The Theatrical *RLS*

THE THEATRICAL R. L. S.

**An evaluation
of
the theatrical aspects
of
Robert Louis Stevenson**

by

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A thesis

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THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

ABSTRACT

'What the public likes is work (of any kind),
a little loosely executed, as long as it's wordy...
It should, (if possible) be a little dull into the bargain.'
(Letters, 11,265)

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

ABSTRACT

Within a format of Shakespeare's seven ages of man, the seven stages of Robert Louis Stevenson are presented here as an inaugural investigation of his theatricality.

The Introduction deals with this theatricality generally and is concerned, in its two parts, with the more technical elements of theatricality as they relate to the principles of dramatic theory.

Stage One is a curtailed family history as a general background to his development and deals with his introduction to Mr Skelt's Toy Theatre. Consideration is also given in Section 3 to his first juvenile dramatic writing.

Stage Two tells of his beginning to 'act a part' while at Edinburgh University. This stage also covers the amateur theatricals and the friendships with Fleeming Jenkin, Mrs Sitwell and Sidney Colvin.

Stage Three introduces William Ernest Henley. With Stevenson he writes Deacon Brodie for Henry Irving. Stevenson courts and marries Mrs Osbourne while the playwriting goes on by correspondence. The London performance of Deacon Brodie is discussed and its American production with Edward J. Henley.

Stage Four covers 1884 - the playwriting year at Bournemouth. Beau Austin and Admiral Guinea are discussed with comment and analysis offered under separate headings. The adaptation of Macaire is considered in relation to Beerbohm Tree. The Hanging Judge and the meeting with Thomas Hardy are also considered. Then follow general remarks about all the plays with special reference to Arthur Pinero's 1903 lecture on Robert Louis Stevenson as Dramatist.

Stage Five is a consideration of Early Victorian theatre and its influence on the Henley-Stevenson partnership. This Stage features the final years of the two Henleys and includes a consideration of the Henley review of Balfour's official biography of Stevenson.

Stage Six shows us Stevenson as the Scotch Tusitala, the Patriarch of Vailiama, reading his work aloud from the verandah. It is the final performance and in four short sections we see him rise only to die.

Stage Seven is devoted entirely to adaptations of Stevensonian by other writers for all performing media to date.

A comprehensive survey of R.L.S. and the drama is an area of Stevenson scholarship which has been either neglected or ill-considered. It is the intention of this study to offer a new focus to this dimension of his literary oeuvre and thus encourage a fresh approach to the Stevenson plays as a whole.

It also offers an opportunity to consider his relationship with W.E. Henley and Mrs F.V. Stevenson, his collaborators in the five finished playscripts. In doing so, it puts into perspective the place of the plays in Victorian dramaturgy.

Biographical facts and quotations from the Works are used where they may reflect his lifelong preoccupation with the theatre and where they may argue, by analysis or illustration, the theatrical potential evident, not only in the plays, but in every element of his personality. This is the man of theatre as theatrical man.

A complete list of adaptations of his work in all the performing media and also selected reviews of his plays are added in support of the conclusion which is, sadly, that in considering R.L.S. as dramatist - one can only regret the loss to the theatre of what might have been...

The Theatrical R.L.S.

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

CONTENTS

'It came over me the other day suddenly
that this diary of mine to you
would make good pickings after I am dead...
and a man might make some kind of book out of it...'
(Letters, IV, 69)

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON IN THE
"BART'S" HAT, 1870

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
DEDICATION
THEME

THE SEVEN STAGES OF ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

INTRODUCTION

Part One	'All the world's a stage'	Page i
" Two	'Merely Players'	vii

STAGE ONE A Family of Engineers

Section A	'At first the infant'	Page 1
" B	'And then the whining schoolboy'	" 8
" (i)		" 14

STAGE TWO A Law Unto Himself

Section A	'Creeping like snail'	" 21
" B	'Unwillingly to school'	" 32
" C	'And then the lover'	" 42

STAGE THREE Enter Henley

Deacon Brodie

Section A	'Sighing like furnace'	" 48
" B	'A woeful ballad'	" 68
" B (i)		" 77
" B (ii)		" 86
" C	'His mistress' eyebrow'	" 91
" C (i)		" 97
An American Postlude (E.J.Henley)		" 100

STAGE FOUR The Henley Collaboration

Section A		
Beau Austin	'Then a soldier'	" 128
Comment/Analysis		" 144
Section B		
Admiral Guinea	'Jealous in honour'	" 148
Section B (i)		" 155
Comment/Analysis		" 158
Section C		
Macaire	'Quick in quarrel'	" 163
Comment/ Analysis		" 170
Section D		
The Hanging Judge	'The bubble reputation'	" 175
Comment/Analysis		" 181
General Remarks		" 186

STAGE FIVE Exit Henley

Section A	'Then the justice'	" 204
" B	'Wise saws'	" 220
" C	'Modern instances'	" 233
A Henley Coda		" 244

STAGE SIX	<u>A Scotch Tusitala</u>		
	Section A	'The sixth age shifts'	" 247
	" B	'The lean and slipper'd pantaloons'	" 252
	" C	'A world too wide'	" 258
	" D	'Pipes and whistles'	" 265
	" E	'Last scene of all'	" 272
	In Memoriam R.L.S.		" 278
	Postscript		" 282
STAGE SEVEN	<u>Adaptations</u>		
	Section A		
	Theatre	'Second childishness'	" 284
	Treasure Island		" 301
	Section B		
	Film	'Mere oblivion'	" 319
	Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde		" 320
	Treasure Island		" 327
	Kidnapped		" 331
	Section C		
	Radio	'Sans eyes'	" 336
	Recording		" 345
	Section D		
	Television	'Sans taste'	" 346
	Video		" 354
CONCLUSION		'Sans everything'	" 355
	Envoi		" 366
APPENDICES			
	A - Adaptations for the Theatre	Page 367	
	B - " " " Cinema	" 370	
	C - " " Radio	" 373	
	D - " Recording	" 380	
	E - " Television	" 381	
REFERENCES			
	Theme/Introduction	" 384	
	Stage One	" 385	
	Stage Two	" 386	
	Stage Three	" 387	
	An American Postlude	" 390	
	Stage Four	" 392	
	General Remarks	" 395	
	Stage Five	" 396	
	A Henley Coda	" 397	
	Stage Six	" 399	
	In Memoriam	" 401	
	Postscript		
	Stage Seven		
	Conclusion	" 403	

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Page 405

NOTE:

Illustrations used in this thesis are photocopies of material made available to the writer from sources as listed in Acknowledgements.

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

'Say to your friends - "Look here,
some friends of mine are bringing out a play;
it has some stuff; suppose you go and see it."....'
(Letters, 11,189)

Self-portrait of Louis. The thick, waving hair—Louis's own hair was always lank—and the costume indicate that he drew himself in theatrical get-up, with wig, probably for one of the Jenkins's amateur productions

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to the many who have given of their time, talent, experience and erudition to help me towards a greater understanding of my subject Robert Louis Stevenson in all his theatrical aspects. Since Alanna Knight first suggested in 1972 that I consider R.L.S. as a character for the stage in a play which she was then writing entitled The Private Life and Public Works of Robert Louis Stevenson he has been a continuing study. In 1988, Professor Jan McDonald of Glasgow University initiated the academic process when she advised that I anatomise my own adaptation of that original script, now called Mr R.L.S., as part of my M.Litt. thesis, A History of Solo Theatre. This exercise in turn became the basis for a continued and extended study of Stevenson in relation to Theatre and the Performing Arts.

Eminent scholars who have aided me since that time through their own work on Stevenson include Professors Daiches, Swearingen, Bryant, Cohen and not least, by his work as supervisor of my studies over the past two years, Emeritus Professor Ian A. Gordon, late of Victoria University at Wellington, New Zealand. His appointment was the idea of Vincent O'Sullivan, the poet and then Chairperson of the English Department at Victoria University, and I am most grateful to him.

Thanks are also due to his successor, Dr Robert Easting, for his continuing support and to Dr John Thomson of the same University for his help in enabling me to complete an exhaustive field study trip to all important Stevenson study centres in the United States and Europe in 1993. Further valuable contacts to be mentioned in this respect include Rosemary Smith of the Monterey State Historic Park, California, as well as the publicity departments of the following motion picture companies - Walt Disney, Paramount, Universal, Columbia, 20th-Century Fox, MGM and Warner Bros. In the same context, I must acknowledge the assistance of the Motion Picture Academy in Hollywood, and in particular, the aid given me by Kristine Kreuger and the staff of the Margaret Herrick Library in Beverley Hills. Olwen Terris of the British Film Institute was also most helpful, as were the staff of the Saville Club in London.

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Other sources made available to my personal scrutiny were the Beinicke Collection at Yale University, the Widener Collection at Harvard and Special Collections at Columbia University in New York. Opportunity was taken to visit the Society for Theatre Research at the Theatre Museum, Covent Garden, London, the Scottish Theatre Archive at Glasgow University and the offices of The Stage and Television Today.

Extra reference was also made to authors J.C.Furnas and Jenni Calder; writers Tom Wright, Donald Mackenzie and Jonathan Smith; journalist Clare Brotherhood; and actors Tom Fleming, David McKail and Paul Young. However, no Stevenson study could go forward without the co-operation of Mr Ernest J. Mehew, to whom I owe my final thanks.

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

DEDICATION

The writer wishes to dedicate this thesis
to the memory of his fellow-Scot
and Doctor Subtilis -

Blessed John Duns Scotus

Born in Duns, Berwickshire, Scotland, 1266
Died in Cologne, Germany, 8 November 1308

A Stevenson Prayer At Morning

The day returns
and brings us the petty round of irritating concerns and duties.
Help us to play the man, help us to perform them
with laughter and kind faces...
let cheerfulness abound with industry...

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

THEME

Sir Graham Balfour, in the first Life of Robert Louis Stevenson in 1901, says that the author's speech was -

'distinctly marked with a Scottish intonation, that seemed to everyone, both pleasing and appropriate... His voice was always of a surprising strength and resonance... It was the one gift he really possessed for the stage...'

In the same study, Balfour also remarks on Stevenson's love of Shakespeare's plays, particularly As You Like It and especially the character of Jacques in that play, whose speech, from Act 2, Scene 7, R.L.S. enjoyed speaking aloud:

JACQUES:

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
Mewling and pewking in the nurse's arms;
Then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lin'd,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances;
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,
His youthful hose, well-sav'd, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,
Turning again towards childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion;
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

The present author therefore wishes to offer this speech as a theme for his thesis and as a titular armature to the general layout of the seven stages involved in the foregoing discussion.

The Theatrical R.L.S.

by
John Cairney

BALLADE OF DEAD ACTORS

By Elihu Vedder

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

INTRODUCTION

'Years sit upon me;
it begins to seem to me to be a man's business
to leave off his damnable faces and say his say.'
(Letters, 111, 139)

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

INTRODUCTION

Part One

'All the world's a stage'

Robert Louis Stevenson lived for only forty-four years, between 13 November 1850 and 3 December 1894, but in that time, he completed fourteen full length novels, several books of essays and criticism, innumerable articles, four volumes of letters, an immortal book of children's verse and six plays for the stage - four of which were presented professionally in the theatre. Added to this, was the stormy courtship of a volatile American matron with two children and an even stormier marriage. All this within a brief lifetime's search around the globe for sun and health which brought him, for the last five years of his life, to eventual serenity as the 'speaking chief' of a South Seas island.¹

Although he could refer to himself as an Englishman, his innate Scottishness never diminished no matter how far he was away from his native Edinburgh. He left his homeland in 1887, and was never to see it again, but he took his own kind of Scotland with him wherever he went as every expatriate has done in the Caledonian diaspora. The difference with Stevenson was that he sent his Scotland back around the world again in the stories he wrote at every stopping-place in his many journeys.

He had made himself a professional writer by hard practice but more than anything else he was a story-teller, and a Scottish one at that. Even if, as he himself confessed, -

'his ear continues to remark the English speech; and even though his tongue acquire the Southern knack, he will still have a strong Scottish accent of the mind.'²

He wrote in impeccable English but this stylishness was hard-won over decades of studied literary effort, and whether it was in his magazine essays, the tales of adventure for boys or in the famous novels of his later years, the voice in the work was always his. He also had a good speaking voice and delighted in reading his work aloud to the family at the end of the day from the verandah at Vailima. This was Tusitala, the actor-Stevenson, a man of many parts, but a Victorian legend known world-wide simply by his initials - R.L.S.

It was seen that when Stevenson was well in health he talked and played and that when he was ill, he wrote. He was ill a lot if one takes into account just how much he wrote. James Cunningham, a friend he made during an Atlantic sea-crossing, tells a story from a visit he made to Stevenson at Hyeres, in the South of France, in 1883. Cunningham relates that Stevenson was -

'Just recovering from bad illness, almost blind, wearing blue glasses. He had a very humourous way with the amanuensis who would treat him ceremoniously. He began dictating the moment she entered.

'The man drew the bloody dagger' to which she would reply:

'This is a lovely day, Mr Stevenson.'

(With emphasis) 'The man drew the bloody dagger.'

'I hope you feel better today, Mr Stevenson.'

(With greater emphasis) 'THE MAN DREW THE BLOODY DAGGER!'³

This was the professional at work, whatever the circumstances. His doctor at Bournemouth in 1885, Dr T.B.Scott, testifies to this:

'Success lifted him for a time out of his invalidism. So often seriously ill that his work suffered or was delayed. Again and again his buoyant spirit brought him to the surface and his mind triumphed once more over his defective body. The phrase auto-suggestion had not been invented, but doctors would have been delighted in him. His imagination and will-power were always coming to his rescue.'⁴

Actors and singers recognise this ability as the 'Doctor Greasepaint' syndrome, where the need to perform at a certain time at a certain place leads to the development of the endorphins within the artist's body which in turn creates a surge of adrenalin which, for the time of the performance at least, sweeps the illness or injury away together with all its symptoms. It always seems a miracle at the time. Yet it is perfectly natural.

All sides of him tended to the theatrical - essayist, novelist, poet, dramatist, talker, drinker, joker and Scotsman. It is only a matter of isolating the appropriate facade. The other, deeper part of him is less easy to probe - that part populated by his 'Brownies' or 'Little People' who

'manage man's internal theatre... and played upon their stage like children... rather than drilled actors performing a set piece...'⁵

He owed much to those insomniac, industrious goblins whom he said -

'labour all night long to set before him truncheons of tales upon their lighted theatre.'⁶

He claimed that all his best work was done in his sleep, or to be more precise, in his dreams. He was certainly a dreamer and in these dreams, inspiration came to him and he never hesitated to use it in his writing. We shall see how important dreams were to the man and his work but there was so much more of him below the watermark of any written page. He kept himself behind the lines so to speak. This was the sub-plot he reserved for himself, the top line he could perform as required. This was his facade. Behind it, or beneath it, in his own psychological underworld was the real man, the artist and perhaps too, the dramatist.

This side of him was as much a part of the prism that was R.L.S. as any other face he showed to the world. Every facet of the man catches the light and causes a reflection, an illumination of one of his several selves and this in turn reveals another aspect of the central self. Like all artists - like every man - he was a complicated piece of work, and, while not all of him may be seen, it is hoped, by setting his theatre work against the main body of his writing, something of the essential Stevenson may be realised in this appreciation of the writer as dramatist.

Significantly, he never wrote for the theatre on his own. All his plays were collaborations - one with his cousin, R.A.M. Stevenson, four with his friend W.E. Henley, and one with his wife, Fanny Osbourne. Only the Henley plays were performed, one of which was an adaptation of an older piece, and none totally succeeded before an audience. Ironically, much more success has been found by those who adapted his stories as play scripts after his lifetime. It may have been that his enormous and world-wide success as a novelist and the celebrity he knew as R.L.S. inhibited the latent dramatist. It was left to others to uncover the neo-dramatist that was in him all the time.

We have then the picture of a man who, on his own admission, was a zany, picturesque, eccentric bohemian, who smoked as incessantly as he wrote, and drank as much as he talked and, on his own admission, 'sparked through the world bent on the pleasures of the flesh'. He termed himself 'a tame celebrity' but he was also witty and brave, bad-tempered and selfish but charming and romantic. He unashamedly made himself in his own image, but was never able to express this ideal histrionic base in practical play terms. There are reasons for this.

The first was that he could never find his true stage voice. It was always to be lost in the tentative duet he made with his collaborators. He was almost deliberately ambiguous in his assertion of a true *dramatis persona*. The problem he had here was in presenting, in tangible and dramatic form, the central dilemma of every man - who am I? This was a self-search not only in terms of his own identity but in relation to his other self - or his many selves. This multiplicity, or at least duality, in the individual personality was a theme that was to haunt Stevenson from his earliest work to his last. It is a dilemma many know, particularly the kind of Scot which Stevenson was, going out into the world - that is, which outside face to show so that the inside or secret self can keep its secret. The author of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde is himself two persons in one - the public man and the private person. The paradox is in that the two selves are not only one but that in the one person can also be two people

This question is at the very centre of the theatrical experience - the two persons in one when the actor has to assume his mask and appear to become the character he is playing while all the time remaining the real person he is. Which is the true face - the self as it is or its theatrical lie as presented in performance? In other words, is the real truth, artistically, only as the actor makes it seem? Is it the seeming that is the real truth? This duality in man's nature, as exemplified by the actor in performance, is a question that fascinated Stevenson all his life and had its outcome in much of his work - Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, The Master of Ballantrae, Markheim etc, - not to mention his first published play, Deacon Brodie.

It is no accident that theatre is represented by its two masks of comedy and tragedy for they symbolize the two faces of the drama. Theatre is neither one nor the other; it is the illimitable permutation of both and it is in how one balances them in characterisation that determines the kind of play one has. Conflict is almost the first requirement of dramatic action and what is a more basic conflict than that between one's two selves? This dualism is not only very Stevensonian but very Scottish. It is almost a Scottish characteristic - Calvin vies with Prince Charlie and Hume with Sir David Lyndsay of the Mount. In the Scot it seems, the thinker is always at war with the entertainer, the bonny fighter at odds with the dreamer.

Andrew Lang (1844-1912), himself a very English kind of Scot but a man of letters and later good friend of Stevenson's, met him first in France. He was not impressed:

'A man of twenty-two, his smooth face, the more girlish by reason of his long hair,⁷ was Bertie... he looked nothing less than English except Scottish.'

Stevenson's last and unfinished story, and arguably his best, Weir of Hermiston carried within it the long shadow of Scotland, his homeland - that dark, mysterious nurseryland he had escaped from at every opportunity. Yet, in a sense, he never left it. It was a part he never played on any of his many stages - the professional Scot - but this was at the very core and heart of him, his Scottishness. Scots have always seen this even if many of his biographers have not.

Professor Ian A. Gordon writes:

'The one-time adulation of his personality has given way to a more informed assessment of his life and literary achievement... It was Stevenson's original intention that his biography should be written by his one-time collaborator and friend of his Edinburgh days, W.E. Henley but... Fanny rejected him and the plan fell through. Instead Stevenson left instructions that the task should fall on Sydney Colvin, who had been instrumental in introducing Stevenson to magazine editors at the start of his career... but Colvin delayed so long... (that) the job was reassigned to (Graham) BALFOUR, a Stevenson cousin... The result was a dutiful but bland two-volume biography... which produced an angry reaction from Henley... What early biographers did not recognise was the contrived autobiographical nature of most of Stevenson's early writing... his original readers encountered him, not in books but in magazines... Before he published his first "real" book he had become quite well known for his personal essays, personal travel notes, personal impressions of his reading and his upbringing...'⁸

Professor Gordon properly maintains that it was the actor in the man who maintained the theatrical front. This is a salient point and one to which frequent return is made in this study. The theatrical analogy, while being a general similitude, is particularly apt as far as Stevenson is concerned. He was the outcome of his own work on himself and the element of the autobiographical in all of his writing is evidence of this. When he wrote of a milieu he knew less well, such as the world as represented in the plays, the result is more self-conscious than self-aware. Stevenson, in his beginnings as a writer, fell back on himself entirely and pretty good copy he made too. Professor Gordon confirms this. Stevenson made himself an author by trial and error.

In Professor Gordon's opinion -

'He had sold to the world a picture of himself as a romantic bohemian,⁹ a contrived and posturing hero-figure, writing to be admired.'

It was a persona readers were happy to accept but he had become a victim of his own casting. The real Stevenson was made of sterner stuff although always self-contradictory. He was a rebel against his own middle-class values yet was constantly cared for by older women, he espoused bohemianism but was happy to accept his father's constant financial support. It was yet another sign of his actor-bias that he pretended to be the dilettante in life and work, yet none could have been more determined or committed to the writing life. The real truth was that he was a writer of tenacity who got better and better every year he lived. The only pity is he did not live longer.

I think now, this 5th or 6th of
 April 1873, that I can see
 my future life. I think it
 will run stiller and stiller
 year by year; a very quiet,
 desultorily studious existence
 If God only gives me tolerable
 health, I think now I shall
 be very happy; work and
 science calm the mind and
 stave growing in the brain; and
 as I am glad to say that I
 do now recognise that I shall
 never be a great man, I
 may set myself peacefully
 on a smaller journey; not
 without hope of coming to
 the inn before nightfall
Glass an ein Leben
Nach diesem Ziel ein ewig wandeln
Res!

Residerate.

- I good health
- II 2 to 3 hundred a year.
- III. O du lieber Gott, preu!

A M E N

Robert Louis Stevenson

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

INTRODUCTION

Part Two

'Merely players'

There is a theatricality about Stevenson's writing which cannot be denied. Theatricality is defined as that pertaining to or connected with theatre but it also applies to that which is simulated or pretended. 'Acted' or 'played as a part' in other words and Stevenson may be said to have done that in, and with, his life. In the pejorative sense, theatricality also implies the extravagant, the affected, the artificial or the assumed and Stevenson could also be all of these in his time. However, it is this theatrical element which was at the root of his attitudinising, and it is in every line he wrote. If acting is working towards an effect, no less so is writing.

His very picturesqueness, not to say eccentricity, is part of the role-playing or self-dramatisation that was part of his personality but more importantly, it was a component vital to his creative impulses. He had to do first - to act - and then to describe, or write about the act. His own performance was often his best source. He was the actor-manager in the 'tragical-comical-historical-pastoral' drama that was the life and death of R.L.S. He was the leading man in his own one-man show and by unremitting effort he kept himself in front of a constantly changing drop-curtain. No one knew better than he how 'theatrical' a life could be made to seem, hence his well-rehearsed bohemian stance. But at heart he was still bourgeois.

Each of his novels can be seen as the theatres they must have been to him in the writing of them, his characters appearing before the footlights of his imagination in what he recognised as the theatre of dreams. He acted out his own dreams and turned them into novels. He might just as easily have converted them into plays. What is a play after all but a playwright's dream made public? A dramatist is a special kind of dreamer but his craft is child's play to those who know what a work for the theatre requires. A child could do it, because a child supplies his own dramatic needs naturally and spontaneously. Stevenson never forgot his own childhood and those who -

'walk in a vain show, and among mists and rainbows; they are passionate after dreams and are unconcerned about realities.'

He speaks here not only for children but for himself as a child/adult. Anyone who retains the gift of imagination remains a child at heart and will keep the child's trust to accept and tell the convincing lie. Stevenson understood that people with no imagination find it easy to tell the truth but when they tell it, they generally do so uninterestingly. He knew the value of the creative lie and he reminded the reader that - 'it is the grown people who make the nursery stories' and also that -

'(that) in the child's world of dim sensation, play is all in all. "Making believe" is the gist of his whole life, and he cannot so much as take a walk except in character. I could not learn my alphabet without some suitable mise-en-scene, and had to act a business man in an office before I could sit down to my book... (Children) prefer the shadow to the substance... even a meal is... an interruption in the business of life.'²

Like any child, he had his priorities right and was in no great hurry to conform. The demand for immediacy was imperative and was part of his undisguised zest for living. It was as if he knew his own life would be dramatically short and he was determined to enjoy it while he could. As he wrote in Apology for Idlers -

'It is not by any means certain that a man's business is the most important thing he has to do... Many of the wisest, most virtuous, and most beneficent parts that are to be played upon the Theatre of Life are filled by gratuitous performers... For in that Theatre, not only the walking gentlemen, singing chambermaids, and diligent fiddlers in the orchestra, but those who look on and clap their hands... do really play a part and fulfil important offices towards the general result.'³

Given such a slender hold on life he grasped it nonetheless with both hands. His life-love was in direct inverse ratio to his fitness for it. Existence for him was almost a play in itself. This was shown in his constant search for the effective in dress and speech, and in his boyish pleasure in the spectacular. These are all further pointers to his theatricality.

He had cast himself as the star in the uninhibited self-dramatisation of his own life and he joyfully rehearsed it with all available energy whenever he had the opportunity. This was why he was often thought 'odd' and seen as 'different'. From his youth, he was in search of himself and his purpose. Once he found it - in writing - the posing became a harmless game and a mere display on the periphery of his main intention, which was to make himself an author.

Elizabeth Burns in her book Theatricality reminds us that Ben Jonson, like Shakespeare, saw the world as a stage and people as players in it -

'I have considered our whole life is like a play; wherein every man forgetful of himself is in travail with expression of another... though the most be players, some must be spectators.'⁴

In other words, if we cannot write our own part, as Stevenson did, we must play as cast according to the script provided for us. The role in life, that is 'whatever it was was given one', had to be played to the hilt, and until the final curtain. For most of his life, he played a part - according to where he was and with whom he was. The performance was continual - in bed or out of it, in town or country, day or night. He was rarely 'off' as actors say. He was always 'on'.

In this study the central purpose is an investigation of theatricality as it manifested itself in the life of a particular author who was also a dramatist, but for him its expression was more evident in his life than in his plays. He represented in himself not only the presenter of the role but its creator. The duality was natural to him. Stevenson assumed a role for himself and unashamedly played it out with consistency and verve. For him, this was more than an empty ritual, repeated for effect. He needed the spur to compensate for a lack of physical strength and he found it in a theatrical persona. He wrapped it around himself like a cloak. Thus 'dressed for the part' he could play it to the hilt and so achieve the time and space he needed to express himself as the artist-writer. Such persistent posing would have been tiresome in anyone else but Stevenson had been born with a great dose of the famous Balfour charm and he never hesitated to use it. What was a pose to others was essential garb to him. He needed the theatrical costume just as much as the drama it suggested. He knew exactly when to put on an act. Elizabeth Burns continues:

'Drama is not a mirror of action. It is a composition. In composing words, gestures, and deeds to form a play, dramatists and performers operate within the constraints (or generate drama according to the grammar) of both kinds of convention. Together the constraints amount to a code of rules for the transmission of specific beliefs, attitudes and feelings in terms of organised social behaviour.'⁵

It is the contention here that this applies to individual behaviour and especially so to Stevenson, particularly in the Edinburgh segments of his life, where Stevenson first discovered the need to 'play a part'.

According to Elizabeth Burns:

'Theatricality' in ordinary life consists in the resort to this special grammar of composed behaviour; it is when we suspect that behaviour is being composed according to the grammar of rhetorical and authenticating conventions that we regard it as theatrical. We feel that we are in the presence of some action that has been devised to transmit beliefs, attitudes and feelings of a kind that the 'composer' wishes us to have.'⁶

The part played by the theatre metaphor as an image in literature is as old as the drama itself and it continues to make explicit our awareness of theatricality in real life. Elizabeth Burns reminds us in her book that Plato, despite his antipathy to theatre as a whole, made frequent use of the 'play' metaphor and that he spoke of -

'the great stage of human life where comedy and tragedy take place.'⁷

Man is seen as the puppet-actor where the strings are pulled by an Unseen Being. His relationship of man to his various roles in life is one which is evoked by recognising the world as a stage and theatre as paradigm. After all the inscription on Shakespeare's Globe Theatre was 'Totus mundus agit histrionem' (Petronius)⁸

Stevenson's often called himself 'this dreamer'. He lay down at night wondering what was going to happen. This reflects the involuntary nature of the dream where the dreamer is both actor and spectator. This rudimentary private drama also characterises early theatre. In medieval times, Man was still thought of as an 'actor acting in the eye of God'.⁹

By Shakespeare's day the thought of the world as theatre and man as the actor in it was almost commonplace. Antonio in The Merchant of Venice repeats almost wearily -

'I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano,
A stage where every man must play a part,
And mine a sad one.'¹⁰

In Restoration times, Richard Steele made the comparison that

'The player acts the the world, the world the player
Whom still that world unjustly disesteems,¹¹
Though he alone professes what he seems.'

Behaviour can only be described as 'theatrical' by those who know what theatre is in their own time and place. Shakespeare, as an actor as well as a playwright, is well aware, in Elizabeth Burns's phrase, of 'the fabricated nature of conduct both on and off the stage'.¹²

If actors are indeed the mirrors held up to reflect human nature, is it humanity they reflect or themselves as only a part of that species?

'O wad some power the giftie gie us/ To see oursels as ithers see us.'¹³ Claudius in 'Hamlet' has to see the murder of Gonzago re-enacted by the players before he realizes that his crime has been discovered by Hamlet. Shakespeare's dramatic use of the metaphor transformed it from a simple allegorical figure into a complex and imaginative mode of expression. Ann Righter suggests that he carried the metaphor to its limits in his final play, when The Tempest becomes a play within a play and both men and players are characterised by Prospero's last speech, where he tells the audience as well as the cast that -

'we are such stuff / As dreams are made on...'¹⁴

Since we are all dreamers, then it follows that we are all actors in the drama of our own life-actions and experiences. We too are part of that 'theatre' the dreamer Stevenson knew in his theatre of dreams. He quite unashamedly made his dreams work for him by transcribing to paper as soon as he could after awakening, all that he could remember of what he had seen and heard in his sleep. The importance to his creativity cannot be over-stressed. He was tapping in to his subconscious mind.

The individual who creates a role for himself in real life is equivalent to the actor who creates a given part on stage. Each act or action has its own theatricality, that is behaviour perceived by others and received by them in theatrical terms. Theatricality is more what others see than what a person is. How the world regarded Stevenson in his lifetime was not entirely as he was, but as he wanted to be seen. He was often his own outward show. The public loved him for it. They wanted him to be as they saw him. They wanted him to be the legend. The Stevenson cult soon after his death had its roots in theatricality. People saw in him what they wanted to see. He had given them what he wanted and played up to their expectations of him as the romantic exile. The impersonation or performance was accepted as his true self. Elizabeth Burns comments on this aspect in relation to Hume:

'The image of mind as a theatre came easily to Hume in his consideration of identity: "The mind is a kind of theatre where several perceptions make their appearance; pass and re-pass, glide away and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations."' ¹⁵

Real life often imitates art, and where there is drama in life it tends to be 'acted out' by the people involved in order that they may better deal with it. It is a way to keep it at a remove, therefore safer. This may have been the motive behind Stevenson's outlandish displays.

David Novitz, in his Boundaries of Art (1993) insists that we all invent for ourselves what he calls - 'a narrative identity'. He continues:

'The stories that people tell about their lives are of considerable importance to us, for there is an intimate connection between the ways in which people construe themselves and the ways in which they are likely to behave... And this must involve behaving in certain ways. Because of this, it is tempting to construe the lives we lead on a dramatic model - as if our life-narratives furnish the scripts that are to be enacted on "the stage of life".'¹⁶

Brett Riley, in his review of the Novitz book for the Listener magazine makes the same point, describing the narrative identity as -

'a story we spin about ourselves, which we then project by dramatic means to others as a way of gaining acceptance, and making our way in the world. Our created identity is, to Novitz, a cultural object. It involves a primeval process whereby we come to make sense both of our selves and the world in which we live, a process "at the very heart of our existence and social being". It is often done with as much skill and imaginative flair as the construction of works of fine art.'¹⁷

The various and contrasting circumstances in which Stevenson was to find himself in his eventful existence might be likened to a stage scene against which he played the appropriate part. As everyone in life does because, as Novitz and Elizabeth Burns both argue, there is almost a reassurance in seeing ourselves 'on stage' as it were. It might even be someone else we are watching. Drama does not only occur on stage.

As Novitz states:

'If, in fact, drama has a place in, and emanates from, everyday life, then what Hegel has described as the highest of all art forms will be seen to be integrally involved in the processes of ordinary life.'¹⁸

Novitz further contends that -

'Long before there was anything that counted as... the fine art of drama, people found it advantageous to act out received narratives... It is not as if social drama presupposes the existence of stage drama. Quite the contrary, stage drama presupposes, and depends for its existence on, its social counterpart.'¹⁹

In other words, art imitates life and, in so doing, becomes life.

Mr Novitz concludes:

'What we find is that a very important art form is deeply embedded in the process of conflict resolution in everyday life and that the conflicts that we seek to resolve arise because of our commitment to the narratives that govern our lives. Narrative, like drama, finds its origin not in the fine arts but in the arts of everyday living.'²⁰

The traditional theatre offers a play world which asks to be taken seriously. Stevenson, however, never took the real world seriously. In a sense, he played with it. This is perhaps why his plays failed. He never took them seriously enough. Was he acting the part of the playwright in a deliberate scenario he had built up for himself? After all, he saw himself as a writer long before he was accepted by others as such. It was nonetheless a very positive self-image he projected. He knew from the start what he wanted to be, but not everyone believed him. Elizabeth Burns comments on this point:

'Few people like to believe they are acting all the time. This seems to be perceived as a charge of insincerity and even as a denial of identity. Heuristically, sociologists are prepared to assume that the self is unknowable and that all that can be observed can be described in a meaningful way by using what they call role theory, an elaboration of the terminology of the stage... Dramatism, that is the use of theatre terms, is now used as a method of analysis in all the methods of thought that underlie social action... as it provides the link between the social reality of the world and the human reality of the individual and his behaviour in it.'²¹

The first purpose of this investigation is to discuss why this most theatrical of literary Victorians failed to find his proper metier on stage. The second question to be addressed is why, despite this, his work is so accessible to so many in adaptations from the theatre of his own time to the film and television screens of today. It must be admitted at once that many of these adaptations bear little resemblance to the Stevenson original but it is also true that the results often echo the innate dramatic energy and artistic reality that resonate in the primal source. The thought occurs to this writer that perhaps he was not behind his time in respect of theatrical demands, but ahead of it. Much has still to be said of this remarkable man and his work in this regard and therefore it is licit and timely to record his contribution to historical theatre practice. Hence this present study.

A project which is entered into with the subject's own advice in mind:

'We must first of all, like a historical artist, think ourselves into sympathy with his position, and, in the technical phrase, create his character. A historian... or an actor, charged with a part, have but one preoccupation; they must search all round and upon every side, and grope for some central conception; which is to explain and justify the most extreme details...' ¹²²

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

STAGE ONE
A Family of Engineers

'Every generation has to educate another
which it has brought upon the stage.'

Lay Morals
Chatto and Windus 1914, p4

Louis in the middle teens, probably the year before he entered the University of Edinburgh. Evident retouching adds to the untypical effect of conventionality

Stevenson Family Tree

Northern Lighthouse Board (NLB)

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

STAGE ONE

Section A

'At first the infant'

Robert Louis Stevenson has had to wait a long time to be remembered by his native city. A hundred years after his death there is at last an awareness that he might lay claim to be one of Edinburgh's most famous sons. He was born a city boy or more exactly a town boy and a New Town one at that. This is the first fact that must be borne in mind in considering the kind of man he grew up to be. He was always an Edinburgh man wherever he was and was never ashamed to admit it.

Edinburgh is less a city than two towns in a state of truce. The Old, on the hill under the shadow of the ancient castle, is cut off from the New across the boulevard of Princes Street, so properly prim behind its circumspect gardens. When the ancient city retired from being a fortress, and before it became a tourist attraction, it was a comfort stop for the carriage trade. And so it remains today, a genteel, quasi-English city with little brief for the arts, particularly theatre. Edinburgh is not a theatre town as actors know the term and it is something of a surprise that one of its most distinguished citizens should grow up to love the stage. In doing so, according to the venerable city fathers, he risked the pain of damnation and the fires of Hell. Stevenson admitted that as a child -

'I had an extreme terror of Hell, implanted in me, I suppose, by my good nurse, which used to haunt me terribly on stormy nights, when the wind had broken loose and was going about the town like a bedlamite...'

He was a child of the New Town. It still thought of itself as New even though it was already middle-aged when he was born. Middle-aged and middle-class and middle-of-the-road. The Old Town for centuries housed the aristocrat quite happily with the pauper. Those in the middle, who were at neither extreme, fled over the Nor' Loch to the New Town, which became its own place and proudly so. This is why it concerned itself first with appearances and with the bourgeois preoccupation of the keeping up of appearances and keeping down of costs, not to mention the keeping shut of lace curtains. Edinburgh itself is a city divided and its two faces are turned from each other.

In the New half, the world might spin as it liked as long as full attention was given to the daily round. The clock must be watched and books were things to be balanced rather than to be read. Living was an essentially practical business. Money, of course, was never mentioned but it was always the first concern. This is the real Edinburgh agenda and one which Stevenson saw clearly:

'We are to regulate our conduct not by desire, but by a politic eye upon the future; and to value acts as they will bring us₂ money or good opinion; as they will bring us, in one word profit.'²

Not that money was a worry for either the Stevensons or the Balfours in 1850. They were both involved in the rise of the Scottish professional class in mid-Victorian Britain and nowhere was this more evident than in the burgeoning prosperity of both Glasgow and Edinburgh in that time. Of Margaret Balfour's brothers, for instance, George became Physician-in-Ordinary-to-the-Queen, John was a doctor with the East India Company and James became Engineer to the Crown Colony of New Zealand. The Stevensons, on the other hand, were made like girders, engineers to a man and Thomas Stevenson fully expected his son to follow his sturdy example. His expectations in that regard were to be sorely tested by the youthful Louis. He was named, as was the custom in Scottish families, after his paternal grandfather, Robert Stevenson, (1772-1850) and the Reverend Lewis Balfour, (1777-1859) grandfather on his mother's side, who christened the child at home, again according to Scottish usage. Stevenson remembered him as -

'the noblest looking old man I have ever seen... one of the last, I suppose, to speak broad Scots and be a gentleman.'³
He goes on:

'I often wonder what I inherited from that old Balfour minister-grandfather of mine... he was a great lover of Shakespeare whom he read aloud with taste, I have been told. Well, I love my Shakespeare also, and am persuaded that I read him well, though I own I have never been told so...'⁴

What he inherited in fact from his Balfour grandfather was his weak chest. When the old man died, the Balfour name was dropped but Stevenson was eighteen before he admitted it to Charles Baxter:

'After several years of feeble and ineffectual (sic) endeavour with regard to my third initial (a thing I loathe) I have been led to put myself out of reach of such accident in the future by taking my first two names in full.'⁵

'Lewis' became 'Louis' not so much for any French affectation but for the more practical reasons of comfortable pronunciation and phonetic usage. The juxtaposition of the two sibilants (the final letter in 'Lewis' and the first in 'Stevenson') made the elision almost inevitable. At least this is a more valid reason than that given of Thomas Stevenson's changing the name because of his dislike of an Edinburgh town councillor named Lewis. Lewis became Louis in print although the family still said it in the Scottish pronunciation, that is sounding the final 's' as his collateral descendants still do. In any case, they would be more than likely to use the name as a Christian name and rarely as the middle name of three which is the normal public usage. Only William Henley, his future collaborator, insisted on writing 'Lewis' rather than 'Louis' but one cannot be sure of his motive for doing so. Henley always had his own reasons for everything.

In any event, young Robert Stevenson (his registered name at Edinburgh Academy) was now Robert Louis Stevenson and there was an end of the matter. Either way, he was Stevenson and the son of a good family. A sense of family was something that was always important to him. He was never to lose his interest in his roots. In 1888, he wrote to Henry James:

'I am one of the few people in the world who do not forget their own lives.'⁶

One of his very last letters (on December 1, 1894) was to Sir Herbert Maxwell concerning the possibility of a Stevenson connection with Rob Roy McGregor. Such kin would have delighted him. And his father.

'I see like a vision the youth of my father and his father before him and the whole stream of lives flowing down with the sound of laughter and tears...'⁷

His engineer father loomed large in the boy Stevenson's life:

'There is scarce a deep-sea light from the Isle of Man north to Berwick, but one of my blood designed it... Upon so many reefs and forelands, that not very elegant name of Stevenson is engraved with the pen of iron upon granite. My name is as well known as the Duke of Argyle's among the fishers and masons of my native land. Whenever I smell salt water, I know I am not far from my ancestors. The Bell Rock stands monument for my grandfather; the Skerry Vhor for my Uncle Alan; and when the lights come on at sundown along the shores of Scotland, I am proud to think they burn more brightly for the genius of my father.'⁸

Though he joked that he had his father's legs and would always fall on his feet, he had his mother's Balfour chest and would never really be well from early childhood. He had croup at two and from then on it was one thing after another:

'My ill-health principally chronicles itself by the terrible long nights that I lay awake, troubled continually by a hacking, exhausting cough, and praying for sleep or morning from the bottom of my shaken little body...

As Thomas Stevenson further prospered he moved up in the Edinburgh world, first in 1853, to 1 Inverlieth Terrace, which was larger but damp. On their doctor's warning, and for little Lou's sake, they moved again in 1856 to 17 Heriot Row - 'with a lamp before the door'. But the damage had been done. Their son was diagnosed as consumptive and the rest of his life was a continuing fight against incipient invalidism.

'My recollections of the long nights when I was kept awake by the pain of coughing are only relieved by the tenderness of my nurse and second mother (my first will not be jealous), Alison Cunningham. She was more patient than I can suppose of an angel... How well I remember her lifting me out of bed, carrying me to the window, and showing me one or two lit windows up in Queen Street across the dark belt of gardens; where also, we told each other, there might be sick little boys and their nurses waiting, like us, for the morning...¹⁰

His mother's diary for 26 July 1853 boasted the entry:

'Smout's favourite occupation is making a church; he makes a pulpit with a chair¹¹ and a stool; reads sitting, and then stands up and sings by turns.

Walter B. Blaikie, whose mother was related to Margaret Stevenson, was a nursery play-mate of Stevenson's and well remembers the 'Church Game'.

'Louis was particularly fond of anything dramatic, and his favourite game in our nursery was to play at Church after the Scottish fashion... Louis, who was fond of declamation was generally the minister. Clad in some form of black drapery (probably Alison's cloak) he would preach vigorously. On one occasion he constructed a pair of clerical 'bands' made of white paper, which were hung round his neck... While Louis was proclaiming, my mother entered the room. She had not minded previous performances, but when she saw the clerical bands her anger was fierce... She tore the bands from Louis's neck and prohibited the church game for the future.'¹²

According to his mother, he had also said, "You can never be good unless you pray..." When asked how he knew, he said with great emphasis, "Because I've tried it."

Another diary entry in 1853 stated:

'Mr. Swan at dinner. Smout recited the first four lines of "On Linden" in great style, waving his hand and making a splendid bow at the end. This is Cummie's teaching.'

Graham Balfour says of Alison Cunningham:

'In spite of her restrictions, Cummie was full of life and merriment. She sang and danced to her boy and read to him most dramatically. She herself tells how, the last time she ever saw him, he said to her 'before a room full of people, "It's you that gave me the passion for the drama, Cummie." "Me, Master Lou," I said; "I never put foot inside a playhouse in my life." "Ay, woman," said he; but it was the grand dramatic way ye had of reciting the hymns."¹³

'A passion for the drama' - his very own words.

The importance of Alison Cunningham (1822-1913) in the formation of Stevenson's lifelong attitudes cannot be overestimated. As he inherited his father's integrity and sense of humour, his mother's love of learning and quirky regard for the other side of things, so he imbibed from infancy, Cummy's frankness, social prejudices and religious bigotry. It took him no time to shake the second off, but the third took longer. Miss Cunningham would no doubt have been appalled at her charge's later Catholic sympathies in the South Seas. She was nonetheless vital to his growing up and essential to our understanding of him as a Victorian. One cannot help wonder what might have been the result had she been a devotee of the playhouse? His autobiographical reminiscences conclude:

'When I was five years of age my cousin Robert Alan Mowbray Stevenson came to stay at my father's house. This visit was altogether a great holiday in my life. Bob was three years older than I and lived in a dream with his sisters and the Arabian Nights. He was even less unfitted for the world than I was and we lived together in a purely visionary state. We had our own countries. His was Nosingtonia, mine was Encyclopaedia. We ruled and made wars and inventions and we perpetually drew maps. We were never weary of dressing up. We drew and cut out and painted the figures for our pasteboard theatre. My toy theatre. This last was one of the dearest pleasures of my childhood and one I was loathe to relinquish. Indeed, I followed in secret until I was fifteen or sixteen...¹⁴

Here the fragment stops. It is to be regretted that he did not persevere in his dictation of additional material to Isobel Strong in Samoa in 1893, but as he said in the opening sentence -

'I have long given up all idea of autobiographical writing.'¹⁵

Like many Victorians of his class, (Dickens, Eliot, Butler, Kingsley), Stevenson felt a sense of guilt about his childhood as Jenni Calder has pointed out.¹⁶ At the same time, he knew he could not be seven for ever and inevitably it came time to loosen the apron-strings if not to cut them completely. The first phase of his life was ending but the marks of it would remain. The father of the wasting man was undoubtedly the sickly boy but he was a boy with a vivid imagination who learned to make considerable artistic use of his many ills and incapacities. J.C. Furnas, one of the foremost Stevenson biographers, comments:

'Coughs, chills, fevers, aches and pains paraded interminably through the bright-eyed, big-beaked little creature who so often lay awake dreading the horrible howl of the wind round the corner; the audible haunting of an incarnate anger about the house; the evil spirit that was abroad; and, above all, the shuddering, silent pauses when the storm's heart stands dreadfully still for a moment. Oh, how I hate a storm at night... I always heard it as a horseman riding past with his cloak over his head...'¹⁷

Stevenson was recollecting these moments from the viewpoint of a sensitive adult well aware of the value of good material. He recognised early that he was his own best source. He created his own memory of himself and he was in every line he wrote, but it may be that it is between the lines that one should look for Robert Louis Stevenson.

'I remember that the noises on such occasions always grouped themselves for me into the sounds of a horseman, or rather a succession of horsemen, riding furiously past the bottom of the street and away up the hill into town. I think even now that I hear the terrible howl of his passage, and the clinking that I used to attribute to his bit and stirrups...'¹⁸

To the end, he saw his pictures and heard his sounds and merely wrote down what he saw and heard in his head. The theatre in his mind began early. Professor David Daiches, another eminent Stevenson scholar, underlines the importance of Stevenson's boyhood to his writer's adult imagination:

'The sickly boy, confined to the Land of Counterpane, obsessed with the wind howling down the chimney and encircling the house like a furious aerial horseman, imagining escape and adventure from the security of his comfortable, middle-class home... He remembered how it felt to be a boy longing for adventure yet at the same time anticipating a return to the familiar scenes of childhood after all the adventures are over.'¹⁹

In John Kelman's phrase, 'he saw through crystal doors to the past'.²⁰

Sir James Barrie (1860-1937) - another man-boy - defined genius as 'that power to be a boy again at will'. R.L.S. had this gift. He always had some childishness at hand. For instance -

'Did the man with the big Wellingtons and the bald head, have small Wellingtons and a small bald head when he was a child?'²¹

There was always a devil in Stevenson or perhaps it was a boyish imp? Something in his whole personality suggested that 'other childishness' which is at once simplicity and complexity combined. It is this that makes the man the writer. So many things go into any man's making that it is difficult to know what that other element is that gives us our seers, prophets, dreamers, poets and artists, but whatever it is, it was in the winds of Edinburgh when Robert Louis Stevenson was begot. J.C.Furnas recounts the tentative first steps of what he called a 'son of Edinburgh' into the big, outside world:

'Cummy took him by the hand to the nearby 'beginners' school' at Canonmills and there, if the way had been cold and wet, 'changed his feet for him' before his classmates... though play under a nurse's eye in the private Queen Street Gardens was indicated for children of his background, his regimen seems rather to have been based on walks exclusively with Cummy... No wonder, as Miss Masson said, 'he grew up precocious, interesting, affected and egregiously egotistic.'²²

The miracle of course, given his poor health, is that he grew up at all. But unknown to everyone he had sneaked a preview of theatrical possibilities at, of all places, Colinton Manse:

'Down in the corner beside the bricks, whether on the floor or on a bookshelf I do not remember, were four volumes of Joanna Baillie's plays. Now as Cummie always expatiated on the wickedness of anything theatrical, I supposed these books to be forbidden, and took every opportunity of reading them.'²³

Finally, in this discussion of the boy Stevenson, a little anecdote that illustrates, not only Stevenson's natural mimetic instincts, but that impish, boyish quality always to be typical of the man.

'One fine morning his mother and his Aunt Jane, in the eminently respectable family phaeton, were proceeding in the most dignified way down High Street in Edinburgh, conversationally bewailing his wildness and his escapades, when he suddenly appeared to them at the entrance of a filthy alley, a street-cleaner's broom in his hand and a bag of papers, bones and offal on his back. "Oh, Louis, Louis," cried his mother, hiding her pretty, flushed face in her hands, "what will you do to me next?"'²⁴

STAGE ONE

Section B

'And then the whining schoolboy'

His schooldays were certainly not the happiest days of Stevenson's life - even at Mr Henderson's. He dutifully entered the Academy at ten and when he spent an autumn term at Burlington Lodge Academy at Spring Grove, Middlesex, under Mr Wyatt, he 'walked among surprises' as his own phrase has it. He soon whined to his father in a schoolboy letter (partly written in French) to take him home again - or more exactly, to allow him travel with them.¹ He loved travelling with his parents, especially by train, but essentially Louis was a loner. He neither fitted his schoolmasters' expectations nor his classmates' estimation, although he did make one school friend at least, Dr H. Bellyse Baildon, who was to remain another lifelong correspondent and was to write a book on Stevenson in 1901. He and Louis met at Robert Thomson's school in Frederick Street in 1864 and they edited the school magazine there until Stevenson went to university in 1867.

It is unlikely that Louis attended commercial theatre in his schooldays. Theatre-going was hardly an obsession with the worthy Edin-'burghers'. In any case, they had all the drama they needed from the two-hour sermons in the kirk every Sunday morning. Musical soirees were preferred, if anything, and if there had to be theatricals then they took the form of charades which could be kept among the family and close friends. Professional theatre was for the most part out of the ken of the Scottish bourgeoisie who were not quite sure that it was respectable for a Christian to disport himself in public, or worse, to pay to see others do so. Actors, to them, were no more than fairground people or gypsies who, by some fakery, probably diabolic, were able to parade themselves as gentlemen within the confines of the proscenium arch or the circle bar.

As for actresses, they were beyond the pale and beneath all mention and quite candidly were thought of as little more than prostitutes. The stage was for the the rabble in the pit or the rakes in their boxes and not a pastime for decent people. Few in Stevenson's social class ever knew an actor or actress, or knew anyone who did. This was true of most of his friends, so it would seem unlikely that Louis knew theatre-going at firsthand until his student years, 1870-75.

How then did theatre come to him? Hardly from the plays of Joanna Baillie. It came as a sixth birthday present in the form of a toy theatre which immediately became an obsession with him. One cannot help wonder if it were his 'Chief of Aunts', the unmarried Jane Whyte Balfour, (to whom he would dedicate Travels with a Donkey in 1879) who gave little Louis the birthday gift. After all, it was under her eye that he played at Colinton Manse and first found the book of plays and she had already given him his favourite toy soldiers. Aunt Jane knew what was good for a boy. She certainly was in tune with his Theatre of the Imagination.

'What did the other children do?
And what were childhood, wanting you?'²

There may have been other later first influences such as his mother's reading to him of Shakespeare, or his own wide reading of plays as texts, or in reading about theatre and theatre folk in magazines and periodicals, even in such as Cummy's regular weekly copy of Cassell's Family Papers. It can be seen, therefore, that as far as Robert Louis Stevenson was concerned, theatre was Mr Skelt's Juvenile Drama sheets - 'A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured' - from the 'shop at the corner' - the corner of Leith Walk and Antigua Street. The following are excerpts from the essay based on his memories of Wilson's shop.

'There stands, I fancy, to this day (but now how fallen) a certain stationer's shop at a corner of the wide thoroughfare that joins the city of my childhood to the sea. When, upon any Saturday, we made a party to behold the ships, we passed that corner...

In the Leith Walk window, all the year round, there stood displayed, a theatre in working order with a "forest set", a "combat" and a few "robbers carousing" in the slides; and below them and about, but dearer tenfold to me! the plays themselves, those budgets of romance, lying tumbled one upon the other. Long and often have I lingered there with empty pockets. One figure, we shall say, was visible in the first place of characters, bearded, pistol in hand, or drawing to his ear the clothyard arrow; I would spell the name; was it Macaire...?

How - if by chance - the name were hidden, I would wonder in what play he figured, and what immortal legend justified his attitude and strange apparel! And then, go within to announce myself as a potential purchaser, and closely watched, be suffered to undo those bundles and breathlessly devour those pages of gesticulating villains, epileptic combats, bosky forests, palaces and warships, frowning fortresses and prison vaults - it was a giddy joy! That shop, which was dark and smelt of bibles was a lodestone rock for all that bore the name of boy...

Every sheet we fingered was another lighting glance into obscure, delicious story. It was like wallowing in the raw stuff of storybooks. I knew nothing to compare with it, save, now and then, in dreams, when I am privileged to read, in certain, unwritten stories of adventure, from which I find I awake to find the world all vanity...

Indeed, this name of Skelt appears so stagey and piratic, that I will adapt it boldly to design these qualities. Skelttery, then, is a quality of much art...

The stagey is its generic name; but it is an old, insular, home-bred staginess; not French, domestically British; not of today, but smacking of O. Smith, Fitzball, and the great age of melodrama; a peculiar fragrance haunting it; uttering its unimportant message in a tone of voice that has the charm of fresh antiquity...

What am I? What are life, art, letters, the world, but what my Skelt has made them? He stamped himself upon my immaturity. The world was plain before I knew him, a poor, penny world - but soon it was coloured with romance.'³

His fascination with model theatre no doubt led to his interest in playwriting, and this is confirmed by Dr Baildon's attesting that he had heard Stevenson read, in 1869, a very early version of what became Deacon Brodie. Stevenson himself would later corroborate this fact in a press interview in New York. He described it deprecatingly as 'a hugger-mugger melodrama'. From the very beginning he had known that he was, as he later described himself, 'no melodramatist but rather a Skelt-drunken boy; the man who went out to find the Eldorado of romantic comedy'.⁴ Notwithstanding, he was always a theatre enthusiast.

This was evident on his first London visits, between 1874 and 1882, when he made a point of discovering the shops of Webb and Pollock who sold the famous theatre sheets. This may also have been in connection with his article for the Magazine of Art but there was no denying his toy theatre interest. Stevenson had adapted the play Robert Macaire for his own Toy Theatre. Mr H.J. Webb has recalled his several visits to the shop and remembers that

'as he (Stevenson) came in he noticed some of the coloured sheets hanging in the doorway, and at once struck a theatrical attitude... He used to talk Toy Theatres by the hour with my father.'

Mr Pollock too, can recall the visits of the thin, tall Scotsman who bumped his head every time against the toy theatres hanging from hooks in the ceiling; he was fond of recalling how pale and ill-looking he always was, and how he was most interested in plays about pirates and highwaymen; Pollock remembered that Stevenson's hands - 'were so thin you could almost see through them'.⁵

The 'Juvenile Drama' had begun in the days of the Regency as a kind of theatrical souvenir, but by 1850 the form had already become a rather old-fashioned home amusement. Despite this, Pollock's had become famous as Pollock's Toy Theatre and Museum where toy theatres were made by hand and play sheets still sold for 'a penny plain and twopence coloured'. Mr Pollock told Mr Webb:

'In 1882, Stevenson and his wife left Britain in search of health in the South of France, but he must have taken his Toy Theatre sheets with him and browsed among them during his illnesses and convalescence at Hyeres; all this eventually bore fruit with an article entitled 'A Penny Plain and Tuppence Coloured' in the Magazine of Art for April, 1884.'⁶

Mr George Speaight notes in the same Pollock booklet -

'Not all of Stevenson's essays have worn well and there is an element of preciousness in his more pretentious writing, but this essay is, I think, one of the best things he ever wrote (perhaps the subject makes me blind), and there are phrases in it which ring through the mind like a bell. It was G.K.Chesterton, I think, (himself a Toy Theatre devotee) who first pointed out the influence of the Toy Theatre upon all of Stevenson's life... And so, as a school of rhetoric, the Toy Theatre plays its part... Stevenson is an example (of men) upon whose lives the influence of the Juvenile Drama can be discerned, and (is) representative of that romantic strain which runs through our sober Northern blood and lifts us into genius. That is the gift of the Juvenile Drama to the nation that gave it birth; bright "twopence coloured" images in the fog, exaggerated shadows like caricatures, a touch of drama, a brave and boyish romance, the breath of poetry.'⁷

The real tragedy about Robert Louis Stevenson and Theatre was that he leaned towards a kind of stage that was always unreal, an artificial form that was nowhere in touch with ordinary life at any of its points. But then one could almost say the same for Stevenson himself. However, in terms of theatre practice, this attitude to the drama on his part can be laid squarely before Skelt's gaudy picture-theatre. Stevenson's later attempts at the drama were always at the mercy of these first vivid, though misleading, theatrical impressions. Had the same dash and brio and originality that was to be found in his writing been complemented by stage craft, his plays might have created the dramatic sensation that was so nearly in his grasp. It was certainly within his reach. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), also a toy theatre enthusiast, made some trenchant remarks about theatre to Eckermann which are relevant to a consideration of Skelt's influence on playwrights:

'Writing for the stage is something peculiar. And he who does not understand it had better leave it alone. Everyone thinks that an interesting fact will appear interesting on the boards - nothing of the kind. Things may be very pretty to read, and very pretty to think about; but as soon as they are put upon the stage the effect is quite different; and that which has charmed us in the closet will probably fall flat on the boards... writing for the stage is a trade that one must understand, and requires a talent that one must possess. Both are uncommon, and where they are not combined we have scarcely any good result.'⁸

The fact remains that if Stevenson had sought to learn the trade of playwriting he erred in apprenticing himself to Skelt and not to Sardou, to Reddington rather than Augier and to Pollock rather than Henrik Ibsen. This fact almost speaks for itself and one wonders that Stevenson himself did not realize it. Theatre had taken hold of him early via Skelt, and as he himself affirmed, it was more than a mere passing childhood fancy, its hold was lasting.

'Indeed, out of this cut-and-dry, dull, swaggering, obtrusive and infantile art, I seem to have learned the very spirit of my life's enjoyment; met there the shadows of the characters I was to read about and love in a late future... acquired a gallery of scenes and characters with which, in the silent theatre of the brain, I might enact all novels and romances; and⁹ took from these rude cuts an enduring and transforming pleasure.'

There was so much of theatre in him for there was always a good bit of the actor in the man as was seen in his behaviour. He was just an inch or two away from being a poser - but only just. Throughout his life, he was always something of a dandy with his predilection for cloaks and capes, velvet jackets, yachting caps, high tied boots, red sashes, Mexican ponchos and black silk ties. Lloyd Osbourne remembers that his stepfather's 'clothes and long, unkempt hair...were often regarded as affectations',¹⁰ His sartorial eccentricities were all part of his general fantasy. If he were, in his own phrase, 'author entire', he certainly knew how to act the part. He had rehearsed it all his life. Fantasy was a fact to Robert Louis Stevenson and even into manhood he clung closely to his childhood-ness. It was for him more than an escape from reality, it was reality and the reservoir from which he was to draw his fiction. If the prose were ever purple then at least it had the excuse that its source was twopence-coloured. But at this stage some thought had to be given to his likely future profession. Thomas Stevenson assumed that his only son would follow in his footsteps and take his place in a line that went back for a hundred years.

It was a hard tradition to resist and it would take a strong man to do so. Louis was spared because he was weak - weakened by illness. Before this, however, there was nothing he liked better than going off with his father, especially if they had to go to sea. Robert Louis Stevenson was to prove a very good sailor before his life was over. These working trips gave him his first glimpse of working theatre because one particular journey took him to stay with a family at Kenzie House, Anstruther, from where in, July 1968, he wrote to his mother:

'Tonight I went with M. to see a strolling band of players in the Town Hall. A large table placed below the gallery with a print curtain on either side of the most limited dimensions was at once scenery and the proscenium. The manager told us that his scenes were sixteen by twenty-four, and so could not get in. Though I knew, or at least felt sure, that there were no such scenes in the poor man's possession. I could not laugh, as did the major part of the audience, at this shift to escape criticism.

We saw a wretched farce and some comic songs were sung. The manager sang one but it came grimly from his throat. The whole receipt of the evening was five shillings and threepence, out of which had to come room, gas and town drummer. We left soon; and I must say came out as sad as I've been for ever so long. I think that manager had a soul above comic songs. I said so to young M., who is a phillistine, (Matthew Arnold's philistine, you understand) and he replied:

"How much happier he would be as a common working man!"

I told him I thought he would be less happy earning a comfortable living as a shoemaker than he was starving as an actor. But the phillistine wouldn't see it. (You observe that I spell 'philistine' time about with one and two Ls.)¹¹

That an eighteen-year-old of limited experience in life as well as in theatre should understand so well the psyche that drives the average actor, is a tribute to his genuine instinct for things theatrical. It also illustrates his natural compassion for the unlucky and the failed. It was also at this age, as has already been mentioned, that he had decided on his change of name, or rather the loss of the 'Balfour'. As he later confessed to Edward W. Bok in Scribner's New York office:

'I had another name up to eighteen...¹² did you know that? No? Then find out. It will be our secret...'

This was the playful Stevenson of 1888 but the Stevenson of 1869 might be said to be full of plays. Certainly, he had begun to write dramatic pieces around then and in the immediate years that followed. It is with this juvenilia that consideration now continues.

STAGE ONE

Section B (i)

THE CHARITY BAZAAR

'Well - come, here goes for Juvenilia. Dancing Infants, An Autumn Effect, Forest Notes, ...0, and there was a little skit called The Charity Bazaar which you might see; I don't think it would do.'¹

The above was written to Sir Sydney Colvin (1845-1927), when the 1894 Edinburgh Edition of the Works was being considered in May of that year. Stevenson had first met Colvin, then Slade Professor of Fine Art at Cambridge, at Cockfield Rectory in Surrey while visiting his cousin Maud Wilson, now Mrs Churchill Babington in 1873. Colvin was to become a lifelong part of Stevenson's literary and personal life and after he became Keeper of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum in 1884 he remained a constant and important factor in Stevenson's affairs.

Colvin was virtually responsible for Stevenson's early development as a writer but he wrongly dated The Charity Bazaar from 1868. He probably confused it with The Baneful Potato, a libretto for an opera no less, which Louis had worked on at Torquay in 1865 and which, according to his mother's Diary Notes, was lost some time after. One feels it was no great loss to the opera world. Only the names of two characters survive "Dig-him-up-o", the gardener, and "Seek-him-out-o", the policeman, and the first line of an aria sung by the heroine, "My own dear casement window."²

As far as the dating of The Charity Bazaar is concerned, the paper watermark is given as 1871 so it is therefore probable that the short work dates from September-October 1875 as Professor Swearingen says. It was a -

'Privately-printed four-page folder without place, publisher or date distributed at a bazaar held by Stevenson's mother to benefit the Zenana Missions of the Church of Scotland and recorded in her diary dated 25 November 1875.'³

Stevenson himself was not completely sanguine about its possible publication:

'I see with some alarm the proposal to print Juvenilia; does it not seem to you taking myself a little too much like Grandfather William?'⁴

The Charity Bazaar sold at the Bazaar for half-a-crown and later copies were available for sixpence but the bulk of the printing disappeared. It is hardly a play, merely three characters in four pages of dialogue.

The following is an extract from the version printed for a bazaar held at 17 Heriot Row in aid of the Royal Scottish Society for the Self-Aid of Gentlewomen in 1973:

The Ingenuous Public:

'You expound this subject very magisterially, sir. But tell me, would it not be possible to carry this element of play still further? And after I had remained a proper time in the bazaar, and negotiated a sufficient number of sham bargains, would it not be possible to return me my money in the hall?

The Tout:

I question whether that would not impair the humour of the situation. And besides, my dear sir, the pith of the whole advice is to take your money from you.

The Ingenuous Public:

True. But at least the Bazaar might take back the tea-cosies and the pen-wipers.

The Tout:

I have no doubt, if you were to ask it handsomely, that you would be so far accommodated. Still it is out of the theory. The sham goods, for which, believe me, I readily understand your disaffection - the sham goods are well adapted for their purpose. Your lady wife will lay these tea-cosies and pen-wipers aside in a safe place, until she is asked to contribute to another Charity Bazaar. There the tea-cosies and pen-wipers will be once more charitably sold. The new purchasers, in their turn, will accurately imitate the dispositions of your lady wife. In short, Sir, the whole affair is a cycle of operations. The tea-cosies and pen-wipers are merely counters; they come off and on again like a stage army; and year after year people pretend to buy and pretend to sell them,⁵ with a vivacity that seems to indicate a talent for the stage...

There is 'a talent for the stage' here. How genuine was its vivacity? It was a first attempt and one feels it ought to have been followed up. Stevenson was pleased with it at the time as Margaret Moyes Black remembers. She had been visiting Heriot Row and was being seen to the door by young Louis who asked her if she had been to the recent Grand Bazaar and when she said she had not he mentioned that he had -

'contributed a very clever skit to it - which had sold for half-a-crown. I asked if I could still buy a copy. "No," he replied sadly, "the sale is over. But - " - after a dramatic pause - "I can give you one." And he retreated through the hall with the long, gliding steps of the stage conspirator... Bye and bye he returned with a small printed leaflet in his hand... signed with the magic letters R.L.S. with the black and heavy down strokes. "There," its author said, bowing gracefully, "the Charity Bazaar - an allegorical dialogue - and it is by ME and worth a whole half-crown."⁶

He might be said to have begun from this as a professional.

STAGE ONE

Scene B (ii)

MONMOUTH

Stevenson had intended this as a joint work with the brilliant if indolent Bob Stevenson as a classical piece after the manner of Algernon Charles Swinbourne (1837-1909), the English poet and critic whom Louis had much admired for his anti-religious play, Atalanta in Calydon (1865) as well as for his trilogy of plays based on Mary Stuart begun around the same time. Monmouth was a subject totally in keeping with the cousins' mutual high romantic ideas about history as well as theatre and entirely appropriate to their attitudes at the time of their writing it. The Monmouth of the title, James 'Crofts' (1649-85), was the natural son of King Charles II and though a weak, pretty, affable libertine, was, for a time, the idol of the populace and even had himself crowned King James II at Taunton in 1685. However, on the failure of an ill-organised rising and defeat at the Battle of Sedgemoor in July 1685, he was executed on Tower Hill.

The play that Stevenson made of these events had a good central idea badly worked out. Sacrifice, substitution and unrequited love are good ingredients for melodrama but they need to be integrated smoothly. Notwithstanding, the effort deserves its place in the Stevenson dramaturgy if only for the fact that it was his first completed full-length play. As it happened, it was not a collaboration after all. Stevenson had opened the project by writing to Bob on 17 April 1868:

'I send you a programme, the division, and the first sketch for Scene I of "Monmouth - a Tragedy." The plot was arranged and the programme written yesterday; the scene was scribbled off in about an hour and a half this afternoon; so you must excuse it... I find myself utterly unable to write dramatically; I go off into long soliloquies, description of scenery, emotion et cetera... You see I made a sort of beginning for (Sc)II, which is simply sickening; only keep in the little joke about the "little black box" - of course, you twig the allusion. Do mind and make Lambourne and everybody moral - no Swinburnism. If you can manage to make any character say aught witty, humorous, or bright, for Heaven's sake do so; I can't.'

Stevenson soon abandoned their original idea of writing alternate scenes and completed it himself. He worked quickly, too quickly perhaps. This was to be a continuing problem with Stevenson in his playwriting. On Sunday September 6, he wrote once more to Bob:

'Monmouth is finished... a spasmodic effort, not a sustained and completed work. There are pieces in it I think decent enough, some little touches of nature, and an end sufficiently sensational to satisfy all lovers of poetic justice, of which I am one. But the play has somehow crined in to use a Scotch expression. The characters do not come forth on the stage. They are only seen peeping out of a window. They are not properly developed. They are merely roughly and hastily sketched... With the versification... I am tolerably pleased, and the little touches of description also give me satisfaction. You see I am frank and praise myself; did I ever grow great this letter would figure in my life.'⁸

He was always, however playfully, bearing in mind his posterity. He continues:

'I am not entirely satisfied with it (although) I think it contains passages (which are) decent enough... (I have) mixed feelings about it.'⁹

A synopsis was written by Stevenson for the guidance of R.A.M.S. during the proposed collaboration with the addition of the following byelaws, also compiled by R.L.S.:

- i He who wrote the scene has the casting vote in any difficulty.
- ii It is requested that the casting vote be used as little as possible.
- iii Corrections not merely verbal and additions exceeding a line in length to be put on a paper apart and pinned on.¹⁰

One may laugh at the adolescent earnestness of such thoroughness but each touches on problems that do arise in any collaboration and young Stevenson is to be admired for a professional astuteness that was much in advance of his eighteen years. What a pity he did not take the same strict tone or basic precautions with his later collaborators.

Meantime, he continued his bombardment of Bob from Wick:

'Monmouth already stinks a little in my nostrils... it was meant to shadow forth good lessons and true; but they are feeble, and too feebly put.'¹¹

He then put it aside but by 29 March 1870 he was writing to Bob again:

'When you come you must bring me 'Monmouth'. I have improved a little in dramatic diction - less of the buskin. So I must have a shot at that subject again.'¹² I see the possibilities of a first-rate acting piece in it.'

Bob did not bring the play. He forgot. But his cousin did not. After all, it had become his play by this time. Even as other projects took up his attention, this, his first-born play, for all its defects, still held a place in his affections. This was seen in his next letter to cousin Bob:

'I write, write, write - no matter what, under a vain delusion that my name will live in proportion to the number of foolscap pages covered with sprawling, half-illegible handwriting... A propos, I have dedicated the rotten play of Monmouth to a friend of mine - the dearest correspondent I ever met with;¹³ it is enclosed for your approbation, corroboration or correction.

'To R.A.M.S., I dedicate this play - MONMOUTH,
A Tragedy in Four Acts and Eight Scenes
The scene is London

PERSONS:Henrietta Wentworth, Baroness Nettlestrode
Jerome, Servitor to Monmouth
Martha, Lady Wentworth's maid
Michael Lambourne, a scrivener employed as a secret agent
The Duke of Monmouth
Mrs. Lambourne, mother of Michael
Milly, a little child
Some lords favourable to Monmouth.

'Worthier had been this offering of thee,
Clad in the fancied colours that it wore
Whilst it was still a glorious dream to be
Hereafter carried forth.'¹⁴

The manuscript was not discovered till after Stevenson's death. Lloyd Osbourne planned to publish it as part of the 1922 Vailima edition of the Complete Works and sold the manuscript at Christie's on 22 July 1922. It is now in the Stevenson Collection at Yale University.

The dream however was eventually 'carried forth' when 250 numbered copies were printed at Mount Vernon, USA by William Edwin Rudge in March 1928. Pages 13 and 14 and the conclusion of the original manuscript are missing but Charles Vale was able to supply the needed information from the Stevenson synopsis. He also added an Introduction and Notes in which he says of the play:

'It was never adequately considered or revised...
Essential directions have not been supplied, so the the scenes do not merge smoothly...
The dramatic machinery creaks, and towards the end of the play there are distinct evidences that the author was - temporarily - a little tired of his theme...and in a hurry to be done wth it.
Yet this uncorrected drama by a youth of eighteen contains some striking work and many lines that he need never have been ashamed of... Those who understand that all verse is dead without a living reader... will see something of a dream that was never fulfilled...'¹⁵

Earlier, the news of the sale of an unknown Stevenson play astounded and confounded Stevensonians. The possible publication of the work, did not please many, including Edmund Gosse, one of Stevenson's oldest friends and admirers, who wrote to the Editor of The Times on 17 June 1922:

'Sir - In the Times of today, I read with alarm that another mass of Stevenson's juvenile writings has been unearthed. Special attention is drawn to the unpublished play, Monmouth. May I say a word to your readers about this play, which presents no "surprise" to me? More than forty years ago when I was seeing Stevenson almost every day, there was frequent mention of this tragedy. R.L.S. regarded it with a kind of mocking complaisance, as great fun. He used to recite tags and tirades out of Monmouth as types of "how not to do it". The notion of its ever being published he scouted with indignation, but I, being one of the four or five persons who at that date already believed that his writings would become matters of universal curiosity, urged him to burn it. He said he would do so, but - 'Infatuate authors on their offspring dote,' and R.L.S. was never prompt to destroy any piece of his own writing.....

When I was entrusted with the preparation of the Pentland Edition (of the Works) I mentioned Monmouth to my friend, and I may almost say, my collaborator, Mrs R.L.Stevenson. She was emphatically of my opinion that it would be wrong to give general publicity to so crude and so absurd a production... If it must be preserved (let it be) kept in some library where any serious student can consult it, but not given up to the laughter of the crowd... I write from the country, and have not had the opportunity of consulting the only final arbiter in all Stevensonian questions, Sir Sidney Colvin, but I believe I know enough of his mind to be sure that he will agree with me.....'

And on June 22, from 35 Palace Gardens Terrace, W8, came the due response from Sir Sidney - 'To the Editor of The Times:'

'Mr Edmund Gosse is quite right in counting on my sympathy with his hope that Stevenson's juvenile play, Monmouth, may remain unpublished. Not because I know anything of its quality - I never saw it or heard it read - but because, as a general rule, I hold it unjust to an author that work which he thought proper to keep to himself should be given to the world after his death. For this reason, I have regretted the posthumous publication of Stevenson's stray leavings... discarded drafts and experiments are announced for inclusion in the forthcoming Vailima edition of his works...'

This prompted a response from Lloyd Osbourne on 24 June 1922:

'Sir - I never heard of Monmouth myself until I saw it advertised in a catalogue of Christie's for a sale on July 11; but I cannot share Sir Sidney Colvin's rather premature decision that it must necessarily be worthless. One would think the best way would be to read it first and pass judgement on it afterwards...'

The Editor - as always - had the last word:

'to a certain extent, Stevenson will have brought the blame upon himself... The moral is that writers who have a reputation to consider should be more careful about what they keep... Let Monmouth be destroyed... Otherwise, let the world know the worst promptly so that it may soon get over it and consign it to oblivion.'

In his Notes, Charles Vale quotes E.V. Lucas:

'I think the world is entitled to Monmouth. Particularly as its author, in his maturity, still liked it.'

And Eliot Crawshay-Williams:

'Unless the publication can damage the personal feelings of living persons, it would seem almost a duty to the world to give it as full material as possible for the study of its great characters.'

Vale concludes:

'I am under no misapprehensions as to the merits or demerits of 'Monmouth'; it is an immature work but not a negligible one. It helps to build up a clearer picture of Stevenson and his ambitions, of his possibilities and limitations in the adolescent stage...'

On reading the play, the present writer was struck by the number of good lines in it -

'God wedded soul and body into one
Which, not without some trouble, men divide.'

But overall it suffers from its lack of technical structure. The eponymous leading character for instance makes his first appearance too late in the action (Act 2 Scene 2). There is a good first act curtain (Henrietta - 'Why he has ta'en my glove?'). Apparently, Stevenson had three tries at the second act curtain line before reverting to his original - 'And God forgive me for my lies today'. Some of the other lines however are unintentionally laughable, like Monmouth's to Lambourne, who is in obvious disguise -

'Wherefore do you wear
A false, red beard, a patch upon your eye
And a grey wig above a youthful face?'

No matter its many weaknesses, the play has been carried to its conclusion and ends on what Charles Vale calls 'its dominant note' -

'that Monmouth has been 'found out' by Lady Wentworth (Henrietta) and can only redeem himself by some supreme effort of despair or innate heroism... Michael's is to be an heroic suicide so that Monmouth may escape.'

But there is no escape from the fact that, just as The Charity Bazaar was a non-event theatrically, Monmouth is a bore.

Both items of juvenilia marked the end of the beginning for Stevenson and playwriting. Another stage had been reached and the drama would now give way to a dramatic change in his own life.

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

STAGE TWO
A Law Unto Himself

'What a man truly wants, that he will get,
or he will be changed in the trying.'
(R.L.S. - Aphorism.)

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

STAGE TWO

Section A

'Creeping like snail'

Mrs Henrietta Younger, a cousin and favourite playmate (known familiarly as Etta), spent a great deal of time with the Stevenson family both at Heriot Row and in their summer cottage at Swanston. She remembered an April evening in 1871 - a very important night in the life of Robert Louis.

'I happened to be in the house when Lou told his father he did not want to continue to be a civil engineer. This was a terrible blow and disappointment to dear Uncle Tom... (he) was more disappointed still when Lou declared that he wanted to go in for the literary life...'

This news was all the more shocking to Thomas Stevenson in view of his son's great success only twelve days before when he read a paper on A New Form of Intermittent Light before the Royal Scottish Society of Arts which was adjudged to be - 'well worthy of the favourable consideration of the Society, and highly creditable to so young an author.'²

Just when he had made such a promising start in a respectable profession he wanted to leave it. Thomas was perplexed but Louis was adamant. Father and son took a long walk the next day to Cramond and in the course of it a compromise was reached. Louis would remain at the University but switch to Law. At least he would still be a professional man and his writing could remain a wee hobby for him. Father and son could be friends again and his mother would be pleased. Margaret Stevenson's diary records that her husband was 'wonderfully resigned.' To offset the probability of having their son labelled as a 'failed author' they would have the prospect of seeing him called to the Bar. Meantime, Thomas did not lack for worries about Louis in other areas.

The same young man's night-time jaunts about the city were disturbing although Thomas was less perturbed about that than by Louis's new atheism. The father's religion was Scottish Presbyterian Calvinism, the son's, however, always had 'a dash of scarlet in it', a puritan waving a Bohemian banner - but an athiest? Was he acting a part again? Dr John Kelman reminds us that in his Edinburgh time, the part that Stevenson acted was as 'the gypsy encamped on the thoroughfare'.³

His studentship, in fact, was a total performance and it is no accident that Dr Kelman devotes no less than eight pages to the younger Stevenson as an actor in life. But Louis meant no harm by it and his conscience was quite clear:

'I, too, have a soul of my own, arrogantly upright, and to that I will listen and conform...'⁴

This egoism is tempered however by a self-deprecating and disarming candour which is confirmed by the description Stevenson gives of himself at the time:

'A certain lean, ugly, idle, unpopular student full of changing humours, fine occasional purposes of good, unflinching acceptance of evil, shiverings on wet, East-windy mornings, journeys up to class, infinite yawnings during lectures and unquestionable gusto in the delights of truancy.'⁵

His ethics were unconventional to say the least. He told Fleeming Jenkin in 1882 - 'I have a genuine morality, but no talent for it.' Genuine piety, on the other hand, is its own reward and Stevenson had no need to be bribed to be virtuous. His was an abstract inclination to evil, a fascination more than any real involvement. He was always good in his own way. But he did not enjoy hurting his parents - or even God. He was not quite sure where he was going but he was not going to move until he was. But he could not stand still.

'To hold the same view at forty as one held at twenty is to have been stupified for a score of years,⁶ and take rank, not as a prophet, but as an unteachable brat...'

He knew himself better than anybody and was by far his own best critic.

'... All I mean is, I was never conscious of a struggle, nor registered a vow, nor seemingly had anything personally to do with the matter. I came about like a well-handled ship and there at the helm stood that Unknown Steersman whom we call God.'

A God whom he affected not to believe in and this hurt his mother and father most. But he loved his parents and had no wish to hurt them.

'They don't see either that my game is not the light-hearted scoffer. I believe as much as they do, but generally in the inverse ratio. I am as honest as they and have not come hastily to my views. I reserve,⁸ as I told them, many points until I acquire fuller information.'

There is a certain irony in contrasting this somewhat astatic railing against orthodox religion by Louis, the student in Edinburgh, with the R.L.S. of a decade later, the prayerful patriarch of Vailima.

The contemporary American writer and critic, William Veeder, addresses this whole question of Stevenson and Patriarchy, in a chapter of that title in his study of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. He sees it as being at the root of Stevenson's family difficulties at this time.

'The emergence of the profession as one of the major forces in social organization had occurred in Stevenson's own century... Upper middle-class professional men are for Robert Louis Stevenson the principal expression of the patriarchal tradition... despite the lingering presence of a landed, titled aristocracy and Stevenson's nostalgia for the gentry Balfours of his mother's line... Patriarchy, as Stevenson considers it, is essentially bourgeois.'

This of course might be held as nothing more than fashionable critical jargon. We have seen that the Balfours were just as professional as the Stevensons but Mr Veeder does see that Stevenson's battle was against the sheer weight of family on the father's side, pressing him towards a professional career just as his father had been pressured by his father before him and so on all the way back to plain Tam Smith. Stevenson showed extraordinary grit in fighting back from a weak position. The winds might buffet the flimsy frame but his heels were dug in firmly. Veeder further posits that Stevenson was a man torn by oedipal emotions and that the adolescent father-son quarrels were re-stagings of childhood antagonisms. He concludes:

'That both men loved Margaret fiercely is without doubt but Louis had also an early over-dependence on Alison Cunningham. What is evident is that the son recognised his father's subconscious incompatibility with the family profession and he (Louis) was determined that the same unhappy fate would not be his. Thomas might have been happier as a minister or a publican, who is to tell, he might even had been a writer himself. His son was always willing to listen to his artistic opinions in later life, if not to act on them. Both were very determined men in their way, and their relationship often suffered as a result but there was no denying either they there was also much love between them.'

Thomas Stevenson was overwhelmed by his sense of God-given duty to his family and his profession. His son was obsessed by what he saw was his responsibility to a God-given talent. Neither could really compromise on the matter but after his father's death, and very near his own, when Stevenson came to write Weir of Hermiston, it is not too difficult to see the shadow of Thomas Stevenson behind the relentless figure of Weir himself in the novel - 'climbing the great staircase of his duty...'

During 1872 Stevenson was with the Edinburgh law firm of Skene and Peacock as a very token apprentice and made fitful preparations for the Scottish Bar Preliminary Examination at the end of that year. He was warming to the idea of the wig and gown and the idea of being a barrister if not to the prospect of a daily office routine as a solicitor. As Jenni Calder points out, Stevenson longed for life to be full of colour and drama and even as he acknowledged the need to follow some kind of respectable profession - or at least to be seen to be doing so - he could not get the stage out of his head, even when on holiday. Calder quotes as an example the letter he had written to his mother from 13 Rosegasse, Frankfurt, on Tuesday morning, August 1872 (sic):

'Last night I was at the theatre and heard Die Judin (La Juive) and was thereby terribly excited. At last, in the middle of the fifth act, which was perfectly beastly, I had to slope... I thought it high time to be out of that galere, and so I do not know yet whether it ends well or ill... An opera is far more real than real life to me. It seems as if stage illusion, and particularly... an opera... would never stale upon me.

I wish that life were an opera. I should like to live in one, but I don't know in which quarter of the globe I shall find life so constituted... imagine asking for three Kreuzer cigars in recitative, or giving the washerwoman an inventory of your dirty clothes in a sustained and flourishous aria.'¹²

His love of music was already as strong as his theatre bias and both contrasted strongly with his academic apathy. No matter his notorious and self-admitted truancy from classes at the University, there is evidence of his attending at Old College at least once, for he had in his possession a notebook made out for P.G.Tait's natural philosophy lectures, but in it he has written out, title by title, all the plays he would one day write:

- 'Edward Ferren' (3-act tragedy) (Sometimes listed as Darren)
- 'Edward Bolton' or 'The Last Will' (5-act comedy)
- 'Ananais Proudfoot, Baker and Elder' (3-act comedy)
- 'The Witch' (5-act tragedy)
- 'A Poor Heart' or 'The King's Pardon' (5-act tragedy)
- 'The Brothers' (3-act comedy)
- 'Charlie is my darling' (3-act tragedy)
- 'Francis Nesham' (5-act tragedy)
- 'The Point of Honour' / A Partie Quaree on the Bass (3-act comedy)
- 'The Duke's Jester' (5-act tragedy)¹³ and
- 'The Sweet Singer' (5-act tragedy)

There is evidence that some of these titles were worked on or used as material for other play projects but none emerged as finished pieces.

Edmund Gosse, (1849-1928), writer, and later friend from the Saville Club, states:

'I think the dramatic influence of Mr Swinbourne flared up finally and sank... he (Stevenson) had been much fired to write in the manner of Massinger... (and) actually began on a murder drama in the style of A New Way To Pay Old Debts... He thought Charles Lamb had been unjust to what ¹⁴he (Stevenson) called the "gentlemanlike plainness" of Massinger.

Stevenson himself says of these early play attempts:

'In 'Monmouth', a tragedy, I reclined on the bosom of Mr Swinburne... in 'The King's Pardon', also a tragedy, I was on the trail of no lesser than John Webster, and in the second draft of the same, with staggering versatility, I switched my allegiance to Congreve - whose exquisite prose I had admired and longed to copy.'¹⁵

Stevenson himself in My First Book refers to the reams of paper ('now all ash') that had gone into some of these play ideas. The same notebook contains seven pages of notes and speeches for The Brothers which may have been a dramatic version of Cosmo, a novel dating from 1868-9. There was also 'a spectacle-play in that transcendent type of human vanity, Herostratus', considered but not written during 1873-4.¹⁶

'All through my boyhood and youth, I was known and pointed out for the pattern of an idler; and yet I was always busy on my own private end, which was to learn to write. I always kept two books in my pocket, one to read, one to write in... Thus I lived with words... But I worked in other ways also; often accompanied ¹⁷my walks with dramatic dialogues, in which I played many parts...

Despite the on-going family crises, his apparent atheism, his uncertainty about a future career, the continuing threat to his lungs in living through each Edinburgh winter, the student Stevenson's imagination was caught up in the idea of plays. But how was he to go about it? As he said himself - 'the thing is to understand the lie of the world.' Of course it would depend on what he meant by 'lie'. Its substance was in how it lay before him but its shadow was what it suggested to him in his head.

He saw the whole of existence as a vast charade and his own life in terms of the part - or parts - he had to play. He recognised that we grow accustomed to the character we put on ourselves; in time, the part becomes the reality. He therefore set out to learn how to play his part effectively just as much as he had set out how to learn to write. His writing was just another means of acting out his fantasies in print.

Meantime, in the critical years that were immediately ahead, the picture he presented to the world was bewildering to say the least. He may have been playing a part but he gave scant regard to his costume. On the other hand, he may have given the matter his total consideration. Whichever the case, the effect was noticable:

'His whole appearance was a shock to a puritan neighbourhood. His chestnut hair fell in limp strands over his shoulder. He did not hesitate to dress as a Bohemian; he wore a velveteen jacket like a workman and a gray, flannel shirt to hide his thin arms. And to warm his thin body, he swathed himself like his claimed ancestor, Rob Roy Macgregor, in a dramatic mantle with flowing folds. Some people found him pretentious, others irritating, (for) he was too consciously sensational - but sardonic eyes and a mocking smile indicated his sublime indifference to public opinion...'¹⁸

Charlotte Jane McDonald remembers his -

'Curious way of walking, sideways and seemed never to be propelled by any power greater than the wind. From time to time wraith-like, then floating along, like a graceful yacht to protect his sails. Usually in fawn tweeds, jacket buttoned up over his chest... On concert nights in a black velvet coat.'

'He attended a performance of Wagner's Flying Dutchman one evening and talked to his neighbour throughout - (his) rather unusual appearance...made him conspicuous and affected-looking among the crowd.'¹⁹

In Malcolm Elwin's words - 'the school softie had become the University boulder'. Stevenson himself did not entirely disagree:

'Indeed, I denied myself many opportunities; acting upon an extensive and highly rational system of truancy which cost me a great deal of trouble to put into exercise - perhaps as much as would have taught me Greek.'²⁰

The black velvet jacket had by now become his habitual wear and his tie 'looked like a strip torn from a castaway carpet'. It was even thought there must be a family trunk of old clothes he was trying to wear out.

'... a slithering, loose, flail of a fellow. All joints, elbows and spindleshanks, his trousers generally so short in the leg like a scarecrow, that one almost expected him to creak in the wind.'²¹

His airs were even more ridiculous than his clothes to one onlooker:

'He was always posing, always showing off. The more we jeered, the more he posed - a smile of disdain on his queer, foreign-looking face - so consumed with conceit, he could not even walk without mincing like a dancing master.'²²

'Mercury disguised as a mortal', a friend called him.²³

All this did not prevent his becoming President of the University Speculative Society. His opening Address was deliberately provoking:

'Mr Stevenson is engaged in explaining to the other members of the Speculative Society that he is the cleverest person of his age and weight between this and California!'²⁴

Note the prophetic mention of 'California' by the future writer of The Amateur Emigrant. This sort of fancy, however, did not endear him to his fellow-students who would have thought him the very least likely classmate to succeed. Such a bundle of affectation was he that it was hinted by some that there might be insanity in the family. Was it all not an act, a deliberate facade, a smoke-screen, even a shield? But what was he trying to hide? It still remains an enigma.

He hardly seemed well-cast as a typical young man-about-town but there is no doubt he went about it in his own way. He turned round some strange corners to meet Kate Drummond. Or was it 'Claire'? Or Jean Stevenson (no relation) out at rural Swanston who had a son they say? Furnas totally discounts these legends and attributes their currency to the largely unsubstantiated work of George S. Hellman and John A. Steuart. He is of the opinion that 'Claire' is merely another of the 'emotionally-charged pseudonyms' which Louis was later to apply to Mrs Fanny Sitwell, to whom he wrote, 'Of course I am not going on with Claire...'²⁵ Whatever the truth of the controversy, this was Stevenson's secret Edinburgh phase and for a time we lose him among the wynds and closes of the Old Town.

'Conduct is three parts of life, they say; but I think they put it high. There is a vast deal of life and letters which is not immoral, but simply a-moral; which either does not regard the human will at all, or deals with it in obvious and healthy relations; where the interest turns, not upon what the man shall choose to do, but on how he manages to do it; not on the passionate slips and hesitations of the conscience, but on the problems of the body and the practical intelligence, in clean, open-air adventure, the shock of arms or the diplomacy of life. With such material as this it is impossible to build a play, for the serious theatre exists solely on moral grounds, and is standing proof of the dissemination of the human conscience...'²⁶

Once again the allusion to theatre. But then his whole world was a revolving stage - and one which revolved round him. His own view that 'drama is the poetry of conduct, romance the poetry of circumstance,' might have been his motto, the only difference was that he looked for 'the spark of drama in life's drabness', as Jenni Calder put it.

He knew, however, that he was not yet ready to play his part fully, whatever that part was, he needed time to 'rehearse'. So he did, in his very own kind of performance. Any performance at all would be a useful diversion and distraction even if it did give an unfavourable impression. It would draw attention from his apparent lack of purpose. He knew exactly what he was doing. He had to find his own escape and he found it in 'performance' as various versions of himself offered in protest against the deadly restrictions of respectability. As he said, 'There is something stupifying in the recurrence of unimportant things.' The only things important to Stevenson were words upon a page. He sold himself to himself as a writer virtually before he had written anything and certainly before he received his first professional writing fee (for Roads in 1873). He 'acted the part' of a writer in other words. This in itself, as has already been discussed, is a dramatic process.

Nothing is more apposite of his hectic, inchoate Edinburgh studenthood than this fact of his studied bohemianism. The town and gown provided the backdrop to his deliberate misbehaviour. The university was the stage scene against which he played his part.

The narratives that governed Stevenson's life to this time were two-fold. The obvious and superficial struggle was between himself and his father for his own future and to a lesser extent for his mother's love and understanding. Interior to this, and complementary, as far as Stevenson was concerned, was the battle between the engineer and the lawyer in himself for his soul, already given to the putative writer.

His first resort was to pretence and this allowed his actor's inclinations full rein. His cigarette could not have raised a more effective smoke-screen than did the various disguises he donned in these years. One clue may be in that for much of this time, he was removed from the influence of his cousin and co-dreamer, Bob Stevenson. But not before the same Bob had caused further consternation at Heriot Row by joining with Louis to found the L.J.R. Society - for the propagation of Liberty, Justice and Reverence and the denial by its members of everything taught them by their parents. One cannot help feel that it was Bob framed this combustible constitution. Having lit the fuse, he decamped to Antwerp to study Art, leaving Louis to stand by the domestic powder keg. Of course when it exploded everyone felt the blast. The least affected may have been Stevenson himself.

He had run full tilt against conventionality, but one cannot help think that his was a forced kind of rebellion, to which he applied himself with much more zeal than he did to the getting of a degree. Essentially, he was, in Dr Kelman's phrase - 'a puritan masquerading as a reveller'.

'Looking back upon it, I am surprised at the courage with which I first ventured alone into the societies in which I moved; I was the companion of seamen, chimney-sweeps and thieves; my circle was being continually changed by the action of the Police Magistrate. I see now the little sanded kitchen, where Velvet Coat (for such was the name I went by) has spent days together, generally in silence and making sonnets in a penny version-book; and rough as the material may appear, I do not believe these days were among the least happy I have spent. I was distinctly petted and respected; the women were most gentle and kind with me; I might have left all my money for a month, and they would have returned every farthing of it...' ²⁷

In 1870 he had been fined for 'snow-balling' in the streets and remembered feeling ashamed in the courtroom but he was hailed as a hero as soon as he came out into the street again. Velvet Coat had become Francois Villon, just as he had always wanted. He was still playing to the crowd and to his own image of himself at the given moment. He was a criminal hero at last, but, as always, his dissipation was always moral and even his explorations in the paths of wickedness had been undertaken with largely metaphysical intentions. His feet may have strayed into the Old Town but his head remained sensibly and comfortably in Heriot Row. He knew he could have the best and worst of each world.

'A man's view of the universe is mostly a view of the society in which he lives.' ²⁸

Having seen something of life on the other side of the private gardens that lie between Heriot Row and Queen Street he was now in a better position to evaluate his own fortunate position as the only son of a well-to-do house, but he seemed almost to resent this. It was as if he could never be satisfied or content with the part allocated to him. He had to be always seeking the alternative point of view. This explains his pleasure in extreme behaviour, outlandish dress and his unashamed dandyism on occasions, even to his ostentatious grubbiness at times. He was still the boy chimney sweep at heart. The instinct to perform was in his bones, and as he said himself, 'what's bred in the bone will out in the flesh', but the flesh, as yet, was still weak.

Nonetheless, he was powerfully drawn to the theatre. The student obsession with the stage was further underlined by an article he was to contribute to the British Weekly (13 May 1887) under the title, Books Which Influenced Me in which he states quite categorically:

'Shakespeare has served me best. Few living friends have had upon me an influence so strong for good as Hamlet or Rosalind. The last character, already well beloved in the reading, I had the good fortune to see, I must think, in an impressionable hour, played by Mrs Scott Siddons.* Nothing has ever more moved, more delighted, more refreshed me; nor has the influence quite passed away. Kent's brief speech over the dying Lear had a great effect upon my mind, and was the burthen of my reflections for long: so profoundly, so touchingly generous did it appear in sense, so overpowering in expression.'

It can be assumed then that as well as an avid reader of plays, the younger Stevenson was now, at least in the latter years at University, an intermittent Edinburgh theatre-goer even if his play-going was limited to third-rate local offerings and second-rate provincial tours by No 2 London companies. Although it must be said that Dickens had taken the town with his famous Readings in 1859 and rising young actors like Henry Irving and J.L.Toole (1830-1906) were among many others beginning famous careers at the Edinburgh's Theatre Royal. There was also the local favourite A.D.McNeill at the Princes Theatre as Sir Charles Pomander (a part Stevenson himself was to play before long) in Tom Taylor's and Charles Reade's Masks and Faces.

There were also orchestral concerts to attend and song recitals to hear. The point is that there were things to see and hear even in Stevenson's philistine Edinburgh but Mid-Victorian theatre was not guaranteed to inspire the aesthetically-inclined and Stevenson at that time badly needed exactly that kind of stimulus. He was ripe for inspiration and reassurance and this was found quite unexpectedly in the person of the University's Professor of Engineering - or rather, in the first instance, through that good Professor's wife. To explain, it is necessary at this stage to retrace our Edinburgh steps somewhat, to a winter's afternoon in 1868, when Mrs Henry Fleeming Jenkin, having then newly come to Edinburgh, went to have tea with Mrs Thomas Stevenson.

* Mrs Scott Siddons was the mother of Mrs. Sarah E.Siddons Mair with whom Stevenson was involved in private theatricals in Chester Street. Mrs Scott Siddons was of the Siddons/Kemble theatrical dynasty.

Anne Jenkin found Margaret Stevenson, apparently alone, sitting by the flicker of the firelight in the drawing-room of 17 Heriot Row.

Mrs Jenkin reported:

'Suddenly, from out of a dark corner came a voice peculiar, vibrating, a boy's voice I thought at first... I listened in perplexity and amazement. Who was this son who talked as Charles Lamb wrote? This young Heine with the Scottish accent? I stayed long, and when I came away, the unseen converser came with me to the the front door... I saw a slender, brown, long-haired lad with great dark eyes, a brilliant smile, and a gentle, deprecating bend of the head...I asked him to come and see us?

"Can I come tomorrow?" he replied at once...

As I sat down to dinner I announced -

"I have made the acquaintance of a poet!"

From that day forward, our affection and admiration for him, and our delight in his company, grew.³⁰

Stevenson himself was later to write of Jenkin:

'During the year, bad student as I was, he had shown a certain leaning to my society; I had been to his house, (and) he had asked me to take a humble part in his theatricals.'³¹

It was time for a scene change to -

'ANOTHER PART OF THE CITY'.

STAGE TWO

Section B

'Unwillingly to School'

The 'school' in this instance could be considered as a 'drama school', for the years between 1871 and 1877 were Stevenson's formal 'acting' period, that is, when he was involved irregularly in private theatricals with the Fleeming Jenkin troupe at another part of the city. This was neither in the Old Town, nor strictly speaking in the New, but at the country edge of the latter near fields and trees and running water. Whether at this, their first Edinburgh home at 5 Fettes Row, or later in their second house at 3 Great Stuart Street, Mr and Mrs H.C.Fleeming Jenkin were always 'at home' to Robert Louis Stevenson.

Anne Jenkin was a beautiful and talented woman in her late thirties, who was also a formidable table wit herself. She was the first of the older women Stevenson was always to admire in his life.

'Madam', as the students called her because of her grand manner, was at the same time a soft and sympathetic ear for Stevenson at a difficult domestic phase for him and it is little wonder he found her fascinating and different. She was an amateur actress of some distinction and it was she who persuaded the troubled young man, struggling with religious doubts and uncertainties about his future, to join in their twice-yearly amateur theatricals. He was glad to do so, seeing the whole process of rehearsal and discussion involved as 'an oasis in a desert of convention' after the dining-table tensions of Heriot Row. It was as if, in the Jenkins duo, he had found another kind of parentage, a twopence coloured alternative to the penny-plain pairing he faced at home.

Given his theoretical preoccupation with the stage, and his love of all things theatrical, there is no indication of his entertaining any thought of becoming a serious actor, even privately as an amateur. Knowledge of his physical limitations no doubt precluded any real ambitions on stage but he had a good voice and he certainly liked to use it - except, it would appear, when on stage before an audience. If it did anything, however, the play-acting period fostered a deep friendship with the protean Henry Charles Fleeming Jenkin (1833-1885) which had begun with Stevenson's previous brief flirtation with Engineering.

Jenkin was engineer enough to have built a toy phonograph 'so that he could teach it to swear', biologist enough to have corrected Darwin, scientist enough to have written a significant work on Fecundity and inventive enough to have pioneered electrical transportation, but what is germane to the Stevenson story, at least as far as this study is concerned, is that he was a great enthusiast of the drama. He had even written a play in his time - Grizelda - and was no mean actor himself, but he preferred to produce the plays and was generally regarded as the manager. Like his wife, he was an entertaining conversationalist in a dry manner and was also a talented dancer and ice-skater.

One gets the feeling that his preoccupation with private theatricals was as much a homage to his wife's considerable dramatic gifts as to his own desire to be involved. To select a play, adapt it and mount it and then rehearse a very variable company of amateurs to a standard that was almost professional, and then to adapt his own house as a working theatre for five performances twice a year, calls for extraordinary managerial and technical skills. Fleeming Jenkin had these - plus a very practical enthusiasm. This then was the formidable polymath who was to have a great influence over the emerging Stevenson and whom the mature Stevenson was to immortalise as 'Cockshot' in Talk and Talkers:

'He is possessed by a demoniac energy, welding the elements of his life, and bending ideas as an athlete bends a horseshoe, with a visible and lively effort...'¹

Stevenson became a Jenkinite as much as Jenkin became a Stevensonian. Edmund Gosse was later to write of the relationship -

'In Jenkin's presence, Stevenson seemed to be resisting an instinctive tendency towards veneration, which Jenkin, to do him justice, was on his part always anxious to break down.'²

Stevenson had many reasons to be grateful for the friendship of this redoubtable character and none more so than being allowed to continue his studies at the University despite his abysmal attendance record in his first sessions. It was less important to Stevenson than to his much-tried father and Fleeming Jenkin knew this. He also knew that in Louis he was hardly dealing with an average Edinburgh student. Not by a long way. Jenkin guessed rightly that Stevenson was educating himself by reading, talking and occasionally listening. Any learning gleaned from University was only assimilated by a kind of osmosis.

In order to continue his studies, Stevenson needed certificates of class attendance. Having won over the other professors by sheer effrontery, he then approached the Professor of Engineering.

'It is quite useless for you to come to me, Mr Stevenson. There may be doubtful cases, there ³is no doubt about yours. You have simply not attended my class.'

Nevertheless, he signed it, more for Thomas Stevenson's sake one feels. Stevenson commented - 'That was the bitter beginning of my love for Fleeming, I never thought lightly of him afterward...'⁴

They enjoyed sparking off each other. In one of their many debates, while attending his class, Stevenson put to the Professor a problem of conduct, to which he replied evasively -

"What would Christ have said?"

"Nothing unkind or cowardly," answered Louis carefully.

"True, Mr Stevenson, nor anything amusing!"⁵

The lack of humour in the Gospels worried Stevenson from then on. In a letter to Sidney Colvin from Honolulu in 1889, he summed up his attitude to the brilliant mentor of his student days -

'My dear Colvin, I owe you and Fleeming Jenkin, the two older men who took the trouble, and knew how to make a friend of me, everything I have, or am.'⁶

That Jenkin returned Stevenson's admiration is quite obvious. He saw behind the ludicrous facade the young man had drawn up around him and, in the same way that Anne Jenkin had listened in order to help, Fleeming Jenkin spoke out forcefully to the same end.

In the spring of 1872, he promoted Louis from Prompter to 'the dumb (or rather inarticulate) recipient of Carter's dog-whip'. (R.O.Carter was the Petruchio in a production of Shakespeare's The Taming of the Shrew in which Stevenson played Biondello and the Tailor.) Mrs Stevenson's diary reports that (he) 'gives satisfaction in both'. Sir J. Alfred Ewing, later to be Principal of Edinburgh University, was in the company at that time on Stage Management. Speaking of Stevenson he says:

'I remember a sudden departure after one of the Jenkin plays Stevenson was standing in the wings ready to go on in the dress of a Greek Messenger which had been designed by Fleeming with a fidelity that excluded pockets. Louis had omitted to divest himself of a signet-ring he usually wore. Handing it to me he said, "Wear it till I come off". We forgot it that night and next day he vanished into space...'⁷

He was back in the next year to play Vatel, a cook, in My Son-in-Law, a translation of Le Gendre de M. Poirier by Emile Augier (1820-89). One wonders why the two highly theatrical Jenkins, with all their personality and flair and influence over their protégé could not persuade Louis towards playwriting? At no time were they more powerful in his life - or he more vulnerable. Fleeming Jenkin knew he was dealing with a rare promise - if not of acting talent, at least of something in the young R.L.S. Mrs E. Siddons Mair, of the famous theatre family, confirms this in her recollection of a reading at chez Jenkin of The Frogs of Aristophanes:

'Stevenson stood up to recite (as Aeschylus)... a mere youth, glowing with poetic fervour... I always remember the Professor's emphatic whisper... "Listen to that boy; he will be somebody yet". Or words to that effect.'

His 'old comrade' James, Lord Guthrie, did not share this certainty:

'I frankly confess I had not the vision, in college days, to foresee his future fame. I do not know that anybody had except perhaps his mother and Cummy. But I can at least claim I never mistook the husk for the kernel... The stories about his follies (have) a foundation in fact, but all of them (are) grossly exaggerated and distorted... I never doubted he had the root of the matter in him; that, with all his surface frivolity and seeming pliability, if it came, in life's crucible, to a question of principle, a clear issue of right and wrong, Stevenson would prove as good as gold and as true as steel... Stevenson cannot be understood unless the abnormal strength of three elements in his elusive nature receive adequate recognition - the primitive or aboriginal element, the boyish element and the Bohemian element.'

One wonders which of these strands was in charge when, on May 19 in that same year, he stood up in evening dress to read a paper on The Thermal Influence of Forests before the gentlemen of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. It was well received and there was no doubt that it was Tom Stevenson's finest hour. His son considered it as merely another performance. He was still questing, but still working. As he said, modestly, 'I am no sloven'.

He worked tirelessly at his writing but he found his home life stifling. He needed to break clear from time to time. He considered trying for the English Bar but a medical in London in July 1873 resulted in his being Ordered South - alone. He left soon afterwards for the south of France with something like relief. Throughout his life, every travel opportunity that arose for him was grabbed eagerly.

'For my part, I travel not to go anywhere but to go. I travel for travel's sake...' ¹⁰

'It is a better thing to travel hopefully than to arrive...' ¹¹

But what is not quoted in the familiar saying is the second part of it - 'And the true success is to labour.' ¹¹

Once again - the work ethic; he was not a Protestant for nothing. As he explained in a letter to Mrs Sitwell:

'I have a goad in my flesh pushing me to work, work, work...' ¹²

In 1874, he was writing to his mother from Menton:

'We have all been getting photographed... how they will look I know not. Madame Zassetsky arranged for mine, and then said to the photographer - "C'est mon fils. Il vient d'avoir dix-neuf ans. Il est tout fier de sa moustache. Tachez de la faire paraître" - and then bolted, leaving me solemnly alone with the artist (who) explained to me that he would - "Faire ressortir ce que vient Madame la Princesse" to the best of his ability; he bowed very much to me after this, in quality of prince you see. I bowed in return and handled the flap of my cloak, after the most princely fashion I could command...' ¹³

Toujours l'acteur. The Princess Zassetsky and Madame Garschine were sisters from Georgia and had come to the Riviera sans husbands. They did not know what to make of Louis Stevenson.

'I am to them some undiscovered animal. They do not seem to cultivate R.L.S. in Muscovy.' ¹⁴

Madame Garschine took more than a platonic interest in this odd twenty-three year old Scot but Louis sought refuge in the works of George Sand. He was always ready to come back to theatre in his letters. When he wrote to Sydney Colvin from Hotel St. Romain in Paris:

'My people have made no objection to my going on to Gottingen; but my body has... it is a sore pity. That was a great chance for me and it is gone... I must just be content to live as I have begun, an ignorant, chic penny-a-liner... Have you had any thoughts about Diana of the Ephesians? I will straighten up a play for you but it may take years. A play is a thing just like a story, it begins to disengage itself and then unrolls gradually in block. It will disengage itself for me one day and then I will send you the nugget and you will see if you can make anything of it.' ¹⁵

Unfortunately, Diana did not disengage herself and she remained unborn. Meantime, the nomad remained an essential part of him.

'Any place is good enough to live a life in, while it is only in a few, and those highly favoured, that we can pass a few hours agreeably.' ¹⁶

This sentiment however also suggests an innate restlessness.

In Edinburgh, he dreamt of London, in London he dreamt of Germany, in Germany, he dreamt of France, in France, he dreamt of New York, in New York he dreamt of California, in California he dreamt of the South Seas and in the South Seas, dreamt of Edinburgh. The wheel would go round and come again full circle. Robert Louis Stevenson was an exile from the beginning - from his house and family, from his friends and companions, and more especially perhaps, from himself. Why? He had yet to fall in love for instance. He still had to write something worthwhile. Not to prove to the world that he could write, but to prove it to himself. But first of all, he had to get that degree. In his own range of priorities, however, there was always only one thing to do in life and that was to write.

Meantime, there was the business of keeping up a front on all fronts. Behind his own barricades he could store up experiences and events and people as the fodder for all his future writing. He was quite purposeful and thoroughly objective about this, almost callous in his lifelong need to create a happening in order to later write about it. But there seemed to be so much still to do, to see, to feel, to experience, that he might not have time to absorb it all.

Sometime in February 1875, he wrote to Fanny Sitwell:

'I have thrown off the worst of my depression; indeed this morning I can scarcely call myself depressed. I am a little February that's all. I am to act Orsino (The Duke) in Twelfth Night at the Jenkins'. I could not resist that; it is such a delightful part; and I got them to put off rehearsals to the last moment; so that I could get a fortnight with you in London and a fortnight with Bob in France; for that must be done this time, coute que coute. I am not altogether satisfied that I shall do Orsino comme il faut; but the Jenkins are pleased, and that is the great affair.'

He was right, he did not play it well, but at least he tried.:

'I rehearsed yesterday from quarter-to-seven, and today from four (with interval for dinner) to eleven... I play Orsino every day, in all the pomp of Solomon, splendid Francis the First clothes, heavy with gold and stage jewellery. I play it ill enough, I believe; but me and the clothes, and the wedding wherewith me and the clothes are reconciled, produce every night a thrill of admiration. Our cook told my mother (There is a servants' night, you know) that she and the housemaids were 'just proud to be able to say it was oor young gentleman.' To sup afterwards with these clothes on, and a wonderful lot of gaiety and Shakespearian jokes about the table, is something to live for...' 18

The actor in him was an off-stage guise.

Not everyone applauded his thespian ventures. One such was the future Mrs Macleod:

'I did not know R.L.S. at all well although I acted in Twelfth Night as I took the part of 'Maria' at two day's notice. I was only fifteen at the time and it is one of my great regrets that I did not like R.L.S.! Is it not mortifying to confess it?... I think at that period he was self-conscious and rather a poseur. He did not excel as an actor and was rather taken up with his fine clothes...'¹⁹

Flora Masson had a more detailed recollection::

'When people launch on amateur theatricals now they do so on a large scale, taking one of the theatres. But I doubt if one of these performances are as much of an event in the Edinburgh of today as those dear old 'private theatricals' in Professor and Mrs. Jenkin's own house; where audiences were packed, night after night, into the dining room, and the wall between (it) and the room behind was made to let down in some mysterious way to form a stage with a real curtain and footlights and what not...

Robert Louis Stevenson was not one of the chief actors... yet there are people who remember his Orsino...

and the satisfied languor of his opening words -

'If music be the food of love, play on.

Give me excess of it, that surfeiting,

The appetite may sicken and so die...'

There are some humorous recollections of Louis Stevenson in the Green Room... I saw him walking up and down the big drawing room in a dreamy, rather detached way, gazing into a mirror that was hung in the line of sight. It was as if he were acting to himself being an actor... But once Louis surpassed himself. It was in Greek tragedy. The curtain had fallen on a powerful and moving scene... and the stage was left in the possession of two of the young actors- both in Greek garb. These two threw themselves into one another's arms and (then) flung themselves on to opposite ends of the couch at the back of the stage kicking their legs in the air - at which, Louis, who had been officiating at the curtain, touched a spring - and up went the curtain again. The audience gasped with amazement and broke into a roar of applause. The two luckless acrobats leapt to their feet - only to see the curtain fall once more. Professor Jenkin left his seat without a word and went behind the scenes. "Mr. Stevenson," he said with icy distinctiveness, "I shall ask you to give me a few minutes in my own room." Louis sauntered into the drawing room with a look of absolute unconcern. When he left the Stage Manager's room, one of the company whispered, "What happened?" Louis whispered back - "The very worst ten minutes I ever experienced in the whole course of my life"'.²⁰

Margaret Stevenson's Diary records in March 1876:

'The Miss Barclays with private theatricals.'

Constance Barclay describes this as - 'A French play we had translated'

- and that R.L.S. had the leading part.

Sarah E. Siddons Mair continues with another anecdote relating to Louis Stevenson in performance:

'(A) later. more vivid scene stages itself in my mother's drawing room in Chester Street some forty-seven years ago when a happy charade party amused themselves by acting out SHY and LOCK and then, greatly venturing, with the portraits of Kembles and Siddonses looking down on them, summed up their charade in a representation of the Trial Scene from the Merchant of Venice... There stood Portia, my presumptuous self, pleading with the Jew (The late Drama-loving, Lord Kingsburgh, Dean of Faculty...) and there, Bassanio, the rising architect, Mr. Sydney Mitchell... and there too, Gratiano, (the late Mr. Alec Burnett Crathes) and 'midst them all, with gentle grace, the poetic figure of R.L.S. is seen bending slightly forward to address the court in sweet, clear accents, declaring himself to be - "A tainted wether of the flock, meetest for death"...'²¹

And Frances H. Simpson can also remember Robert Louis Stevenson in 1877:

'In his youthful days when he had begun to let his hair grow long and to wear unusual clothes... He was not a regular member of the Fleeming Jenkin troupe, but he was no novice and acted well in Art and Nature which was an adaptation of a well-known comedy Masks and

'Many years later, I rang him at his (Sydney) hotel... and his voice replied - I remembered it at once. He had a marked but agreeable Lothian accent. He said, "Are you the man who acted at the Jenkin's theatricals?" I modestly said that I had been the call-boy... It is so difficult... to remember conversations. It is the general look of the man,²⁴ and his extraordinary, vivid personality that remain with me.'

In 1877 he was the Messenger in Deianira, (complete with signet-ring). This play was the first part of Lewis Campbell's translation of the Trachiniae of Sophocles. The final memory of Stevenson in genuine active theatrical practice must lie with J.M. Harkom of the Edinburgh Shakespeare Society:

On two memorable occasions, the play Richard II was read by the old Shakespeare Union of which R.L.S. was a member. The two readings were in a room at 8 St. Andrew's Square on 29 February 1876. On both occasions Stevenson read the part of the King. His appearance was striking and picturesque. A slim youth, rather above the middle height, with hair always long and lank and then of a pale brown colour; wearing a velvet coat and over it a long cloak of old-fashioned cut, with brass clasps. The head-piece he wore was of a smoking cap order - and embroidered - such as a German student might wear in his club. What helped to impress the two evenings in the memory was the remarkable likeness of the future novelist... to the ancient fresco portrait of Richard II in Westminster Abbey... his whole expression while reading the play was remarkably suggestive of the original.'²⁵

'I have been studying how I may compare
This prison where I live unto the world;
And, for because the world is populous
And here is not a creature but myself,
I cannot do it. Yet I'll hammer it out.
My brain I'll prove the female to my soul,
My soul the father; and these two beget
A generation of still-breeding thoughts,
And these same thoughts people this little world,
In humours like the people of this world,
For no thought is contented. The better sort,
As thoughts of things divine, are intermix'd
With scruples, and do set the word itself
Against the word...
Thoughts tending to content flatter themselves
That they are not the first of fortune's slaves,
Nor shall not be the last; like silly beggars
Who, sitting in the stocks, refuge their shame
That many have and others must sit there;
And in this thought they find a kind of ease,
Bearing their own misfortune on the back
Of such as have before endured the like.
Thus play I in one person many people,
And none contented.'²⁶

1877 was his last year with the little theatre company. The curtain finally closed on R.L.Stevenson, actor, with no recourse this time to that mischievous spring. Fleeming Jenkin had been Stevenson's mentor in more than the theatrical sense. He understood the younger man's extravagances and could excuse him much - except his poor theatre discipline and indifferent acting. Although later he meant acting in the wider sense when he had written to Stevenson in Saranac Lake:

'even if you acted more foolishly and and worse than other men did you did so from much wiser and better motives than theirs.'²⁷

It was through Jenkin that Stevenson had met a certain Taiso Masaki, an academic visiting from Tokyo University in 1878, who, at dinner, quoted the Japanese classic poem uttered by the hero Yoshida Torajiro before his execution:

'It is better to be crystal and be broken
Than to remain perfect as a tile upon the housetop.'²⁸

Stevenson was apparently impressed. This is not surprising for no better motif could be found for Stevenson himself.

As a footnote to this consideration of his dramatic efforts it might be allowed here to add a proof of consideration of another kind - and one typical of the man who was Stevenson, even when he was pretending to be an actor. Constance Barclay, who has been mentioned previously in connection with the French play in which she appeared with Louis, commented additionally:

'It was not a costume play, but Stevenson took the dressing-up seriously and studied effects at the mirror so often... that another man in the piece... astonished us all... by a daring piece of comic characterisation... which entirely took the wind out of Louis's sails... but Louis never showed any resentment... He asked my father if he would give the fair copying of our translation, should one be needed, to a man ^{he} knew who was ill and in very low water. That friend was Henley.'²⁹

STAGE TWO

Section C

'And then the lover'

As early as 1870, Stevenson had visited his cousin Maude Wilson at Cockfield Rectory in Suffolk. She had married a wealthy Anglican vicar and Cambridge Professor of Archaeology, the Reverend Churchill Babington, and their mutual friend was a Mrs Albert Sitwell who had sought refuge for herself and her tubercular son from a drunken and abusive husband. In 1873, when Stevenson came to Suffolk again, he met her there. Fanny Sitwell was in her thirties, Irish, and very beautiful and Louis was smitten at once. Lady Colvin (as Mrs Sitwell was to become in 1903) wrote her version of what happened on that summer's day:

'That afternoon I was lying on a sofa near an open window when I saw a slim youth in a black velvet jacket and straw hat, with a knapsack on his back, walking up the avenue. "Here is your cousin," I said to Mrs. Babington and she went to meet him... Then the hours began to fly by as they had never flown before in that dear, quiet old Rectory... his talk was like nothing I had ever heard before, though I knew some of our best talkers and writers. Before three days were over, I wrote to Sidney Colvin... and begged him (with Mrs. Babington's leave) not to delay his promised visit if he wanted to meet a brilliant and to my mind unmistakable young genius called Robert Louis Stevenson...'

Colvin had met Fanny in London where she worked as a translator at a college for working women and he was recognised as her official wooer. Unofficially, she was courted by every young man who met her, and this included the twenty-two year old Robert Louis Stevenson. Fanny did not totally discourage him. In Sidney Colvin, he acquired another mentor, this time in the literary field, but in Frances Jane Featherstonehaugh Sitwell, he had found all at once his Muse, his Consuelo, his Madonna, his other 'mother', and his first real sexual and spiritual passion. She had come into his life at exactly the right time and was in that line of women in his life that had begun with Anne Jenkin, then Madame Garschine and now Fanny Sitwell - all older, and all married. What other solace he needed, he found at a gentlemanly London club:.

'After his return from the Riviera in 1874, Stevenson was elected to the Saville Club... (which) had been founded on a principle aimed against the standoffishness customary in English club life, and all members were to hold themselves predisposed to talk... On his visits he generally lunched there... habitually surrounded as a radiating centre of good talk...'²

The road south had brought him unexpectedly to an English garden, where the heady perfume of an abandoned Irish rose intoxicated an impressionable young Scot familiar only with the flowers of Edinburgh. He was to remain entwined with this particular Hibernian bloom for several years even though their mutual passion found its only outlet in a platonic bombardment of letters which continued until his marriage to Fanny Van de Grift Osbourne in 1880. The affair, if it can be called that, closely resembled that of Robert Burns with Mrs Nancy McLehose in Edinburgh in 1787-91, and was, like theirs, never consummated; but where Burns transmuted his exasperation and frustration into one of the world's great songs of parting love (Ae Fond Kiss), Stevenson found his outlet (and release) in thinking of Fanny as another kind of mother. He wrote to her from Edinburgh in 1875:

'Dearest Mother...This is by E.A.Poe:
'...Therefore by that dear name I long have called you
You who are more than mother unto me
And fill my heart of hearts.'

(It goes on:)

'I had been glad to take Madame Garschine by the hand as a mother and make a mother of her at the time, so far as it would go. You do not know perhaps - I do not think I knew myself, perhaps, until I thought it out today - how dear a hope, how sorry a want this has been for me... the children of love are orphans. I am very young at heart - or, (God knows) very old - and what I want is a mother, and I have one now, have I not?

... I am to be a son, you must be a mother; and surely I am a son in more than (the) ordinary sense, begotten of the sweet soul and beautiful body of you, and taught all that I know, fine or holy or of good report, by the contact of your sweet soul and lovely body - transmuted and transfigured and made a new creature... by the knowledge of your goodness and beauty; if this is so, and it is so... you have your duties to me as certainly as ever a fleshly mother had, and for these duties you must be true to me, and happy for me...'3

The Stevenson performance here was undoubtedly that of the cavaliere servente in the long tradition of the chivalrous knight but in this case with filial connotations. Colvin censored the above letters considerably when the correspondence was collected for publication in 1911 and 1923/4/6. The ertswhile invalid had fallen victim to the very oldest disorder - love-sickness. 'Love, what is love? -

'A great and aching heart
Wrung hands and silence
And a long despair.'4

Very early in the business, he had sent her a verse-letter, heavily self-bowdlerising his original text, but his meaning is clear:

'For all is sweet, my lady, in my love;
Sweet hair, sweet breast and sweeter eyes,
That draw my soul, my lady, like a dove,
Drawn southward by the shining of the skies;
For all is sweet, my lady, in my love.

If I could die, my lady, with my love,
Die, mouth to mouth, a splendid death,
I should take wing, my lady, like a dove,
To spend upon her lips, my all of breath,
If I could die, my lady, with my love.'

He burned all of her letters. An action that speaks for itself. Since none of hers to him has survived it can only be assumed that he had no wish for her side of things to be known and there we must let the matter rest.*

From this point onwards, we have the 'Englising' of R.L.S., as it was his meeting with English friends such as Fleeming Jenkin, Colvin and Gosse that was to have such a profound influence not only in his personal life but on his immediate prospects as a professional writer. If he were to be a writer it was time to make a start.

'The morning drum-call on my eager ear
Thrills unforgotten yet, the morning dew
Lies yet undried upon my field of noon
But now I pause a while in what I do
And count the bell, and tremble lest I hear⁶
(My work untrimmed) the sunset gun too soon.'

I have trod the upward and the downward slope
I have endured and done as in days before
I have longed for all and bid farewell to hope
I have lived and loved and closed the door.'

But as one door closed in Stevenson's life another was ready to open - a stage door. Stand by for cue - 'Here comes the gifted boy.'⁸ There were now final examinations to pass. Even if he never intended to be a lawyer he had to qualify. The outsider had to come in.

* A true Victorian, Fanny Sitwell only remarried when both her husband and Colvin's aged mother died in 1903. She was 62 and Sidney, 56 - and Robert Louis Stevenson was dead. She kept many of his letters to her that were never published in her lifetime.⁸ Letters - as she herself said - 'too sacred and intimate to print'.

A formal part of his degree was a six page thesis on Justinian's Pandects (Book 41 title 9). His subject was the distinction between "Pro Dote" and "Pro Suo" as these apply to a person's state before and after marriage. In the Viva Voce he also fielded a professor's request to define marriage by quoting exactly from Erskine - a pure fluke of preparation or prior knowledge of the question. One feels that he was hardly an authority on marriage, either before or after, but no doubt his actor's ability to 'get his lines off' raised something on the day of his 'sore trial' as he termed his final examination.

The examiner in French was astonished at Stevenson's fluency in that tongue and declared he spoke it like a Frenchman but was just a little perturbed by the lack of a grammatical grasp in the language. Stevenson explained that this was because he spoke it like a Frenchman. With another professor he disputed the quality of the textbook in question (he had not read it) and was able to bluff his way through on another book's better phraseology. It have been another Stevenson 'performance' but there is no doubt that at this stage he made a real attempt at some earnest rehearsal.

For the first time in his university career he applied himself and digging deep into his remarkable energy and range of reading he delivered his academic riposte. He had also the incentive of a promised £1,000 from his father if he passed and this may have had more to do with his success than any deep legal study or latent forensic skills. To everyone's relief, he graduated as an advocate on 14 July 1875 - 'looking like a tipsy Irishman on the way to a funeral.'⁹

Etta Younger remembers -

'the afternoon we drove into town from Swanston to hear the result of the examination. The excitement and joy was tremendous when he heard that he had passed and was a full-blown advocate. We were driving in the big, open barouche and nothing would satisfy Lou but that he would sit on top of the carriage... waving his hat, and calling out to people... like a man gone mad. I often wonder what impression it made on the passers-by, as Uncle Tom always used to have good horses, and liked them to go very fast.'

'After this Lou used to go and walk up and down Parliament House in his wig and gown (and may I say in passing, his mother, with much difficulty, persuaded him to go and have a photograph done of himself in this attire, a copy of which I now possess), and during this time, he was offered two briefs, both of which he refused... Then he declared he was going to retire from the law and devote himself to literature.'¹⁰

He had resigned from the Law just as he resigned from Engineering, that is immediately on gaining the professional recognition. Thomas Stevenson really had little option in resigning himself to his son's determination on a career as a man of letters. Soon the ex-engineer become ex-barrister was writing to Mrs Sitwell with details of three plays - as pending projects, but as he said, in a letter from Swanston:

'Life is a curious problem (original remark: copyright); and I do not see my way through it very distinctly at present... Wild work, madonna, wild work - this decency to others. I may say with Sir Andrew, "Nay, I care not for good life!" ...

Hey diddle-diddle, the cat and the fiddle,

The cow jumped over the moon,

From circumference to middle, the whole is a riddle,

And I hope to be out of it soon.¹¹

Impromptu verses: copyright. Adieu...'

Fleeming Jenkin acknowledged the plaque which Thomas Stevenson proudly fixed to the railings at 17 Heriot Row to proclaim the fact of a lawyer in residence with a knowing note to the same:

'Accept my hearty congratulations on being done with it. I believe that is the view you like to take of the beginning you have just made.'¹²

When Fleeming Jenkin died suddenly on 12 June 1885 at the comparatively early age of 53, Louis, by then in Bournemouth, was shattered. This was evident from the obituary he wrote in the Academy eight days later:

'In talk he was active, combative, pounced upon his interlocutors, and equally enjoyed a victory or a defeat. He had both wit and humour; had a great tolerance for men, little for opinions; gave much offence, never took any... He would not nurse a weakness in himself or you. He knew you and would not dissemble his knowledge; but you were aware he still loved you, and it was thus that he desired you to return his affection; hand to hand, not gloved...'¹³

'Not from one or two only but from many, I hear the same tale of how imagination refuses to accept our loss and instinctively looks for his re-appearing, and how memory retains his voice and image like things of yesterday.'¹⁴

He was glad to acknowledge not only the boon of friendship with a remarkable man in any sphere but that that friendship was also an education and an experience for one who hoped to make his living with the pen. To Mrs Jenkin, his beloved 'Madam', his immediate reaction on first hearing the news of the death was revealed in the simple P.S. -

"Dear me, what happiness I owe to both of you!"¹⁵

Fleeming Jenkin was an Englishman.* If it was true that Stevenson's professional personality and writing sympathies were more English than Scots (and more French than English), it was just as true that it was Englishmen like Jenkin and Colvin who appeared at important times in his life. Stevenson's capacity for making friends was all the more valuable for the fact that many of his friends throughout his life were useful and influential. This was not so however of the next Englishman to enter the scenario. His presence had lain across the back-drop of Stevenson's Edinburgh for more than a year but now it was time for him to make a proper entrance.

Cue Mr. Henley!

* Coincidentally, Fleeming Jenkin shared exact birth and death years with one of Stevenson's great heroes, General Gordon of Khartoum - 1833-85. Stevenson never forgave Prime Minister Gladstone for his political blunder in not going to Gordon's rescue sooner. When he was informed that Gladstone never stopped talking about Treasure Island Stevenson replied that he would be better attending England's imperial affairs. A Stevenson treasure, proudly displayed at Vailima, was General Gordon's last message scrawled hurriedly in Arabic on a cigarette paper.

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

STAGE THREE
Enter Henley

'Money gives us food, shelter, and privacy;
it permits us to be clean in person...
(and) opens for us the doors of the theatre...'

Lay Morals

Chatto and Windus 1914, p46

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

STAGE THREE

Section A

'Sighing like furnace'

Almost from the beginning, Robert Louis Stevenson was intrigued by theatre, albeit an idealised one. All through the years of Toy Theatre he had been sustained by a love for the drama, for that world of the imagination suggested by painted flats and painted faces. He never lost this early enthusiasm for the old stage forms and so strong was its pull that he found it hard to free himself from its attraction even in his adult years. This militated in no small measure against his developing a personal and significant dramatic technique. He was still tied unnecessarily to outdated and outmoded formulae. His flirtation with private theatricals may only have been calf-love, an infatuation natural in a highly romantic adolescent, but it was a very large part of him for nearly seven years. He was an actor in all but name; a poser in search of a persona.

Stevenson's writing always had a smear of greasepaint over it as Dr John Kelman points out:

'In The Treasure of Franchard, the character of Dr. Desprez allows the author to get 'on stage' himself and enjoy to the full the comedy intiated by the character - a combination of egoist, mountebank and child, yet obviously loved by Stevenson. Similarly, Prince Florizel in New Arabian Nights is a stock, theatrical figure, but undoubtedly represents the fantastic side of Stevenson...'

His writing language, when in the preaching style he loved, had a quality not unlike J.M.Synge's synthetic stage Irish -

'In that day, you may go thirty mile and not hear a crawling cock... an' fifty mile, an' ye may not get a light to your pipe; and an hundred mile an' not see a smokin' house.'²

Or even in a casual phrase - 'like weary actors waiting for the end of the night' and 'those bad actors who try to cover their absence of matter by the unwholesome vitality of their delivery,' he showed a fondness for the theatrical metaphor.³ He is so right about bad actors. They give themselves so enthusiastically to their own heavy, foot-stamping performances that they give no thought to the play itself.

As Kelman further indicates, all Stevenson's books were conceived by him more or less as theatres where he could allow himself to perform freely. The assured writer had not yet fully emerged because he himself was still not sure who he was as a man. He could only remember the boy he had been.

'In early years, we take a book for its material and act as our own artists, keenly realising that which pleases us, leaving the rest aside. I never supposed that a book was to command me, until, one disastrous day of storm, the heaven full of turbulent vapours, the streets full of the squalling of the gale, the windows resounding under bucketsful of rain, my mother read aloud to me *Macbeth*. I cannot say I thought the experience agreeable. I far preferred the ditch water stories, where a child could dip and skip and doze over, stealing at times material for play. It was something new and shocking to be thus ravished by a giant, and I sank under the brutal grasp. But the spot in memory is still sensitive, nor do I ever read that tragedy now, but I hear the gale howling up the valley of the Leith!'⁴

It is a tribute to the gentle Margaret Balfour that she should read Shakespeare at all to her son and read it so well that he would still remember its effect so many years later. Again, it is the power of the voice in dramatic narration. This was something her son also learned to use with effect if not for theatrical purposes. Much of his life was an active performance and, during this time in question, he kept in contact with theatre, if only from his seat in the stalls. For instance, he wrote a six page essay/review on the '*Macbeth*' of Tommaso Salvini (1829-1916), when that famous Italian actor came to the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh, in April, 1876. The following are brief extracts:

'Salvini closed his short visit to Edinburgh by a performance of *Macbeth*. It was, perhaps, from a sentiment of local colour that he chose to play the Scottish usurper for the first time before Scotsmen; and the audience were not insensible of the privilege. Few things, indeed, can move a stronger interest than to see a great creation taking shape for the first time. If it is not purely artistic, the sentiment is surely human. And the thought, that you are before the world, and have the start of so many others as eager as yourself, as least keeps you in a more unbearable suspense before the curtain rises, if it does not enhance the delight with which you follow the performance and see the actor "bend up each corporal agent" to realise a masterpiece of a few hours duration. With a player so variable as Salvini, who trusts to the feeling of the moment for so much detail, and who, night after night, does the same thing differently but always well, it can never be safe to pass judgement after a single hearing...'

But this is precisely what Stevenson does over five detailed pages.

42

'The creation is worthy of a place beside the same artist's Othello and Hamlet. It is the simplest and most unsympathetic of the three; but the absence of the finer lineaments of Hamlet is redeemed by gusto, breadth and a headlong unity. Salvini sees nothing great in Macbeth beyond the royalty of muscle, and that courage that comes of a strong and copious circulation...'

Stevenson was always to associate courageous action with health and vigour, and the envy he ascribes to Macbeth's watching King Duncan embrace Banquo might also be in little part also true in Stevenson's watching Salvini.

'Never for a moment, even in the very article of murder, does he possess his own soul. He is a man on wires... For after all, it is not here, but in broad daylight... that this man's physical bravery can keep him up; he is an unwieldy ship, and he needs plenty of way on before he will steer...'⁵

The nautical metaphor was always to fall easily to his pen and despite some shrewd psychological insights in so inexperienced a theatregoer, Scotland had not found its Hazlitt. When the article appeared in the Academy, Stevenson reports that -

'Fleeming opened the paper, read so far, "No," he cried, "that won't do! You were thinking of yourself, not Salvini."⁶

Stevenson was perhaps writing more to impress than inform, which might be true of drama critics at whatever, or in any, age but there is no doubt nevertheless of his own theatrical assurance. He tells his readers that 'the company as a whole appeared not to be up to his (Salvini's) standard... a temperamental ghost of Banquo, a weak Lady Macbeth, and an inexplicable ballet sequence at the end.'

The notice shows all his latent dramatic instinct but it also reveals his theatrical inexperience despite the dropping of well-known names (T.P.Cooke) in what amounts to a wordy scene-by-scene commentary which would have profited by editing. But, aptly quoting Salvini himself, 'O siam nell' opra ancor fancuilli' (sic) - he concludes, 'Scottish gravity' notwithstanding, - '(it is) an admirable work of dramatic art'.

If this is a young man's work it must be borne in mind that Stevenson was always young for his age. Being, or seeming, young was an essential part of him. His game-playing, role-playing, joke-playing all stemmed from a deliberate boyishness that never left him and would have been insufferable in many other grown men. It was accepted in Stevenson because of the kind of man he was.

Throughout his life he had all the Balfour charm even though it was underpinned by a large measure of Stevenson steel. Like his engineer forebears, he was a worker but where they built lighthouses to light sailors home from sea, he built up words to spill a flicker of light on humanity as he saw it.

'Say not of me that weakly I declined
The labours of my sires, and fled the sea,
The towers we founded and the lamps we lit,
To play at home with paper like a child.'

The man reflected the youth who echoed the boy who dreamed heroic dreams and now the same man who talked to himself on solitary walks had found a theatre for himself, but it was his own stage he trod and his company of players stepped out of his mind, made up and word perfect.

Like any actor, but in his case like a writer, Robert Louis Stevenson was an impression hunter, and this facet lay behind his occasional freakishness. He was perennially curious and always susceptible to the charms of the unusual. He wanted to go everywhere, see everything and try anything. He did in fact go down in a diving bell and up in a balloon (like the hero of St Ives). The 'lamp he lit' at this time was a very feeble candle glow. At any rate he was still working at it, and it would wax yet.

He had always worked at his writing and would do so to the grave. It could even be said that overwork hastened him there. It was this hard-hewn, Stevensonian base that gave him the solid frame from which he developed his own 'tower' later, not a babel of tongues but a well-crafted monument to a magnificent writing style. In this respect, it could be said that this very style has acted against him. So much so that he has been seen largely as a 'mere stylist'

Today however, a hundred years on, Stevenson is once again being evaluated on a level with Burns and Scott and seen for what he is, a major Scottish writer with good grounds for being considered truly international. What other Scottish writer, apart from the 'big guns', is so known around the world? One who might be considered in this range of literary artillery, at least in dramatic terms, was the small, slight and bespectacled Sir James Matthew Barrie (1860-1937). He had come from Dumfries Academy to Edinburgh University in 1882 at a time when his fellow-Edinburgh graduate was convalescing at Davos in Switzerland.

William Ernest Henley was born on August 23rd 1849 at Gloucester, England, the son of a bookseller. William was the oldest of five sons, two others of whom were to find notability in the arts. One, Edward John ('Teddy') Henley, became an actor and was to tour America in Deacon Brodie, which William was to write with Stevenson in 1878. Another was Anthony Warton Henley, who became a successful painter. Another of the brothers, Nigel, became a responsible civil servant and the fifth, Joseph, did nothing of note, except remain William's youngest brother. For such a remarkable family, the Henleys were always extremely poor and the five boys knew hunger and deprivation from an early age. Even so, they each grew to be highly intelligent, very tall and extremely well-read, perhaps not surprising in a bookseller's house.

William was acknowledged to be the cleverest of all the sons. He easily won a scholarship to Oxford but ill-health prevented his going on to take his degree. He had had an attack of tuberculosis when he was 12, probably due to poor diet and this resulted in the loss of a foot when he was 20, and eventually, the whole leg. When the other was similarly threatened, Henley undertook to seek the help of Dr Joseph Lister, whose work at Edinburgh Infirmary, particularly in antiseptics, had become known throughout Britain. Without money or introductions, Henley somehow made his way to Edinburgh in 1873 and presented himself to the famous doctor. Lister was impressed by the young Englishman's grit and confidence in him and accepted him as a patient at the Royal Infirmary -

'Those corridors and stairs of stone and iron
Cold, naked, clean - half-workhouse and half-jail...'¹¹

He shared a hospital room with two small boys, Willie Morrison and Roden Shields. The latter, who grew up to become a Glasgow tailor, said that 'Henley has an immortal soul of his own'.

He later wrote his memories of the large, red-bearded Englishman at this time for a magazine article:

'I used to watch him looking hard at the roof, thinking, smiling and frowning as if he saw nice things and talked to people. I never dared question him in these moods but I resolved, when I was a man, I would get pillows at my back and a desk fitted to my bed and read and smile and frown like Henley. He was a good comrade, a kind friend; and I wept bitterly when we parted, and I think that he felt it a little too.'¹²

Master Shields was not the first disciple to be won by William Henley.

Henley was to spend almost twenty months under Lister's care and most of it in bed. It would seem by all accounts that he did not waste an hour of this enforced immobility. If he had been unfairly treated by fate in the matter of consumption he was more than compensated by an extra strength of mind and purpose. He taught himself, for instance, to write and read in four languages - French, German, Italian and Spanish. One can see why he needed the bed-desk so envied by young Master Shields. It was the enforced bedridden situation that turned Henley's considerable mind towards an eventual life of letters and he began to submit poems and articles to the many magazines abounding at that time. One of these, the Cornhill, in London, accepted his first contributions and when its editor, Leslie Stephen, was in Edinburgh, he decided to visit Henley.

'I had an interesting visit to my poor contributor. He is a miserable cripple in the Infirmary who has lost one foot and is likely to lose the other... and has a crippled hand besides. He has been eighteen months laid up here and in that time has taught himself Spanish, Italian and German... He writes poems... and reads such books as he can get hold of.'¹³

It was Stephen who introduced Stevenson to Henley.

'I went to see Stevenson this morning, Colvin's friend, and told him all about this poor creature and am going to take him there this afternoon. He will be able to lend him books, and perhaps read his MSS to him and be otherwise useful. So I hope my coming to Edinburgh will have done good to one living creature.'¹⁴

He not only fulfilled this charitable act, he fulfilled the destinies of two very different young men. Whether or not this was a kindness to either remains a moot point, but from this time on the two were as one. The main players in the life-drama had now been cast. Action could now proceed. Stevenson, as usual, reported to Mrs Sitwell:

'Saturday - Leslie Stephen, who was down here to lecture, called on me and took me up to see a poor fellow, a sort of poet who writes for him, and who has been eighteen months in our infirmary, and may be, for all I know, eighteen months more. It was very sad to see him there, in a little room with two beds, and a couple of sick children in the other bed... The gas(light) flared and crackled, the fire burned in a dull, economical way. Stephen and I sat in a couple of chairs, and the poor fellow sat up in his bed with his hair and beard all tangled, and talked as cheerfully as if he had been in a king's palace... He has taught himself two languages since he has been lying there. I shall try to be of use to him.'¹⁵

Henley, for his part, found young Stevenson an 'apparition'.¹⁶

Stevenson quickly came under the spell of the large, loud-talking, one-legged invalid, his elder brother in the muse by a year. There was no way Henley suggested the helpless cripple despite his acute incapacities. His well-oiled and powerful engine of a mind was running a full head of steam at all times, and its workings demanded constant attention. This meant books, magazines, newspapers, any kind of print. Stevenson brought these. As well as books, he also brought him an armchair from home so that Henley could sit more comfortably when he was allowed up. Stevenson walked with it on his head all the way from Heriot Row because he could not get it into the family carriage. Nothing was too much trouble if it were for Henley.

The two got on famously, especially on their later occasional excursions into the outside world with Henley in a wheelchair. It suggests an odd picture, the frail R.L.S. pushing Henley's huge bulk in a wheelchair through the streets of Edinburgh. It was as if it were Osric propelling Falstaff through Cheapside. Stevenson had even carried him bodily from his hospital bed to the street. More often, and sensibly, Stevenson borrowed his father's phaeton, and his two fast horses.

Mrs Sitwell received the usual bulletin:

'I had a business to carry him down the long stair, and more of a business to get him up again, but while he was in the carriage, it was splendid. It is now just the top of spring with us. The whole country is mad with green. To see the cherry blossom bitten out upon the black firs, and the black firs bitten out of the blue sky, was a sight to set before a king. You can imagine what it was to a man who has been eighteen months in a hospital ward. The look on his face was wine to me.'

Certainly the boisterous Henley must have blown fresh winds around the pale form of the gauche, unworldly, woman-sheltered Stevenson. Who knows therefore what hopes and dreams and ambitions, not to mention Edinburgh secrets, were shared in the hours together at the hospital bedside, or on the carriage excursions or during the wheelchair walks? Their tirade of talk would have turned on all things. Henley, like Stevenson, was fascinated by the stage and everything connected with theatre since seeing Charles Dickens perform his Readings, although Henley's only memory of it is 'a long white finger and a flashing jewel'. Thus was the actor Dickens caught in a phrase by a few Henley pen strokes. The later portrait-poet, who was to catch a vivid R.L.S. likeness in fourteen lines, had begun early.

It must be said at the outset that there was something a little eccentric in the Henley strain, one brother a writer, one a painter, one an actor, but eccentricity was something else William shared with Louis. But more than anything they shared a genuine theatrical enthusiasm. Graham Balfour has confirmed this of Stevenson:

'The theatre was a great delight to him. Although he had read (and written) plays from his early years, had revelled in the melodrama of the toy-theatre and had acted with the Jenkins and in other private theatricals, I find no record of his having visited a theatre before December 1874 when he found Irving's Hamlet 'interesting (for it is really studied) but not good,' and there is no sign of his having been really impressed until he saw Salvini as Macbeth in the spring of 1876.'¹⁸

Balfour could not have been aware of Stevenson's visit to a pantomime a year earlier. Mrs Sitwell was, of course, informed:

'I went in the evening to the pantomime with the Mackintoshes - cousins of mine. Their little boy, aged four, was there for the first time. To see him with his eyes fixed and open like saucers, and never varying in expression save in so far as he might open his mouth a little wider, was worth the money...'¹⁹

The gleam of a little boy's eyes in the darkness of an auditorium would have been a picture of theatre as Stevenson always knew it - from a boy's point of view. He never grew out of its possibility for magic. It is highly probable therefore that they talked much of the stage in their long walks about the Edinburgh streets. Stevenson would have mentioned his juvenile Monmouth and his schoolboy Deacon Brodie. At any rate, it is certain that a histrionic bond was created. Henley too had seen Irving and previously recorded his impressions in a letter to Harry N-, (sometimes called Mephisto) his oldest friend, who kept a coffee-house in Commercial Road, in the East End of London:

'... On Saturday last, I saw Henry Irving as Mathias. It is not a good piece of art, my lad, think as you will of it. 'Tis a piece of acting full of good points - almost too full indeed. But rough, ragged, full of holes.'²⁰

Henley was ever the critic. He had the natural objectivity of the outsider, another trait he shared with Robert Louis Stevenson. By virtue of their respective conditions they were almost forced into being spectators rather than activists in their lives. This did not prevent either of them from making their presence felt. At any rate, an idea had been born from which all else between them would spring. It would now gestate until its time was right.

What is strange however of this period, is that no mention is ever made of Henley's ever formally visiting Heriot Row to meet the Stevenson parents or even old 'Cummy', Louis's former nurse, who still lived on in Edinburgh. One wonders how the circumspect Cummy might have reacted to the gregarious Henley. In their later estrangment, Stevenson was to be angry and disappointed that, on the occasion of his mother's return to Heriot Row from America, Henley had not taken the chance to visit the widowed Mrs Stevenson at home. Stevenson wrote to Charles Baxter, enclosing a note for Henley:

'I hear you have not thought fit to call on my mother since her return. I think my father tried to make you welcome in that house. He is gone, the house is empty; it would have been very fit you should have paid your respects to his widow.'²¹

It is obvious then that Henley must have visited in those first years. If Stevenson had chafed at the restrictions of his father's regime at Heriot Row, how he must have grasped to his soul this outspoken, life-loving, free-thinking English cripple with the gift of tongues. The experience would have been energising and stimulating to anyone still less a diffident, quizzical, unemployed lawyer who had hitherto regarded himself as a delicate oddity. Henley finally left the Infirmary in 1875.

'Free...!
Dizzy, hysterical, faint,
I sit, and the carriage rolls on with me
Into the wonderful world...'²²

He had meantime fallen in love with Anna Boyle, when she had come to the infirmary to visit her sailor brother, and now, despite the fact that he had no prospects whatsoever, Henley wanted to marry her. He was only twenty six, although he looked older with his red beard and heavy moustache, but Lister had saved his leg, and his studies had saved his sanity and now he needed a job to save his hopes for marriage to Anna. He had nothing but his one leg to stand on but he remained optimistic.

After what he had come through, Fate held no terrors for William Ernest Henley. He knew he had literary and linguistic abilities, and they were considerable, but where to apply them, that was the question. For the moment, all he knew was that he was a free man. Defiantly, he sounded his own trumpet-blast not only to the world of letters but to the world at large. No lines are more indicative of the man:

'It matters not how strait the gait,
How charged with punishments, the scroll,
I am the master of my fate;
I am the captain of my soul.'²³

But he had to earn a living. He survived by doing translations for the French section of the Encyclopaedia Britannica and by trying to keep up socially with the Stevenson set - Ferrier, Simpson, Baxter and occasionally the irrepressible cousin, Bob. But where each of these could retreat to a good home in a comfortable square when the 'chimes of midnight' sounded from the formidable Edinburgh steeples, Henley could only limp up the stairs to the garret looking down on Princes Street. But he kept up sufficiently to remember Stevenson's attending mid-winter parties in a turban and sporting a Spanish cloak.

'He came to an informal evening in these garments, and in their removal, appeared in a dress coat, a blue flannel shirt, pepper-and-salt trousers, silk socks and patent leather shoes. He was exceedingly vain of foot - which was neat and elegant. His hair fell to his collar; he waltzed, he talked, he exploded, he was altogether wonderful. And the women, (this would have touched him had he known it) were in fits of laughter till - the whole Romantic Movement in his cloak and turban - he departed to dream (it may be) over a sentence of Sir Thomas Browne's and a gin and ginger at Rutherford's.'²⁴

Stevenson could be said to be 'dressing the part' - always the first stage in creating a role. His trouble at this time was that he was uncertain of the play he was supposed to be in. If it were not high farce it was at the least a comedy - witness the 'fits of laughter'. Margaret Moyes Black describes a similar kind of Stevenson:

'A wilful eccentric who drove down Princes Street (that classic thoroughfare) clothed in boating flannels and a straw hat, upon a summer's afternoon; whose chosen attire in mid-winter was a pork pie hat embroidered with silver... and a Spanish cloak... and who (it is upon record) delighted to outrage the decorous conventions which governed 'Anglified' Edinburgh.'²⁵

Nothing much has changed. The citizen reaction to excesses on the Edinburgh Festival Fringe today continues to show that the shockable 'Anglified' Edinburgh still exists. Stevenson's sartorial flamboyance was nothing more than a gesture of rebelliousness, rather than any serious act of rebellion as Stage Two has. However, now having found Henley, or more correctly, Henley's having found him, he had also found theatre again. Through Henley's promptings, he was led to believe that there might even be money in it.

Henley had discovered, in the autumn of 1878, Stevenson's early draft of Deacon Brodie from 1869. It was likely to have been a very rudimentary affair, given his age and minimal theatrical experience at that time. There was no doubt that Stevenson as a boy had been fascinated by the story of William Brodie. Deacon William Brodie was a respectable 18th-century Edinburgh cabinet maker by day and thief and housebreaker by night. This interest may have been sparked off in Stevenson by the fact that a cabinet in Stevenson's bedroom was made by the notorious Deacon himself - of whom Stevenson wrote:

'A great man in his day was the Deacon; well seen in good society, crafty with his hands as a cabinet maker, and who could sing a song with taste. Many a citizen was proud to welcome the Deacon to supper, and dismissed him with regret at a timeous hour; who would have been vastly disconcerted had he known how soon, and in what guise, his visitor returned...

Still, by the mind's eye, he may be seen, a man harassed below a mountain of duplicity, slinking from a magistrate's supper-room to a thieves' ken, and pioneering among the closes by the flicker of a dark lamp.'²⁶

The story of Deacon Brodie has many parallels with that of the charismatic Francois Villon, the 15th-century French poet and criminal, whom the young Stevenson was also known to admire. In fact, he had featured Villon in one of his short stories, A Lodging for the Night only the year before. Now, in 1878, Henley was of the opinion that 'The Deacon, as they were to call it, could be reworked by both of them.

It was primarily intended as a vehicle for the greatest actor of the day - Henry Irving. John Henry Broadribb, (1838-1905), who was to become the theatre's first knight, as Sir Henry Irving, in 1895, first made his name at the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh, during Stevenson's boyhood and returned there to play the Hamlet in October 1876 which Stevenson saw. He had made a London sensation in 1871 with The Bells, a melodrama which he transformed by sheer acting power. Irving was without doubt the prime interpreter of psychological drama and it was this encouraged Henley to think that Deacon Brodie might be tailor-made for the actor. Accordingly, Stevenson was set to work on his original fragment with this end in mind. Mention of Henry Irving prompts a comment from David Todd, the son of John Tod(d), the Swanston shepherd:

'I always thought that R.L.S. was very like Sir Henry Irving. I think I see him yet, in my mind's eye with his velveteen jacket, every time I pass the old farmhouse.'²⁷

In 1878, melodrama was still recognised as a respectable form of theatre. It had emerged from Italy around 1600 as 'drama per musica' from which it developed in its two branches as opera and melodrama. In both forms recitative was employed as well as sung choruses and dancing. The music was often incidental to the drama and at other times, dramatic in itself but this was the form that led to The Beggar's Opera (1728) as well as The Bells (1871) and in the same way to the first version of Deacon Brodie in 1880. Melodrama, as Edward Gordon Craig insists, is a pure product of theatre. As he rightly says, every great play has in it the best elements of melodrama.

Stevenson and Henley, particularly the latter, would have been aware of this, Stevenson from his reading and Henley from his many nights in the gallery of the Lyceum looking down on Irving. Were he to play the part, he would bring to it all his capacity for stage management, and all the technical facilities available at the Lyceum, particularly the scenic skills of scene-painter, Hawes Craven. Given all this, Henley surmised, the work was a guaranteed success. Given too, Stevenson's own growing confidence as a writer, the combination was sure-fire. At least, Henley thought so. Stevenson had retreated again to Heriot Row to consider the apparent sudden end of his affair with Mrs Fanny Osbourne, who had returned to America and might even reconcile with her errant husband. Frankly, Louis was little disposed to work on anything, still less a play. This was to reckon without Henley's gusto.

At his prompting, Stevenson was soon at work on a re-draft of the old Brodie manuscripts from of 1864 and 1869. Henley was figuratively at his shoulder all the time with advice and encouragement. His letters at this period were full of histrionic schemes and he wrote to one of his many literary friends, the poet and Civil Servant, Henry Austin Dobson (1840 -1941): 'Good Friday, 1879 -

'I am dreaming always of plays, and never now write verse...'²⁸

In his own phrase he was 'very earnest about the drama'.

Very William Ernest one might say and that suggests a considerable earnestness. Once Henley had his furnace stoked there was very little sighing about it. He could not rest till he had everyone blazing like himself. And if the heat was too much, it did little damage for it soon burned itself out. Meantime, he was hard at work on the bellows trying to raise a spark from his collaborator. A lot of letters were written.

Much else of his correspondence with Stevenson was otherwise straight requests for cash - or 'loans' as he termed them. Although it must be said that when Stevenson wanted later to put their play dealings and literary work on a business footing and pay Henley a given commission on each deal, Henley refused. It was not that he did not need the money, it was just that he was Henley. He had married his Anna in Edinburgh and moved to London in April 1878 to edit the magazine of the same name. He now had responsibilities other than his four brothers. His was a constant need of cash. One of Stevenson's replies at this time says much about this side of their relationship:

'I am a kind of pallid Christian martyr with a swelled testicle; languid, non-walking, a poorish sort. If coins are wanted, apply to martyr who has some at disposal, not much, but some.'²⁹

Henley was always in want of coin throughout his life and this time the cause was the folding of the London magazine. As he put it:

'London is dead. It expired on Saturday last, in the 114th week of its age, deeply regretted by none who knew it, excepting myself, its author, founder and slave. It has cost me a great deal and has left me pretty well sick and tired of all kind of journalism but the kind called dramatic criticism, the which unhappily is a kind. I do not think I have a ghost of a chance of practising elsewhere'.³⁰

The Henleys returned to Edinburgh. But wherever he was, Henley had to be doing something. All his life, he was never less than busy attending some kind of day-to-day journalism (his 'shot-rubbish' as he called it) in order to 'get stuff on the nail' or 'rake in the posh' or any other slang phrase used for his daily money-earning activities. Leaving Anna with her relatives in Edinburgh, he returned to London alone, determined to hack out a living in letters.

Stevenson meantime, during the autumn of 1878, and while a guest of Professor Sydney Colvin's at Trinity College, Cambridge, worked on a short story, Providence and the Guitar, prompted by his meeting with M. Leon and Madame Elvira Berthelini, the travelling players, at the Hotel Chevillon in Grez. He wrote to Henley:

'Here I am living like a fighting cock, and have not spoken to a real person for about sixty hours. Those who wait on me are not real. The man I know to be a myth, because I have seen him acting so often at the Palais Royal. He plays the Duke in Tricoche et Cacolet; I knew his nose at once. The part he plays here is very dull for him, but conscientious... I cannot work - even the Guitar is undone.'³¹

His description of his actor-hero in this little tale (later to be called Providence and the Guitar), might have been of himself:

'He had a boy's heart, gloried in his finery, and walked through life like a child in a perpetual dramatic performance.'³²

He was later to say of this story, which was only 52 pages long, -

'It's a little thing I like.' It nicely illustrates his understanding of all the connotations of the word 'artist' especially as it applies to actors. In this context, what he said about Fleeming Jenkin could just as easily apply to himself:

'He played no character on stage as well as he could play himself among friends...

'What he uttered was not so much well said, but excellently acted; so we may hear every day the inexpressive language of a poorly written drama assume character and colour in the hands of a good player...'³³

Stevenson knew a good actor when he saw one. The irony is he never saw it in himself. When Providence and the Guitar was eventually published in four successive numbers of the failing London magazine from the beginning of November, Stevenson, characteristically, sent the money he received for it to the original strolling couple in France.

In the meanwhile Henley was persevering with his drama fixation. He saw a play for Irving as a way out of all his difficulties and to allow his beloved Anna to be restored to him, hence his eagerness to involve Stevenson in a re-write of 'The Deacon' as they referred to it. He had no doubt that their mutual efforts would provide a vehicle worthy of England's most prominent actor. In addition, the true story of the worthy Edinburgh Deacon with an unworthy night life would give Henley the platform he had been seeking since hospital and free him at last from the daily drudgery he had known since boyhood. With typical diligence he set about finding a market for the play and he thought he had found found his man in Irving. Despite Henley's boisterous optimism, Stevenson was tentative and both collaborators took time to write jointly to Stevenson's literary mentor Sidney Colvin to tell him of the venture and to ask if he would approach Irving on their behalf. Colvin, although he hardly approved of Stevenson's defection to the drama, nevertheless agreed to do so but reminded both young men that -

'the act must progress in emotion, not in time... Remember, a play is emotion as a statue is marble. Incident, story, these are but the pedestal.'³⁴

Stevenson was won over and began re-drafting immediately.

61

He worked all morning at the Saville Club and in the afternoons he joined Henley in Shepherd's Bush and reworked the morning's material until dinner. He was well aware that the whole thing was a gamble. He wrote to his mother:

'It's a chance thing, much of a chance... but if it came off it would do more for me and him than four years of articles.'³⁵

Remembering that he had made only £3.8/- for his first article, Roads in the Cornhill Magazine, it was not an over-ambitious statement, but it was a start. And having made it, he went home for Christmas.

After the holidays he sent Henley an undated note wrote from Heriot Row (he rarely dated his letters):

'My Dear Henley,
The 1st 2 acts and a synopsis wanted before the 30th by Sidney S.Colvin, Woodbury Cottage, Biggin Hill, Norwood. Hurry up our staff of copying clerks. I'll give you 111 3 and 1V 3 ere end of week, I hope. Cold better, but I keep the house. Yours ever,
R.L.S.'³⁶

This scrap, as well as giving an intriguing hint as to their working methods, also shows that once the actual writing began the creative initiative passed from Henley to Stevenson. Like many men of letters on the fringes of theatre, Henley could talk a good play but baulked at the blank page. Stevenson did the actual writing. This was done in a matter of weeks from mid-January 1879 when Henley joined him in Edinburgh and the play was eventually completed at Swanston. There was typical Henleyesque rejoicing as Rosalene Masson confirms:

'The playwrights, feverishly excited, talked till dawn of their achievement.'³⁷

A copy was hurriedly sent off to Colvin who made sure that it was received by Henry Irving and his theatre manager, H.L.Bateman. But it was Irving's reaction that mattered. Professor Fleeming Jenkin had condemned Deacon Brodie out of hand, saying that the two of them had - 'tried to do an impossible thing, and had not even tried in a right way' - going on in a letter to Stevenson -

'I am so thoroughly convinced that while you can write admirable appreciative things... this play business is an ignis fatuus.'³⁸

As James Pope-Hennessy has commented -

'When Jenkin died prematurely Louis lost his most vehement and affectionate critic.'³⁹

Not only a critic but a friend and not only a friend, a mentor.

Stevenson was never quite able to replace Fleeming Jenkin in his life.

64

Stevenson himself was well aware of the extent of his loss and this is shown in the following extracts from his obituary article on Jenkin:

'Fleeming was all his life a lover of the play and all that belonged to it. Dramatic literature he knew fully. He was one of the not very numerous people who can read a play; a knack, the fruit of much knowledge and some imagination, comparable to that of reading a score...

Acting had always... a particular power on him. "If I do not cry at the play," he used to say, "I want to have my money back." Even from a poor play with poor actors he could draw pleasure. We were all moved and bettered by the visit of that wonderful man (Salvini). "I declare I feel as if I could pray!" cried one of us, on the return from Hamlet. "That is prayer," said Fleeming...

Another unalloyed dramatic pleasure which Fleeming and I shared the year of the Paris Exposition, was the Marquis de Villemar... He had his fill of weeping on that occasion; and when the piece was at an end, in front of a cafe, in the mild, midnight air, we had our fill of talk about the art of acting...

From the charades at Claygate... and after the money came, in the Edinburgh days, (emerged) that private theatre which took up so much of Fleeming's energy and thought. The company... made a charming society for themselves and gave pleasure to their audience (and) there was perhaps no one in that audience more critical, none was more moved than Fleeming... There were always five performances and weeks of busy rehearsal... We were always sure at least of a long and exciting holiday in mirthful company... But he never supposed himself an actor... and found his true service and pleasure as the manager...

The discipline of acting is detestable; the failures and triumphs of that business appeal too directly to the vanity; and even in the course of a careful amateur performance such as ours, much of the smaller side of the man will be displayed... (Fleeming) was in this an iron task-master... If you were going to do it all, he would see that it was done as well as you were able...'⁴⁰

On February 6 1879, Colvin wrote tersely to Henley -

'Nothing can be got out of... Irving.'⁴¹

Deacon Brodie was aborted.

A final thought on this first Brodie phase and its links with Irving: Edward J. Henley, William's somewhat erratic actor brother, was, around the same time, to make a kind of mark in theatre by impersonating Irving in a burlesque of The Corsican Brothers, a play by Dion Boucicault, in which Irving had had a great popular success in 1880. So deft was Edward's caricature of the actor that Irving complained to the Lord Chamberlain and the offending sketch was removed from the programme.

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

4. Stevenson in 1879, after he followed Fanny Osbourne to California.
- *From the Albert E. Norman Collection, California Historical Society,
San Francisco.*

65

In December 1879, a copy of the text of Deacon Brodie was privately printed by T. and A. Constable of Edinburgh for a limited distribution. In 1880, this version was published in order to safeguard copyright and duly entered at Stationer's Hall:

DEACON BRODIE or The Double Life

A Melodrama founded on facts in Five Acts and Eight Tableaux
With All Rights Reserved.

PERSONS REPRESENTED

William Brodie, Master Carpenter, Deacon of the Wrights, Housebreaker.

Old Brodie, the Deacon's Father

William Lawson, the Deacon's Uncle and Procurator-Fiscal

Andrew Ainslie, Robber in the Deacon's gang

Humphrey Moore, "

George Smith, "

Captain Rivers, An English Highwayman

Hunt, A Bow Street Runner

A Doctor

Walter Leslie

Mary Brodie, the Deacon's Sister

Jean Watt, the Deacon's Mistress

Vagabonds, Officers of the Watch, Men-servants.

SYNOPSIS OF ACTS AND TABLEAUX:

Act One Tableau 1 - The Double Life

" 2 - Hunt the Runner

" 3 - Mother Clarke's

Act Two Tableau 4 - Evil and Good

Act Three Tableau 5 - King's Evidence

" 6 - Unmasked

Act Four Tableau 7 - The Robbery

Act Five Tableau 8 - The Open Door

The scene is laid in Edinburgh. The time is towards the close of the eighteenth-century. The action, some fifty hours long, begins at 8pm on Saturday and ends before midnight on Monday.⁴²

Kennedy Williamson gives a colourful summary of the plot:

'The sub-title to the play is "The Double Life", and the plot hinges round the futile attempt to make oneself free of two camps, morally to serve two masters... Brodie is the master-craftsman, - the deacon, - in his trade guild, and seemingly a douce and law-abiding citizen; but o' nights he... becomes king of the cracksmen who meet with whores and other riff-raff in a low stew. Whenever he has some rascally work on hand, he retires early with a counterfeit headache, and his sister (Mary Brodie) who worships him as an embodiment of all that is noble in mankind, is at hand to hear him bolt his bedroom door. This is his alibi: if ever he were charged with cracking a crib, witnesses could be brought to swear, truthfully enough, that his bedroom door had never been unbolted. One night he murders a man in a brush with a Bow Street runner, and after a very narrow shave indeed makes good his return to his bedroom via the window... (but) his bedroom door is standing wide open! His father has died during the small hours... Mary and the doctor forced the door...'⁴³

The discovery of the open door is a good acting moment for the actor playing Brodie and indeed, Edward Henley, the originator of the role, made good effect of the opportunity offered in Act V, Scene 4 as he takes up his candle and turns towards the door:

'O!... Open, open, open! Judgement of God, the door is open!'

The scene which follows, is, in the opinion of J.H.Buckley, dramatically worth the whole play. It is certainly actable and would play better than it reads:

BRODIE: Did you open the door?
 MARY: I did.
 BRODIE: You...opened the door?
 MARY: I did open it.
 BRODIE: Were you...alone?
 MARY: I was not. The servant was with me. And the doctor.
 BRODIE: O...the servant...and the doctor. Very true. Then it's all over the town by now. The servant and the doctor.
 What doctor? What doctor?
 MARY: My father is dead. O Will, where have you been?
 BRODIE: Your father is dead? Oh yes! He's dead, is he? Dead. Quite right...How did you open the door? It's strange. I bolted it.
 MARY: We could not help it. Will, now could we?
 The doctor forced it. He had to, had he not?
 BRODIE: The doctor forced it? The doctor? Was he here? He forced it? He?
 MARY: We did it for the best; it was I who did it...I, your own sister.⁴⁴

(The scene continues)

Williamson also finds it interesting to analyse the writing amalgam that is Henley-Stevenson and to try and elucidate from the text who wrote what. Stevenson he spots by the quality of the well-worked phrase 'within the sinewy Anglo-Saxon'(of Henley?):

'The city has its vizard on, and we - at night we are our naked selves. Trysts are keeping, bottles cracking, knives are stripping... The grimy night that makes all cats grey.'
 'I shirk King George; he has a fat pocket, but he has a long arm. You pilfer sixpence from him, and it's three hundred reward for you, and a hue and cry from Tophet to the stars.'
 'They were closing hell-doors upon me, swift as the wind, when I slipped through and shot for heaven.'

And who else but Stevenson could have written:

'He was aye ettling after a bit handle to his name.'
 'I was aince a lad mysel', and I ken fine by the glint o' the e'e when a lad's fain and a lassie's willing.'

On the other hand, there are passages that are unmistakably Henley:

'Let me have a queer at her phiz... why clap on the blinkers, my dear?'

'We don't call it 'smuggled' in the trade: it's a wink and King George's picture between us... Too flash in the feather... That's the rig; what you drop on the square you pick up again on the cross... I don't know where the blunt came from to pay for it... A patter cove from Seven Dials...'⁴⁵

There is no denying that there is an individual ring to each example that clearly tells the different coin of the respective writers and also shows the quality of the pens at work. They are certainly writers - but are they play-writers? Mr Williamson seems to have an easier task telling who from whom than Sir Max Beerbohm (1872-1956) was to have in 1890 when the 'Incomparable Max' devoted a whole article in the Saturday Review to the subject of who wrote what in the dual authorship.

It might have remained a matter of mere scholastic curiosity had the blend proved effective. One would happily accept the play as a dramatic entity and not concern oneself so much with who wrote what and where and why. But in 1879 Henley and Stevenson were not quite Beaumont and Fletcher. This however was their first attempt. The situation was a learning one for each but how far did they realize this?

Deacon Brodie may have been Stevenson's natural child but it was now to be Henley's by adoption. He was constantly fussing over it, re-writing, re-ordering and revising. He could not leave the text alone. This was to prove a crucial factor in its later development. Now that it existed in print, Henley saw it more than a matter of protecting copyright, a production was mandatory. It should be noted that there was no dedication of the play and that Henley's name was listed above Stevenson's as author. This underlines Henley's new enthusiasm for the drama. Even Stevenson had been caught up in the project. It was a situation that was not to last.

Meantime, the curtain came down on the first play-writing phase. Here follows an interval.

W. E. HENLEY.

From a photograph by Frederick Hollyer, London.

STAGE THREE

Section B'

'A Woeful Ballad'

'Marriage often puts friends to the door.'¹

In his own telling sentence, Stevenson neatly summarises what happened to the bond-pairing that was William Ernest Henley and Robert Louis Stevenson. Stevenson's adventures as The Amateur Emigrant and traveller Across the Plains are not properly within the remit of this study but it marks the beginning of the end of the Henley-Stevenson friendship. Nothing was to be quite the same again between them. Theirs had been more than a friendship between males, it was a virtual love affair, homoerotic if not homosexual, and neither was really to recover fully from the gradual severing that began almost imperceptibly from this time. Sam Osbourne's was not the only divorce involved in Stevenson's 'marriage in extremis'. Porthos was also parted from his D'Artagnan and with much more regret and pain, especially to the burly Porthos. Prince Hal's rejection of Falstaff could not have been more hurtful than Henley's reaction to the news that 'his Lewis' had taken a wife - and an American at that. Anna Boyle proved a perfect wife for the irascible Henley. Perhaps Frances Matilda Van de Grift Osbourne (1840-1914) would prove the same for the volatile and impetuous Stevenson. Each husband got the wife they perhaps did not deserve.

How true this is matters little now but perhaps nearer the real truth is that Stevenson was as unhappy latterly in his marriage as Henley was increasingly happy in his. What concerns this study however is how these events affected Stevenson's life and work at this stage. The reality is that both men were never able to recapture the sheer joy of their being invalids together in their young Edinburgh.

John Connell writes:

'The canker of the friendship was at the core it was bound to be sterile.'²

Kennedy Williamson continues:

'Because it was founded on dreams and unrealities and boyish longings, the friendship had a doom upon it from the moment - a moment of enchantment and impossible rapture - when Stevenson stood for the first time at Henley's bedside at the Old Infirmary in Edinburgh.'³

The 'apparition' that had stood before him then, only three years before, was described originally by Henley, after many deletions and substitutions, as:

'Thin-legged and chested, slight unspeakably
 Neat-footed and long-fingered, all his face
 Lean, high-boned, round of nose and quick with race
 The brown eyes glinting with vivacity.
 Bold-lipped, rich-tinted, changeful as the sea,
 Is instinct with a stange, romantic grace,
 Intense, wild, delicate, with many a trace
 Of a fitful force and a feminine energy.
 Valiant in velvet, light in ragged luck,
 Most vain, most sensitive, yet most critical,
 Buffoon and poet, lover and sensualist,
 Of Bottom take a little, much of Puck,
 Yet more Titania, Hamlet most of all,
 Combine, constrain, release and - have you missed?'⁴

There were to be many further changes before the final version in 1888. 'Titania' gave way to 'Cleopatra' and eventually to 'Much Antony', Bottom was deleted for 'a deal of Ariel' and 'just a streak' of Puck was added for the final printing as No. XXV of the 'In Hospital' poems. A fair copy of the changes made was sent to Margaret Stevenson by Henley for her comment. She replied from Heriot Row:

'Thank you for my boy's portrait... but do you really think he is most vain? I am not quite prepared to admit that, nor 'the sensualist'. I hope you put in that word for the sake of the rhyme?... in that case, I forgive you.'⁵

Henley thanked her for being 'nearly content' but his changes stood. Incidentally, Compton Mackenzie considered these fourteen lines were worth fourteen volumes of biography.⁶ There is no doubt that this is the work of someone who knows Stevenson, or at least an image of him, and perhaps even envies his ability to 'live by the ideal laws of the day dream'.⁷ Henley had too harsh of a view of life to see other than its bleak reality. Yet he was fascinated by the wisp of Stevenson which had floated into his life and he wanted to 'nail' him to the printed page. Remembering Henley's felicitous gift in pen-portaiture in capturing Dickens in Bristol, one must accept his unerring, almost microscopic view of someone he knew so well. There are more than warts here, the very bones show through.

Perhaps Henley ought to have sent Margaret Stevenson another pen portrait of R.L.S. dating from 1876:

To R.L.S.

'A child
 Curious and innocent,
 Slips from his Nurse, and rejoicing
 Loses himself in the Fair.
 Through the jostle and din
 Wandering, he revels,
 Dreaming, desiring, possessing;
 Till, of a sudden,
 Tired and afraid, he beholds
 The sordid assemblage
 Just as it is; and he runs
 With a sob to his Nurse
 (Lighting at last on him)
 And her motherly bosom
 Cries him to sleep.
 Thus through the world,
 Seeing and feeling and knowing,
 Goes Man, till at last,
 Tired of experience, he turns
 To the friendly and comforting breast
 Of the old nurse, Death.'

An alternative image was created in 1882 when he penned Ballade R.L.S.:

'An ariel quick through all his veins
 With sex and temperament and style
 All eloquence and balls and brains;
 Heroic - also infantile;
 Without the faintest touch of guile
 Yet living but to plot and plan
 Behold him, bubbling into bile
 A bald and cullidheaded man!
 A happy interest he maintains
 In high and low and vast and vile -
 War, morals, odysseys, refrains
 And Iron Dukes and Sluts of Nile.
 He thinks no virgin worth his while;
 He calls to Christ and pipes to Pan;
 A slim but fascinating file
 A bald and cullidheaded man!
 With airs and attitudes he reigns
 On gracefulness he puts his pile;
 His bows are high romantic strains
 His gestures carry half a mile;
 Wise, passionate, swaggering, puerile,
 He talks as well as mortal can
 And is, by fortune's cruel wile
 A bald and cullidheaded man!
 ENVOI
 How will he keep himself in chyle
 Or pause, a mirror's face to scan
 Or work us off a painted smile
 A bald and cullidheaded man?'

It is meaningful that the original dedication for Henley's book of verses was intended for Stevenson as he explained to Mrs Sitwell:

'What do you think of Henley's hospital verses? They were to have been dedicated to me, but Stephen wouldn't allow it - said it would be pretentious.'¹⁰

One wonders if Stephen correctly read the undertone in the first verse-portrait of R.L.S.? Stevenson was never afraid of emotion - he wept as often as he laughed. Feelings, for him, were a form of action, and they were often his only reason for much that he wrote. As Jenni Calder says 'Feminine' sensitivity was as important as 'masculine' aggression.¹¹ Will Low, an artist friend, wrote:

'Fascination and charm are not qualities which Anglo-Saxon youths are prone to acknowledge, in manly avoidance of their supposedly feminizing effect, but it was undoubtedly this attractive power which R.L.S. held so strongly through life; and which, gentle though it be, held no trace of dependence or weakness.'¹²

Robert Louis Stevenson was gay, but only in the lovely, ancient sense of that word, that is, disposed to joy. It is true he loved Henley because he actually said - 'I love you, Henley,' but he was writing as one Victorian to another, neither having any doubts as to their respective heterosexuality. There is similarly no doubt that Henley loved Stevenson and positively pined for the 'urchin Ariel' that ran away to America to get married to his 'tiger lily'. This explains much of Henley's attitude after Stevenson's death. Andrew Lang (1844-1912) a Scottish man of letters and a true Victorian, commented:

'Mr. Stevenson possessed, more than any man I have ever met, the power of making other men fall in love with him.'¹³

This would help to account for the formidable loyalty of the London Stevenson circle, Sidney Colvin, Edmund Gosse, Henry James and Lang himself, who added that their friend was - 'always a child, always a boy'. But most boys grow up to men. This makes them survivors of their own childhood. Henley was a greater survivor than most and it was this made him the poet, just as Stevenson's cosseted childhood allowed him to be merely a felicitous rhymers because he was always reluctant to leave his childhood.

Professor Edward H. Cohen quotes Alfred Noyes (1880-1958), author of The Loom of Years (1902) and himself a poet, (Professor of Poetry at Princeton in 1914), who said of Henley:

'The peculiar gift of Henley, the gift that singles him out as a great writer, a major poet, not only from his contemporaries, but also from all his peers in the past, is his gift of portraiture. He is the John Sargent of English literature - our first, our only, and unapproachable portrait-painter in English verse.'¹⁴

Henley's skill is to convey complexity by selected, significant detail. Nothing could have been more complex in personality than either man and they were, in their relationship, as much so. Whatever detail is selected from the Henley years (1875-87) it could not fail to have significance, reflecting as it might do the primary colours of two total egoists. But even in this, they were redeemed by an equivalent honesty and courage. Overall, it was their genuine feeling for each other that gave the relationship its poignancy and its eventual tragedy. Their final fall was great because it came from a height of mutual benefit and stimulation. This is not rare in such pairings

Artistic partnerships are noted for their volatility (Gilbert and Sullivan, Rogers and Hart, Brecht and Weill, etc.) but a playwriting pair is open to more than the usual hazard in that they are each doing the same thing - writing lines to make a play. If ever anything called for the selection of significant details this does, and Henley and Stevenson ought to have made a splendid pair. They did, but, until their quarrel, which incidentally was not about plays, they were splendid only as a couple of outrageous, life-absorbing young men with differing infirmities.

Jonathan Smith, an emerging contemporary British radio dramatist, made their relationship the central theme of his play Silver, which was broadcast by the BBC as a ninety-minute radio play in the Monday Play series in October 1988. Mr. Smith, in conversation with the present writer, made much of the triangle presented by Stevenson, Henley and Fanny Osbourne Stevenson and held the view that the latter two were vying for Stevenson's love, in the largest sense of the word, and each was jealous of the other's claim to the centre of their affection. So much so that Fanny came to hate Henley, and as he had never liked her from the beginning, Stevenson's loyalties were stretched unreasonably to accommodate both of them.* At length, he had to take sides and, naturally though reluctantly, he chose his wife, and Henley had to endure what in effect was equivalent to long years of bereavement from 1887 until his own death in 1903.

* The Louis-Fanny-Henley triangle is discussed further in Stage Four.

Silver was adapted for the stage by Dr. Anthony Seldon for the Masque Theatre at the 1989 Edinburgh Festival. Mario Relich, in reviewing the piece for the Scotsman, commented on the contrasting Edinburgh and London scenes (the former's Old Infirmary and the latter's dinner tables) and he felt that they -

'intimately reveal Henley's spirited will to survive an agonising leg amputation and Stevenson's conciliatory but devious persona striking like an elegant barracuda to Henley's blundering shark... An overwhelming "Henley, (that) bitter English poet who staked all on friendship, losing everything in the process, except his integrity" in contrast to "a Stevenson (whose) boyish enthusiasm and appetite for life combined with (a) hard-nosed awareness of where his true interests lie."'

The critic concludes that the play is -

'Brimming with psychological insight, for Henley comes across as Mr. Hyde to Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll.'¹⁵

The Nixie quarrel, as it came to be called, was seven years away at this stage and is not relevant to the main theme now being discussed. What is under review for the moment is the acute personal base to the Henley-Stevenson partnership and the manner in which it was affected by the entrance of women into the action - or rather a woman. Anna Boyle became Anna Henley and moved quietly into the background of her husband's freelance literary foraging, but Fanny Osbourne, when she became Fanny Stevenson, moved right into the foreground beside her frail warrior, writer-husband and demanded her own share of the spotlight.

Her intentions were of the very best of course, she intended only to guard her husband zealously but in doing so she may have closed the door against those whom he needed as much as he did her. At this time however, the clouds had yet to gather and the sky was clear. Everyone was curious to know how Louis would cope with marriage, not the least of whom was the man himself, and of a lesser interest was how the American divorcee, of such a contrasting background, and with two grown-up children, would cope with his parents, his many cousins, his friends, and particularly, a certain W.E.H.

Time would tell. In the meantime, the literary life went on and it was, literally, a life of letters - a non-stop barrage of letters that went between Britain and America, and between Henley and his 'Lewis'. They wrote for the most part of what they would one day write - and that, at the time of writing, meant plays.

Their correspondence throughout 1879-80 was full of dramatic writing schemes, Both thought that their future was in a stage play. A typical missive was that from Stevenson to Henley from 608 Bush Street, San Francisco:

'I shall make you a full scenario as soon as the Emigrant is done. But he added - 'When may I hope to see the Deacon... I pine for the Deacon...' ¹⁶. On 12 February, Henley, who was not afraid to describe The Emigrant as 'bosh', was writing about new play ideas and proposing nihilism as a subject. This was a very fashionable topic around that time, especially in the Russian variety. Oscar Wilde had written his first play Vera, (or The Nihilists) on the very same subject but it was unperformed. The stage was clear for a Stevenson play if he wanted it enough. In the next three months in San Francisco, A House Divided or Fate of the House was being written in scenario at any rate and Stevenson wrote to Colvin:

'Tell Henley I have a new play for him - a drama in three acts - "A House Divided", three thrilling situations, the last ghastly; He had better be reading up on nihilism as hard as he is able.' ¹⁷

Stevenson worked on the play at intervals during the next few months but on 15 June 1880, on receiving it from Stevenson, Henley turned it down as a project. Stevenson then made the first suggestion regarding the dramatic possibilities of his own Prince Otto.

'It is my old Semiramis... which suddenly sprang into sunshine clearness the other day. (He thought it might) make a brave play if we can find the trick to make the end. The play, I fear, will have to end darkly, and that spoils the quality, as I now see it, of a kind of crockery, eighteenth-century high life, below-stairs life, breaking up like ice in the spring before the nature ¹⁸ of my poor, clever, feather-headed prince, whom I love already.'

Stevenson's instinct, once again, was not wrong about the play potential here. Prince Otto, or episodes from it, were adapted as a play by Otis Skinner (1858-1942), the American actor, and presented at Wallach's Theatre, New York on 3 September 1900. But as a Stevenson-Henley project, like so many of their ideas, did not survive this first suggestion and was dropped. There was as much energy expended in the discussion of possibilities as might have written a whole cycle of plays. Henley meanwhile, throughout the previous year, had been busying himself with one of student play-titles, on which both had begun to work after Deacon Brodie. He told Colvin:

'The second act of Rogue Denzil's Death or Word from Cromwell or Hester Noble's Mistake or whatever it's called, was made yesterday afternoon. It is the funniest act in dramatic literature. "Whaur's Wullie Shakespeare noo?" as they say in Kirkudbright!'¹⁹

During all this he continued with 'posh journalism', his bits and pieces for such as the Pall Mall Gazette, the Saturday Review and the Athenaeum while at the same time pegging away at another possible play. The rejection of Deacon Brodie did not appear to have dampened his playwrighting enthusiasm. An April Day (or Autolycus in Service) had been begun by Stevenson as a short story but he and Henley worked the material into two acts of a 3-act farce during 1879 but Stevenson could not sustain his enthusiasm and the services of Autolycus were dispensed with. In 1883, Stevenson was to write to Henley that he was again at work on it, but writing it 'with a literary and not a dramatic finish'.

Throughout the period of their close friendship, that is from the winter of 1875 until the spring of 1888, Stevenson and Henley were constantly discussing plays. Thomas Stevenson was told by his son in 1883 - 'Theatre is a gold mine; and on that I must keep my eye.' At this point he was totally committed to the drama. The list of play titles considered gives some idea of the range of the collaborators' reading if nothing else. Swearingen lists the titles as follows:

"Honour and Arms: Drama in Three Acts and Five Tableaux" discussed at some length and described by Henley as "of its essence English, Jacobitish and romantic"; "The King of Clubs: Drama in Four Acts", on which Henley comments at some length, remarking that he took the idea originally from Dickens's 'The Old Curiosity Shop'; "Pepys' Diary: Comedy"; "The Admirable Crichton: Romantic Comedy in Five Acts"; "Ajax: Drama in Four Acts," on which Henley remarks that they once decided to take all their romantic situations from the Greeks and with this in mind "sketched, and partly wrote our Ajax; whose hero is one Sir Robert Trelawney, an elderly Anglo-Indian engineer, who - brave, honest, magnificent - plays the unconscious criminal as one of several directors in a fraudulent bank"; "The Passing of Vanderdecken: (Legend) in Four Acts"; "Farmer George: Historical Play in Five Acts," described by Balfour as planned to cover "the whole reign of George the Third, ending with a scene in which the mad king recovered for a while his reason"; "The Gunpowder Plot: Historical Play"; "Marcus Aurelius: Historical Play"; "The Atheists: Comedy"; "The Mother-in-Law: Drama," which Henley says was to have been a tragedy; and "Madame Fate: Drama in a Prologue and Four Acts," of which Henley had no recollection save that the title "Madame Destiny," which also appears on Stevenson's list, was an alternate title...²⁰

There was enough dramatic potential in any of the above to stimulate any playwright but neither partner seemed able to take the ideas further.

It is yet another Stevensonian irony that one of his greatest admirers, James Barrie, was to have a considerable success in London with his play The Admirable Crichton in 1902. Hester Noble was not included in the catalogue nor in fact were any of the plays they were later to complete. Henley had ignored Stevenson's The Nihilists because he much preferred Hester Noble, but wanted further information:

'I don't want so much, only the lie of the thing. That however I must have. Have no fear as to the results.'²¹

Alas, on 15 June, a blast from Fleeming Jenkin, put an end to this particular project.

'I went into a frenzy of wrath at your suggestion of changes in "Esther or "Hester" etc. All tag ends of old stock incidents and not one single word about the only things which matter in any play... not a new idea or an old one about how Hester would feel just then... You give up every thought of ever writing a play. If you did not know theoretically what was right you might learn, but you do know and yet your mind will harp away about the dropping of letters, the sending of messengers, etc, as if the handkerchief in "Othello" had anything to do with the play.'²²

Once again, Hester was put quietly aside.

Yet in December 1891, Stevenson would write to Charles Baxter:

'I have no intention of writing any of the plays, but of Hester Noble I might make a story since the thing is largely mine. He (Henley) has all the papers in a portfolio... and if there was a sketch of Hester, I should be obliged if he would send it to me.'²³

But in December 1879 Stevenson's enthusiasm for plays was waning.

He had written to Henley from Monterey:

'Plays, dear boy, are madness for me just now. The best play is hopeless before six months, and more likely eighteen for outsiders like you and me. And understand me, I have to get money soon or it has no further interest for me... I am trying to do things that will bring in money... and I could not, if I were not mad, step out of my way to work at what might perhaps bring me in more, but months ahead... I am now quite an American - yellow envelopes.'²⁴

But by 1880, the indefatigable Henley had met the Irish actor Sheil Barry, whom he has decided to keep in mind as the ideal 'lead' for The King of Clubs, on which (he said) the collaborators were then working -

'I feel sure that if I do not die, and can get fairly on in the drama, I shall make him a part in which he'll be the talk of London.'²⁵

Henley now had the dramatic bit between his teeth but then Stevenson brought his American wife home to meet his mother and father.

Fanny Vandegrift Osbourne at approximately the time when she
met Louis

Section B (i)

The City of Chester landed at Liverpool on 17 August 1880. From there the whole Stevenson family party, Louis, Fanny, stepson Lloyd, Thomas and Margaret Stevenson, was whisked by train - first class of course - to Edinburgh and Heriot Row. Louis told his parents calmly - 'My wife did me the honour to divorce her husband in order to marry me'. His mother admitted to a female cousin - 'Doubtless she is not the daughter-in-law I have always pictured to myself' but Thomas Stevenson was impressed and one uncle was heard to remark encouragingly, 'Aye, I married a besom myself'. Robert Louis Stevenson was home again. A year later, the plays appeared to have been forgotten.

Then, 'on a chill September morning, by the cheek of a brisk fire, and the rain drumming on the window', Stevenson began very casually on another writing project that was to change his life. In the 'Late Miss McGregor's Cottage' in Braemar, Aberdeenshire, he began a game with young Lloyd that became a story, The Sea Cook, which was to become a novel, Treasure Island, which was to set Robert Louis Stevenson on the road to fame and fortune. It had started with his drawing a map of an imaginary island to amuse his young stepson when both of them were kept indoors by the weather. Soon, a story rose out of it, a boy's story, and from its pages stepped Long John Silver -

'a tall man with a face like a ham and only one leg...'

Henley? Stevenson was later to write to his friend:

'I will now make a confession. It was the sight of your maimed strength and masterfulness that begot John Silver. Of course he is not in any other quality or feature the least like you; but the idea of the maimed man, ruling and dreaded by the sound, was entirely taken from you.'²⁶

For once, Henley said nothing.

The letter was signed, "Ever Yours, Pretty Sick" for the truth was Stevenson thought he was dying in the winter of 1880. Once more he had to flee his homeland. This time, he and Fanny sought the health-giving heights of Davos, in Switzerland. He immediately felt better, if only to disassociate himself from the other invalids. He perhaps pretended a well-being he did not always feel. He 'played' the fit man. As Andrew Lang observed, recognising the sometime poseur:

'His whole vocation was endless imitation.'

At the Hotel Belvedere, Harold Vallings, a fellow-patient, confirms this thespian tendency in the writer. In an article describing the time he remembers that -

'The now famous Robert Louis Stevenson was then simply Mr Stevenson...

I believe he struck us - to begin with - as a rather odd, exotic, theatrical kind of man... although obviously a member of the crock company, he would, whenever he had an ounce of energy, insist upon a place with the robust brigade... "Now I've fallen sick," he said to me one day, "I've lost all my capacity for idleness."

One could often chance upon him in the billiard room though not often with a cue in his hand. Once only do I remember him playing a game and a truly remarkable performance it was. He played with all the fire and intensity he was apt to put into things. The balls flew wildly about, on and off the table, - but seldom threatened a pocket.

"What a fine thing a game of billiards is," he remarked to the astonished on-lookers, "once a year or so!"

A crowd would always kindle him. On one occasion he read, at an entertainment given in the hotel drawing room, Tennyson's Lucknow. His reading did not impress his audience.

"Too theatrical," "Rather stagey" were some of the criticisms offered.

He had the temperament of the reciter rather than the reader and was (perhaps) too impassioned and histrionic for the sober-minded.²⁷

Fleeming Jenkin's favourite pupil could never resist an audience.

It was also at Davos that he made friends with another patient, the English writer J.A.Symonds (1840-93), who warned Stevenson

'Men drawn to the theatre tend to be dreamers of illimitable dreams.' It was after a dinner party with the same Symonds, ("Onions, lovely onions!") in March 1882, that Stevenson sent to Henley a fanciful Shakespearean flight. This may only have been owing to the fact that Symonds was to be the author of Shakespeare's Predecessors in the English Drama (1884). At any rate, Stevenson wrote:

'Do you know one of the tragedies - a Bible tragedy too - David was written in his third period - much about the same time as Lear?

The comedy April Rain is also a late work. Becket is a fine ranting piece, like Richard III, but very fine for the stage. Irving is to play it this autumn when I am in town; the part rather suits him.'*

* Irving was actually to play Lord Tennyson's 1884 Becket at the Lyceum Theatre, London in 1893 - (a tribute to Stevenson's foresight). It was after a performance of the same play at Bradford on 13 October 1905 that Irving died at the age of 68.

Stevenson continues:

'But who is to play Henry? A tremendous creation, sir. Betterton, in his private journal, seems to have seen this piece; and he says distinctly that Henry is the best part in any play. "Though," he adds, "how it be with the ancient plays I know not. But in this I have ever feared to do ill, and indeed will not be persuaded in that undertaking." So says Betterton.'²⁸

So too, says Stevenson, with authority and brio, over several paragraphs of felicitous fancy regarding 'new' Shakespearean plays; 'plays' such as Rufus, David and Absalom, and, as he pertly puts it, 'another Troilus, quo!'

During 1881, with Treasure Island half-finished (Stevenson liked to do things by halves) he broke off to correct the proofs of what became Virginibus Puerisque, a book dedicated to:

'My Dear William Ernest Henley,
We are all busy in this world building Towers of Babel; and the child of our imagination is always a changeling when it comes from nurse. This is not only true in the greatest, as of wars and folios, but in the least also, like the trifling volume in your hand...

I was to state temperately the beliefs of youth as opposed to the contentions of age; to go all over the field where the two differ and produce at last a little volume of special pleadings which I might call, without misnomer, 'Life at Twenty-Five'.

But times kept changing, and I shared in that change. I clung hard to that entrancing age; but, with the best will in the world one can't be twenty-five forever... It is good to have been young in youth and, as the years go on, to grow older. Many are already old before they are through their teens; but to travel deliberately through one's ages is to get the very heart out of a liberal education...

Times change, opinions vary to their opposite, and still this world appears a brave gymnasium, full of sea-bathing and horse exercise and bracing, manly virtues; and what can be more encouraging than to find the friend that was welcome at one age, still welcome at another?

Our affections and beliefs are wiser than we; the best that is in us is better than we understand; for it is grounded beyond experience, and guides us, blindfold but safe, from one age to another. These papers are like milestones in my life; and as I look back in memory, there is hardly a stage of that distance but I see you present with advice, reproof or praise...'²⁹

Which 'advice' evinced a spirited response from Stevenson - in verse:

'Henley, in my hours of ease
You may say anything you please,
But when I join the muse's revil,
Begad, I wish you at the devil!'³⁰

Henley was always ready with advice on any matter. When Colvin's study of Landor appeared in 1881, Henley felt obliged, as a critic of Literature and the Drama, to take the professor to task:

'The truth is, my Colvin, that your admiration for Landor as a writer has somewhat got the better... of your judgement as a critic... I wish we had talked these 'Conversations' more fully, book in hand, ere you wrote. And I wish too, I had minded my Count Julian better. The scene you quote ought to have settled the dramatist with you forever... No man could gravely write and as gravely publish that for passion and for a scene, and ever become a dramatic poet... It's for this reason I love my Epicurus and his two girls and my Caesar and Luccullus. There's no pretence at drammy there... Now I'll go and drink a whiskey (sic) and soda, and go to bed. I am tired and it's doosid late. Good night.'³¹

Stevenson for his part, had no illusions about his old friend:

'I wish your honesty were not so war-faring... in not many years shall we not all be clay-cold and safe below ground, you with your loud-mouthed integrity, I with my fastidious briskness... swallowed in silence?'³²

Even George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), an admirer, and one of Henley's 'young men' in London, could not resist a jibe at his one-time mentor:

'Henley is... an Elizabethan... a man with an extraordinary and imposing power of saying things, and with nothing whatever to say.'³³

Oscar Wilde remarked that to converse with Henley was a physical no less than an intellectual recreation. Which is more than apt when one remembers that Henley once felled a man with a flying crutch on the steps of the Soho Cafe. Not that he was anything but respectful of Wilde. After Wilde's death in Paris, Henley told Will Low:

'Clever? I should say he was clever. Seated where you are (now) he has held the table against ME more than once.'³⁴

There was no doubt that Henley had considerable prowess as a talker. This facility was later to draw around him, at Solferino's Restaurant in Rupert Street, a band of young writers associated with him at the National Observer - talents like Rudyard Kipling (1865-1937), William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) and Herbert George Wells (1866-1946) - a group dubbed by wits as 'The Henley Regatta'. In this respect, Henley was not unlike Dr Samuel Johnson (1709-84), whom he resembled in so many ways. Both were the sons of provincial booksellers, both were denied a university education and both were buried in Westminster Abbey. Above all else however, both men were talkers and attracted talkers to them. Johnson had his Boswell, who said of Johnson that 'in proportion to the native vigour of the mind, the contradictory qualities will be the more prominent'. The comment could apply equally to William Henley.

Bearing Stevenson's love of good talk in mind, it is appropriate that one of his first essays in the New Year of 1882 was Talk and Talkers for the Cornhill magazine. Stevenson found the subject congenial. He recognised that -

'Good talk is dramatic; it is like an impromptu piece of acting where each should represent himself to the greatest advantage...'³⁵

The talkers featured did not include Wilde or Shaw or any of the above-mentioned writers, but concentrated rather on those talkers Stevenson knew intimately, and these included his cousin, R.A.M. (Bob) Stevenson ('Spring-heel'd Jack'), Fleeming Jenkin ('Cockshot'), Walter Simpson ('Aethelred'), J.A. Symonds ('Opalstein'), Edmund Gosse ('Parcel') and last, but not least, W.E. Henley as 'Burly'.

'Burly is a man of great presence; he commands a larger atmosphere, gives the impression of a grosser mass of character than most men. It has been said of him that his presence could be felt in a room you entered blindfold... There is something boisterous and piratic in Burly's manner of talk. He will roar you down, he will bury his face in his hands, he will undergo passions of revolt and agony; and meanwhile his attitude of mind is both conciliatory and receptive; and after Pistol has been out-Pistol'd, and the welkin rung for hours, you begin to perceive a certain subsidence in these spring torrents, points of agreements issue, and you end arm-in-arm and in a glow of mutual admiration. The outcry only serves to make the final union the more unexpected and precious. Throughout there has been perfect sincerity, perfect intelligence, a desire to hear though not always to listen...'³⁶

This was a friend seen through a friend's eyes - candidly but fondly. The big man was unforgettable; full of words for all occasions and was never afraid to use them in four languages. But his word struggles, whether in poetry or prose or table talk were all towards making himself a master wordsmith - with an allied ambition to be a dramatist. As he wrote to Dobson:

'If I could only get to work on my plays! I think I'll do something with them some day; but meanwhile my energies seem to be with last year's snows and I am all Dry Rot. I must get away and get young again.'³⁷

Note the possessive 'my', indicating his increasingly proprietorial attitude to the drama projects, only one of which had been actually complete, and that had been refused by the man for whom it had been written. It is hard to understand Henley's continuing optimism. And it takes spirit for a man with a wooden leg to talk about 'Dry Rot'.

As it happened, he did 'get away and get young again'. He went to Paris and, typically, made a lasting friendship with sculptor, Auguste Rodin (who was to create his memorial bust). He came back to edit the Magazine of Art which was significant for the introduction it gave to writing of Robert Alan Mowbray Stevenson, Louis's wilful artist-cousin Bob. Bob contributed two articles, one on Velasquez and one on Rubens, which made a great impression at the time and are still rated as valuable commentaries. Despite Henley's pleas, Bob would write no more. He preferred to paint and enjoy life. Henley was convinced Bob had a real writing talent, which was, in some respects, in Henley's opinion at least, superior to his famous cousin's.

Bob was all that Louis was not, strong, healthy and handsome. He was a genuine bohemian, where Louis only played at it. And there certainly was nothing of the Shorter Catechist about Bob Stevenson. It is difficult to imagine two relatives more dissimilar but it also as hard to find two who loved each other as much. Louis had his mentors through his life, Fleeming Jenkin, Colvin, and now Henley, but cousin Bob, if one excepts General Gordon perhaps, was Robert Louis Stevenson's first and only hero. He featured in Talk and Talkers as 'Spring-heel'd Jack':

'In the Spanish proverb, the fourth man necessary to compound a salad is a madman to mix it; Jack is that madman... He doubles like a serpent, changes and flashes like the shaken kaleidoscope, transmigrates bodily into the views of others, and so, in the twinkling of an eye and with a heady rapture, turns questions inside out and flings them empty before you on the ground, like a triumphant conjurer.'³⁸

Bob and his sister Katharine (later to be Katherine de Mattos, original author of The Nixie and a key player in the later controversy) were the laughing cousins of Stevenson's boyhood and youth; and now Bob, happily married to Louisa Purland since 1881 and living near the Henleys in London, unlike Louis, had no wish to turn author. From the time when he first might have worked with his cousin on Monmouth, Bob Stevenson showed no wish to involve himself in any project that required the application of stamina to the task in hand. Yet the sneaking thought persists that Bob, not Louis, might have been the ideal collaborator for Henley. But the lion had lain down with the lamb. Or rather, a big shambling, three-legged English sheepdog had romped noisily with a sickly Border collie in a field that was strange habitation for both.

There was little talk now of plays, but Henley nevertheless always remained hopeful about an eventual production of their Deacon Brodie, even if his was less a justifiable optimism than an heroic persistence. The re-emergence of the project in 1882 may have been due in no small part to Henley's desire to find something for his actor-brother, Edward. There was no denying his enthusiasm for the play and more particularly for the part of Brodie. An eighteen-year old, when the play was first being written, he had assured the authors then that he would -

'learn the speeches as fast as³⁹ they were written' - and declaim them with true romantic gusto.'

Already a promising, if unorthodox, young performer in the provinces and in London, Edward was in fact to be a key figure in later developments of this play project and will be dealt with more fully in subsequent sections of this study. For the moment he is noted for his enthusiasm and also for a suspect temperament, which no doubt was put down to his youth and relative inexperience.

Stevenson had some misgivings about the young man but chose to ignore the very natural fraternal bias and blunt nepotism shown. Oddly enough, neither author expressed any qualms about a young Englishman's playing an Edinburgh deacon. This is quite in keeping however with Stevenson's general attitude to the work at this stage and is consistent with Henley's constant anxiety about his brothers all through his life and particularly, the feckless Teddy. So the young man was promised the part should a production of the play be arranged. Stevenson, always willing to let Henley attend to practicalities, did not demur. Had not Henley the ear of every theatrical manager in London and access to every green room? Or so he said.

This appeared to be justified when the play was suddenly scheduled for its premiere production by the Haldane Crichton Company at Pullan's Theatre of Varieties, Bradford, on Thursday December 21 1882 and on the following two evenings. The Scottish connotation in this particular manager's name would suggest that this was a contact made through William's previous time in Edinburgh. Henley made a point of building contacts in every phase of his editorial career. With his proven propensity for making enemies, he needed all the friends he could get. At any rate, a date was arranged for the first performance of the play. It was a theatrical event noted with interest in Scotland.

The Edinburgh Courant reported on 2 January 1883:

'The appearance of Mr Robert Louis Stevenson as a dramatist cannot fail to be interesting to the admirers of that pleasing and very original writer. His play, written in collaboration with Mr W.E.Henley, and produced, if we mistake not, at Bradford the other day, bears the title, Deacon Brodie or The Double Life and is founded upon a well-known Edinburgh tradition... In point of ingenuity of construction, it will not, we fear, excite the envy of the modern playwright... On the other hand, the subtlety and vigour of the portrait of the Deacon and the rough power of the scenes with his associates... strongly excite the imagination, and are the work of no common hand. The play, which has been privately printed, will probably find its way to the London stage.'

It would seem that the prophet was not entirely without honour.

Yet by December 23, the date of the last performance, Louis was writing to his mother from San Marcel that he had heard that Deacon Brodie had been 'hissed off the stage at Bradford'.

The authors may have 'frightened off' their audience, as managers say. In their attempts to attain a psychological realism with Brodie and to set him against such a sordid background, both authors knew they were running a risk of offending susceptibilities. Henley was unrepentant:

'The Shakespeare of tomorrow will take for his hero, not Othello but Iago. The heroes of iniquity, the epic of immorality, the drama of vice - voila la vraie affaire. In fifty years the Deacon, if we had but done it might be a great work. We are syphilised to the core & we don't know it. Zola is our papular eruption, as Balzac was our primary sore. Presently, we shall get to our tertiaries; & the Ugly will be as the Beautiful...'

Nonetheless the theatrical debut of two emerging literary names was not without general interest other than in Edinburgh. Comment was also made by the English newspapers, showing that the writing combination had interest and the play too had a reflected status.

The People reported:

'As the joint production of two young writers, who now turn for the first time their attention to the stage, and one of whom has already established himself as one of the first humorists (sic) and most picturesque essayists of the day, Deacon Brodie has strong claims upon our attention... Its chief feature is its psychology. In the hands of an excellent actor the character of Deacon Brodie... should be eminently effective. Weaker writers might have made the mistake of representing the curious combination of highwayman and burgess as a commonplace canter and hypocrite. No such error has been made (but) sympathy is the heart and life of a play and a love interest... is essential...

As one who would gladly see new talent brought to the stage, and our modern, rather namby-pamby drama informed by a fiercer breath of passion, I advise Messrs Stevenson and Henley, before trusting their play to the London public, to supply it with a stronger love interest... A less important effect is that the whole is clumsily constructed. Very little attention to the play on the part of an expert would probably serve to remove that blemish... In short, the entire play, though it has in it abundance of matter, is the work of inexperienced hands. When... the authors have acquired further experience ... they may turn their attention to this... This would be the condition most favourable to its chance of permanent success...⁴²

This may be considered the 'honeymoon' period in the playwriting phase. There was no doubting the good will that attended the project from the beginning. A tour of the North of England during the same year had the play billed as 'The New Scotch National Drama'. It also toured throughout Scotland including a performance at Her Majesty's Theatre, Aberdeen. Graham Balfour commented on both tours:

'It was played some forty times without any marked success.'⁴³

Teddy Henley, however, had come out of the experience better than either man had hoped, and Stevenson, ever-generous, took the occasion to write a congratulatory note to the proud older brother:

'I was delighted to hear the good news about Teddy. Bravo, he goes up the hill fast. Let him beware of vanity and he will go higher. Let him be still discontented, and let him (if he might be) see the merits and not the faults of his rivals and he will swarm at last to the top gallant. There is no other way. Admiration is the only way to excellence;... the critical spirit kills and envy and injustice are putrefaction on its feet.'⁴⁴

The grandson of Colinton Manse could never resist the temptation to preach. Henley suggested re-working Deacon Brodie yet again but Stevenson was quick to retort:

'The Deacon can't be tackled until my health and my head are re-instated.'⁴⁵

There now follows a break between scenes.

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

TO
ALISON CUNNINGHAM
FROM HER BOY

*For the long nights you lay awake
And watched for my unworthy sake
For your most comfortable hand
That led me through the uneven land
For all the story-books you read :
For all the pains you comforted :
For all you pitied, all you bore,
In sad and happy days of yore :—
My second Mother, my first Wife,
The angel of my infant life—
From the sick child, now well and old,
Take, nurse, the little book you hold !*

*And grant it, Heaven, that all who read
May find as dear a nurse at need,
And every child who lists my rhyme,
In the bright, fireside, nursery clime,
May hear it in as kind a voice
As made my childish days rejoice !*

R. L. S.

Section B (ii)

It was a suggestion from Thomas Stevenson, of all people, that started Louis off into thinking of plays once more. This time he and Fanny, not Henley, were thinking of Great Expectations as a play. Note that he was writing again in tandem. Stevenson was never to go it alone on plays. He wrote to his father:

'Your remarks on Great Expectations are very good. We have both re-read it this winter, and I, in a manner, twice. The object being a PLAY; the play, in its rough outline, I now see; and it is extraordinary how much of Dickens has to be discarded... The position has had to be explained by a prologue which is pretty strong. I have great hopes for this piece, which is amiable, and, in places, very strong indeed.'²²

He next postulated his Dickens hopes to Henley offering the idea of Magwitch as Pip's father - "I say there's a play as strong as hell in that".²³ But not strong enough, it would seem, and his own great expectations were not fulfilled. Nor was anything further heard of the other Dickens project from 1980, King of Clubs, which was have provided a star part for Sheil Barry. It is more than curious that Dickens, the actor-writer and inspirer of the young Henley, should be unable to offer a basis for a play from works that are so dramatically based and so rich in character. If ever an author cried out to be adapted for the stage, Dickens did, but Henley was not interested and ergo Stevenson was uninterested.

Nevertheless the letters between them continued as they had done since Kinnaird Cottage. From Stevenson they were the letters of a schoolboy - in-jokes, arcane references, fictitious dialogue, more play ideas, mere nonsense. They are the letters of a madman - more like Joyce than Stevenson - in fact, he addresses Henley as 'Funny Madman' and signs himself with all kinds of soubriquets. And was not above making jocular judgements on Shakespeare:

'I have just re-read Tempest; my Gawd! I also read part of Macbeth, much of Timon, most of Troilus. I shall write a paper for the New Shakespeare on the order of Shakespeare's plays now first determined from internal evidence; and divided into two great Pathological periods, the pre-Poxian and the post-Poxian, with the narrow belt of Instant Pox, Poceius Instans, distinguished. I am not joking. I do believe Troilus was written by a poetaster; Timon too; and in the sunnier vein, As You Like It. As for the Tempest - Gawd. Between you and me... it was a pity he had not some rudimentary notions of a stage play.'²⁴

And he said he was not joking.

'If I had a Bunyan, I'd do you dialogue.'²⁵

Instead, the second part of Treasure Island was completed, its final map drawn and a course set for it and Long John Silver that would take both down the centuries. Henley had acted as unofficial agent for Stevenson in the negotiations with Young Folks, a penny paper, and was able to get his friend £100 for the serial rights and £2-10/- per page.

Stevenson was grateful.

'I have my copyright safe. I feel pretty sure The Sea Cook will go to re-print and bring in something decent at that... I have never formally thanked you for that hundred quid, nor in general for the introduction to Chatto and Windus, and continue to bury you in copy as if you were my private secretary. Gratitude is a tedious sentiment.'²⁶

'Really, £100 is a sight more than Treasure Island is worth...'²⁷

The fact is that had it not been for Henley's massive presence in Stevenson's life there might not have been a Long John Silver in Treasure Island, and without him it might not have been the same book.

Stevenson meantime was still in his two minds about the drama:

'Shall I ever have enough money to write a play?... O dire necessity... A word in your ear - I don't like trying to support myself. I hate the strain and anxiety; and when unexpected expenses are foisted upon me, I feel the world is playing with false dice.'²⁸

For one who had hardly known lack of financial security in his life, the actuary was always at war with the artist in Stevenson. All the same, he knew there might be something in what Henley kept saying - that their future lay on the stage. He thought about it.

'The required play is in The Merry Men... I thus render honour to your flair: it came upon me of a clap; I do not see it yet beyond in a kind of sunset glory; but it's there - passion, romance; the picturesque involved, startling, simple, horrid, a sea-pink in sea-froth! S'agit de la desenterrer. "Help!" cries a buried masterpiece. Once I see my way to the year's end clear, I turn to plays; till then I grind at letters. Then, if all my ships come home, I will attack the drama in earnest. I cannot mix the skeins. Thus, though I'm morally sure there is a play in Otto, I dare not look for it; I shoot straight at the story.'²⁹

The putative playwright is thus forgotten in the embryo novelist. The actor in him however had not been totally forgotten. His journalistic involvement with Henley, for instance, while the latter was editor of the London magazine, saw him, as Pope-Hennessy has quoted:

'as histrionic as ever, he had adapted himself to his new role, wore a fine double-breasted blue suit and brandished a cane, weighted with steel, for use 'in a tight place'.³⁰ For his part, the brief tenure as editor, had given Henley an opportunity to establish himself, if not as a man of letters, then at least as a 'gentleman of the press' and even more, to appoint himself his own drama critic. William Archer remembered his unmistakable figure slumped in his stall for the visit of the Comedie Francaise to the Gaiety Theatre:

'I thought of him there as a maimed Berkserker dropped by some anachronistic freak of destiny.'³¹

Henley was easily baited and quick to quarrel. In the autumn of 1883, a dispute arose between Henley and an editor regarding the refusal of an article by Stevenson on the Italian actor, Salvini. Henley was prepared to make an issue of it with the editor concerned, but Stevenson, (being 'Fastidious Brisk') wanted, as always, to get on with other things.

'Work done, for the artist, is the Golden Goose killed; you sell its feathers and lament the eggs. Tomorrow the fresh woods!'³²

The Cavalier Stevenson frustrated the Roundhead Henley. Louis was still the 'knight of the sofa', still urging - 'Ride on Cavalier! But for god's sake, ride gently, easy over the stones...'³³

'I revere Salvini, but I shall never see him - or anybody - play again. That is all a matter of history, heroic history, to me. Were I in London, I should be the liker Tantalus - no more.'³⁴

He concurred with writer, Richard le Gallienne (1866-1947):

'The essence is not in the pleasure but the sale... The author is not the whore but the libertine... All art (is) is no other than a pleasure which we turn into a trade.'³⁵

It is hard to think of R.L. Stevenson as a tradesman, still less a prostitute. Yet no one could have laboured harder than he to make himself into an author. Would that had he worked half as hard on the plays. But if Stevenson fluctuated in his stage interest Henley battled on unswervingly. He determined to re-interest his partner in the drama. In January 1884, he joined Charles Baxter and Bob Stevenson in a visit to Louis at his new home in the South of France. Bob and Louis had gone walking together previously to find a winter house for the invalid in that region and when Fanny joined them from Nice, they settled on the Chalet la Solitude on the Rue de la Pierre Glissante in Hyères.

* Stevenson's final visit to a theatre was in May 1880 when he and Fanny saw The Pirates of Penzance in San Francisco.

The situation of the new house could not be better. Les Isles d'Or could be seen in one direction and the hills beyond Toulon in the other. Stevenson was delighted with the place and was to say later that he was never happier than at Hyères. From where he wrote -

'You may³⁶ be surprised to hear that I am now the great writer of verses.'

Had the writer of plays given way to the playful writer?

What had happened to Stevenson the Dramatist?

This was what Henley was determined to find out - hence his visit. He still had hopes for the Deacon in London and wanted an opportunity to persuade his friend to agree to one more stage effort.

Through Charles Baxter, (Henley could not afford it otherwise) it was arranged that he should come to Hyeres. There was some serious talking to be done. The combination of Henley with Bob Stevenson, even allowing for the tempering presence of Baxter, meant there was also some serious drinking to do first. On one spree, the three friends bore the invalid off to Nice where he fell seriously ill in the hotel with a haemorrhage and was only saved by the presence of a visiting English doctor who told Fanny:

'Keep him alive till he's forty and then, though a winged bird, he may live to ninety... but between now and then, he must walk on eggs.'³⁷

It is not known what Fanny said to Messrs Henley, Baxter and Stevenson but it was sufficient to send all three men speedily back to Britain forthwith. Fanny then opened a subscription to The Lancet and determined henceforth to become her own doctor and watch-dog against further invasions by friends. However, some business had been concluded between drinks because it was agreed that Deacon Brodie would be presented in London during the coming summer. Meantime, Stevenson was in a theatrical frame of mind when replying to a young artist:

'I gather from half-shut eyes that you were a Skeltist; now seriously, that is a good beginning; there is a deal of romance (cheap) in Skelt. Look at it well and you will see much of Dickens. And even Skelt is better than conscientious, grey back-gardens, and conscientious dull, still lives. The great lack of art just now is a spice of life and interest; and I prefer galvanism to acquiescence in the grave. All do not; 'tis an affair of tastes; and mine are young. Those who like death have their innings today with art that is like mahogany and horse-hair furniture, solid, true, serious, and as dead as Caesar.'³⁸

It was hardly propitious that as the curtain about to rise on Deacon Brodie in London that Stevenson should be advocating Skelt as an example of what is desirable in theatre. However, one lucky event was that Edward Henley, the original Deacon Brodie, had received an unexpected legacy and wished to use it in mounting a trial matinee of the play. It is not known if brother William similarly benefitted but Edward's gesture was enough to set the wheels in motion. William would undertake full managerial responsibility for casting and rehearsal and make whatever financial contracts were required without any liability to Stevenson. Health permitting, Stevenson would be in London for the opening night. Whether he liked to or not, he was entering once again into the 'mahogany and horse-hair' world of practical theatre and unless the production were 'solid, true and serious', given the critical exposure expected on this occasion, then Deacon Brodie too, would be as 'dead as Caesar'. What is more important, Stevenson would see it for himself. So much would now depend on young Teddy Henley. It was a risk of course, but then everything in theatre is. Henley was now twenty-three years old and had been on the stage since he was eighteen. Now he was about to enter fully into the Robert Louis Stevenson story.

Although born in Gloucester, Edward John Henley had begun in theatre playing melodrama in Middlesborough, in plays like The Crimson Rock, paying for his own wardrobe. He then toured the seaside resorts with George Fox in The Captain of the Guards playing the second low comedian. John Holingshead saw him work and brought him to the London Gaiety Theatre where he made his first hit as Sir Fretful Plagiary in Sheridan's The Critic. He was held to be the equal of Charles Mathews (1736- 1835) in the part - and he was still only nineteen years of age. Later, in the burlesque of Bluebeard, which ran for two hundred nights at the Gaiety, he and comedian, Harry Monkhouse, were required to stand at either side of the stage and 'gag' as required. They were known as 'the counter-weights'. During this run he first tried his impersonation of Irving. It became the talk of the town and lead to a leading part opposite Sophie Eyre in a piece called Gabrielle. John Hare then engaged him to play the Duc de Bligny in The Ironmaster. Edward was now a rising actor but he met and married actress-singer, Mary Hampton, and followed her to New York. While there, he received his windfall and returned with it, but not his wife, to prepare the Deacon for London.

On WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON, at 2.30, for the First Time in London, a Melo-
Drama, in Four Acts and Ten Tableaux, entitled

DEACON BRODIE;

Or, THE DOUBLE LIFE.

(FOUNDED ON FACTS.)

By ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON & WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY.

Deacon William Brodie	... (Burgess and Housebreaker) ...	MR. E. J. HENLEY.
William Lawson	... (Procurator Fiscal, the Deacon's Uncle)	MR. JOHN MACLEAN.
Andrew Ainslie	} (Robbers in the Deacon's Gang) }	MR. FRED DESMOND.
George Smith		MR. JULIAN CROSS.
Humphrey Moore		MR. EDMUND GRACE.
		(His First Appearance in London.)
Captain Rivers	... (An English Highwayman) ...	MR. BRANDON THOMAS.
Hunt	... (A Bow Street Runner) ...	MR. HERBERT AKHURST.
Old Brodie	... (The Deacon's Father) ...	MR. ALEX. KNIGHT.
Workman		MR. LOVELL.
Walter Leslie	... (The Deacon's Friend) ...	MR. CHARLES CARTWRIGHT.
Mary Brodie	... (The Deacon's Sister) ...	MISS LIZZIE WILLIAMS.
Jean Watt	... (The Deacon's Mistress) ...	MISS MINNIE BELL.

VAGABONDS, CHILDREN, OFFICERS OF THE WATCH, &c.

The above Ladies and Gentlemen will appear by permission of their respective Managers.

The Scene is laid in Edinburgh. The time is towards the end of the Eighteenth Century. The Action, some 50 hours long, begins at 8 p.m. on the first day, and ends before midnight on the third.

The whole produced under the direction of Mr. E. J. HENLEY.

(By special permission of Messrs. HARE & KENDAL.)

Synopsis of Acts, Tableaux and Scenery.

Act I.—THE TWO LIVES.

Tableau I. AN APPARITION.

Scene—THE DEACON'S ROOM.

Tableau II. HUNT THE RUNNER.

Scene—THE PROCURATOR FISCAL'S OFFICE.

Tableau III. MOTHER CLARKE'S.

Scene—THE GAMING HOUSE IN FLESHMARKET CLOSE.

"Lord, who shall stand, if thou, O Lord,
Should'st mark iniquity;
But yet with Thee forgiveness is,
That fear'd thou may'st be."

Act II. }—EVIL AND GOOD.

Tableau IV. }
Scene—THE DEACON'S ROOM.

Act III.—FACE TO FACE.

Tableau V. JEAN WATT.

Scene—JEAN WATT'S IN LIBBERTON'S WYND.

Tableau VI. KING'S EVIDENCE.

Scene—A STREET IN EDINBURGH.

Tableau VII. UNMASKED.

Scene—A ROOM IN LESLIE'S HOUSE.

OPERA GLASSES ON HIRE OF THE ATTENDANTS, 1/6.

Act IV.—THE OPEN DOOR.

Tableau VIII. **THE ROBBERY.**

Scene—THE OLD EXCISE OFFICE IN CHESSEL'S COURT.

Tableau IX. **THE TWO WOMEN.**

Scene—THE STREET BEFORE THE DEACON'S HOUSE.

Tableau X. **AT BAY.**

Scene—THE DEACON'S ROOM.

Business Manager (for Mr. E. J. Henley) Mr. HARRINGTON BAILY.

During the Afternoon the Orchestra, under the direction of Mr. C. J. HARGITT, will perform the following Music:—

Overture	...	...	...	"Zampa"	...	...	...	...	Herold.
Valse	...	...	...	"Die Prager"	...	...	...	...	Gung'l.
Selection	...	...	...	"Le Caïd"	...	...	...	...	Ambroise Thomas.
Piccolo Solo	...	...	...	"Polka di Bravura"	...	...	...	...	Pratten.

The Patent Fire-proof Iron Curtain, constructed and erected by Clark, Bunnett & Co., Limited, Rathbone Place, London, will be lowered at the termination of the Performance.

The Theatre is lighted by Electricity. The installation was carried out by Messrs. STRODE & CO., 48, Osnaburgh Street, London. Accumulators being used, the Light is perfectly steady and safe.

THE REFRESHMENT DEPARTMENT IS UNDER THE THEATRE MANAGEMENT.

ALL WINES, SPIRITS, &c., ARE OF THE BEST QUALITY,
AND SCHWEPPE'S MINERAL WATERS ARE SUPPLIED.

Ladies can be served with COFFEE and REFRESHMENTS in the Stalls and Balcony Foyers on application to the attendants.

The Refreshment Kiosk and Smoking Fernery are on the Stalls Level.

NOTICE.—SEATS for all THEATRES, CONCERTS, &c., can be BOOKED at the WINDOW in the VESTIBULE of this THEATRE. A separate Telephone to each Place of Amusement. Tickets for Exhibitions, Fetes, Races, Sports, &c. Music and Musical Instruments. KEITH, PROWSE & Co., 48, Cheapside, & 1, Prince's Buildings, Piccadilly.

Musical Director	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	MR. C. J. HARGITT.
Stage Manager	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	MR. G. W. ANSON.
Assistant Stage Manager	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	MR. H. PARRY.

Books of the Story, "CALLED BACK," may be had of the Attendants in the Theatre. Price, 1s. each.

During the Season Matinées will be given of Burnand's Comedy "THE COLONEL," and G. R. Sims's Comedy "CRUTCH & TOOTHPICK."

July 3rd.—Miss ADA WARD'S Matinee. "The Lady of Lyons."

July 17th.—Mrs. DIGBY WILLOUGHBY'S Matinee.

Every Evening, at 8.15, "CALLED BACK," the very successful Play by Hugh Conway and Comyns Carr, founded on Hugh Conway's popular Story of that name.

"Called Back has taken its place as one of the stage triumphs of the season."—*The Academy.*

STAGE THREE

Section C

'His mistress' eyebrow'

More than one eyebrow was raised in July 1884 at the prospect of a play by Robert Louis Stevenson. The public, especially the artistic coterie, was intrigued and not a little curious about the combination promised by the stylish Scot and the bullish Englishman. The latter was as optimistic as ever and young brother Teddy was ebullient. He had always believed in the piece as has been already reported but the following is the complete context of his remarks as given in a later interview for the New York Dramatic Mirror:

'Deacon Brodie was written by my brother, William Ernest Henley, and the late Robert Louis Stevenson. I was with them when they wrote it. We were all boys at the time, and I would learn the speeches as fast as they were written. The play was originally intended for Henry Irving. It is, in my opinion, the best psychological melodrama ever written. I don't bar *The Bells* or any of the other occult melodramas. The printed copy of the play, published in Stevenson's works, is very different from the original as produced by me. The hero was more repulsive, more repugnant, and, as I think, more human.'

The Deacon Brodie version of January 1880 had been a limited edition published by Edinburgh University Press for distribution to theatre contacts of Henley's like the actors, Charles Warner and John Clayton, and the manager of the Prince's Theatre in London, Walter Gooch. The latter had rejected the piece before Haldane Crichton took it up at Bradford. Stevenson had kept up with these events and had assured Henley:

'You bet I saw the Courant notice, and I never believed in the Deacon before. That poetic Aberdonian settles it; and when we meet we spend three or five or seven hot days upon that Deacon's body... Also this, if the 'cause of art' requires this perpetual skating of bugs, damn art. Let the bugs be... Look here, I'm a bug; Teddy is, as yet, a bug; you are a bug - ay, though the author of the Deacon. If ruddy, truculent people were to make it their business to beetle us in print, and to card us in private circles - I daresay art would₂ profit - but you and I and Teddy would have a bloody * time.'

It is interesting in the above letter that Stevenson happily ascribes the sole authorship of Deacon Brodie to Henley.

* The penultimate word missing may be 'good'.

The three of them were the triumvirate in the development of the play by 1884. At any rate, the Henley brothers made a formidable duo in support of a still reluctant playwright who was nonetheless content to let things theatrical take their erratic course. What is more interesting, however, is that Fanny had added a pencilled post-script to Stevenson's earlier 1881 letter. It is badly faded but reads:

'My Dear Friend - Do keep your eagle eye upon the stage where I am convinced a gold mine shows out (something) that you and Louis may work to your great advantage. A gold mine is so very necessary for us all and you'll find it nowhere else. With brim purses, think what we could do, and the freedom that a little money gives, think what it would do for your wife, to say nothing of Louis's wife who is greedy for gold.
Please give my love to your wife and believe - ever yours,
Mrs.F. de G.Stevenson.'

A postscript is added but it is irrelevant.

Henley must have raised a shaggy eyebrow on receipt of this note.

A woman whom he thought of as a rival wanting to join forces - and in the writing of plays? The 'gold mine' metaphor anticipates Stevenson's letter to his father in 1883. From this time onwards, Fanny was very much involved in the partnership's dramatic plans. The play triumvirate was now a quartet. Ian Bell, in his Stevenson biography Dreams of Exile makes the following comment on the situation:

'It was Fanny and Henley at their worst. For two people so much at odds, they had a good deal in common... they needed Louis, his name and his ability... (and) they would not take 'no' for an answer. He, often quick to anger, was more tolerant than was good for him.'

This is perhaps unfair. Both wanted the same thing for themselves, money, but they had mutual wish for Louis, - good health and peace of mind for him to write - and to gain this he needed some good fortune - and quickly. The irony is that Stevenson was to gain this precious freedom later through inheritance and his own good sales. Henley, for his part, had to wait for a Civil List pension at the end of his life. Meanwhile, thus encouraged and abetted by his unexpected distaff ally, Henley set about further revisions of the script. Then good fortune occurred in the form of Teddy's unexpected hundred pounds and arrangements were made at once with Mr Gooch for the hire of his Princes Theatre for one matinee only on Wednesday 2 July 1884. Contacts were also made with the press.

A typical Henley approach was that made to Moy Thomas, dramatic critic of the Daily News:

'You were kind enough to say something pleasant about Deacon Brodie some months ago. I am sure it will interest you to know that at last we are going to try it in public. I needn't say that we shall be obliged to you if you will take notice of the fact in your Monday feuilletton in the D.N. My brother (who has to thank you for some very kindly words) will play the principal part. The cast (which has given us some trouble) will be a strong one. Its members are all suited to their parts (I will send you a complete list one day next week), and I think I can promise you a good all-round performance. I need hardly say that I hope to see you on the Wednesday afternoon.'

Mr Thomas undertook to attend.

Henley's term in Grub Street had seen him pass through many doors and he now sought to ensure the maximum coverage of the forthcoming matinee. There would be a full house on the day if William Henley had his way.

It was most certainly as much of a social occasion as a theatrical one despite the fact that it was out of the London season. Everyone who was anyone in London art or letters was there - the Tadema family, John Sargent, Max Beerbohm with Aubrey Beardsley, William Rothenstein, Pinero, George du Maurier and family, Mr and Mrs Comyns Carr, Mrs Bancroft et al. The only notable absentee was Stevenson himself.

He and Fanny had left Nice, reaching London by the July 1 but on the day of the show he had felt unwell again and Fanny insisted that he take an outing to Richmond rather than risk going to a crowded theatre. Meanwhile, Henley had drummed up a celebrity audience and the gentlemen of the press were out in force. The London Figaro reported:

'Considerable interest has been aroused by the announcement that London playgoers were to have a chance of seeing a play (in which) an author of the talent and versatility of Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson was known to have taken part. The audience gathered at the Prince's Theatre last Wednesday morning was, therefore, by no means such as matinees usually call together. The audience contained, in fact, many people well-known in literature and art... "Deacon Brodie", it must be said at once, is a disappointing play... Mr Stevenson should try again...

Mr E.J. Henley acts the title-role with great intensity but the hit of the piece was the acting of Mr Edmund Grace as one of the gang of burglars. There was a great deal too much Scotch dialect in it... but with all its shortcomings, "Deacon Brodie" is a play that contains distinct promise of better dramatic things to come.'

The People said much the same thing on the following day:

'The brilliant audience collected at the Prince's Theatre on Wednesday afternoon... gave evidence of the strong interest felt by playgoers in the production... but somehow the authors of "Deacon Brodie", while investing the piece with vigorous writing... have left the plot inconsistent and unintelligible... The piece (is) saved from direct failure by the admirable impersonation of a dogged, brutal, footpad, relieved by grim, natural humour, by Mr Edmund Grace... Mr E.J.Henley, though acting with intensity, was too spasmodic to be natural or even effective... The customary compliments were paid to the actors and authors at the fall of the curtain.'

On July 8, Henley wrote to Austin Dobson:

'The play went brilliantly but the critics have scorned it to a man.'

On July 9, The World stated that -

'Deacon Brodie is one of the strangest plays on record. Bad it is not, but still less is it good; vigorous in its component parts, it is feeble as a whole. The initial error of the authors seems to have lain in supposing that such a common-place criminal as their carpenter-housebreaker hero could be made the subject of a theatrically-interesting psychological study... I expected an infinitely stronger contrast between the hero's two lives...

The authors' design has evidently been to illustrate character rather than arouse interest by way of plot...

Seldom has a piece produced at a morning performance been so well acted. Mr E.J.Henley's performance of the Deacon, a most trying part, was masterly... This young actor has a career before him.

Mr Edmund Grace, a newcomer to the London stage, enraptured the audience by his very original and powerful performance of "the Badger"... An audience, which included many notabilities not usually to be met in theatres, received the piece favourably; and at the close, Mr Henley, in the absence of his collaborator, bowed their joint acknowledgement.'

Then, on July 12, it was the turn of Modern Society to notice the play:

'The chief characteristic of Mr Henley's Prince's matinee was the crowd of fashionable and literary somebodies who had been induced, in spite of the sweltering heat, to foregather for the purpose of witnessing the production of his and R.L.Stevenson's new play, "Deacon Brodie"...

I don't call it a West End play; but Mrs Lane's Britannia patrons would no doubt derive a vast amount of amusement and instruction from it. Hoxton loves to howl at vice.

That this play was looked forward to with a large amount of interest was proved by the number... eminent in art and letters who attended the matinee at the Prince's Theatre on Wednesday, the 2nd instant. A succes d'estime, almost a succes d'acclame, "Deacon Brodie" needs pruning and paring to make it the success of the season...'

*

The Britannia Theatre, Hoxton, under Sara Lupino Lane's management, was famous for its audience's uninhibited involvement in the action.

Society continues:

'(Brodie) at once respectable and vicious is a part in which Mr Irving would revel, and it must be said that Mr E.T. Henley (sic).... played the burgling deacon with much psychological insight... but the strongest representation in the entire play was that of Humphrey Moore, played with prodigious force by Mr. Edmund Grace. This gentleman's first appearance in London should not prove his last... The piece was excellently staged, and at the close, in answer to a unanimous call, the authors - Mr Robert Louis Stevenson (sic) and Mr William Ernest Hart (sic) - bowed their thanks to an applauding audience. I think we shall hear more anon of "Deacon Brodie".'¹¹

But even before he left for London, Stevenson had had his misgivings about the play although he had written to Henley from Royat:

'All this seems excellent news of the Deacon.'

He was still worrying about it -

'But O! That the last tableau, on from Leslie's entrance, were re-written! We had a great opening there and we missed it... Fanny hopes to be in time for the Deacon... We leave Monday.'¹²

Of course he never saw the performance. But he did see his partner.

'We (Louis and I) have talked the thing over - reconstruction and all; & I can see my way to making a play of it. But frankly, I don't think we shall ever get to work on the thing again; nor for that matter on anything else. The match is no longer equal. Louis has grown faster than I have.'¹³

Henley had always been able to see the distance between himself and his Scottish friend although he was blinkered as far as writing for the stage was concerned. The London experience had put paid to any further mutual efforts in that direction. Even so, Stevenson remained loyal to their long friendship and was quick to assure the editor of The Epoch that there was not a line in Deacon Brodie that was not the work of both authors. Nevertheless, it was obvious that Henley - and now possibly Fanny - held the power of veto as far as plays were concerned. Colvin, who had never liked the idea of Stevenson and plays, hated Deacon Brodie and damed it as a -

'morally unintelligible, unconvincing and non-existent' work.'¹⁴

Gosse, James, Lang, Barrie were all untypically reticent about the performance possibly hoping that the drama phase might now pass and Stevenson would resume his real business as a writer of elegant prose. Writing for the stage after all was not the pursuit of a gentleman. Only Henry James among that group had any real love of theatre but he made no comment on Deacon Brodie. His silence was comment enough.

Mrs Margaret Stevenson also saw the London showing but her opinion too, is not recorded. Similarly, Alfred Ewing attended with Fleeming Jenkin and Bob Stevenson but their impressions too are undocumented. Ewing's only observation, written many years later, was that - 'the play had no more than a succes d'estime'.¹⁵

Stevenson wrote candidly to Colvin:

'I quite understand your feelings about the Deacon, which is a far way behind; but I get miserable when I think of Henley cutting this splash and standing, I fear, to lose a great deal of money... It is about Henley, not Brodie, that I care. I fear my affections are not strong to my past works... and anyhow, the Deacon is damned bad.'¹⁶

For a writer who was so easy to read, Stevenson often found the actual act of writing hard work. He had always had to strive for his effects and with his limited physical capacity, he sometimes found it hard work indeed. These pressures had been increased with playwriting, especially as he was working under Henley's momentum rather than his own and under Fanny's constant eye. It was not a question of any lessening of his affection or admiration for the Englishman or of his losing patience with his wife. It was rather the sense of growing frustration with the processes involved in writing for the theatre in tandem.

He confirmed these frustrations to Henley:

'I have thought as well as I could of what you said; and I have come unhesitatingly to the opinion that the stage is only a lottery, must not be regarded as a trade, and must never be preferred to drudgery. If money comes from any play, let us regard it as a legacy, but never count upon it in our income for the year. In other words, I must go on and drudge at Kidnapped, which I hate, and am unfit to do; and you will have to get some journalism somehow.'¹⁷

In an embarrassed silence the curtain came down once more on the Deacon. But not for long.

Henley was still quarrying for that theatre gold. In 1886 he wrote, under the pseudonym of 'Byron McGuiness', a travesty based on the Faust legend, called Mephisto, and of course, brother Edward played Faust opposite the Marguerite of Constance Gilchrist. Special music was composed by Mr D.Caldicott and 'Signor Ernest Bucalossi'. (Henley?) Mephisto opened on Whit Monday (14 June) 1886 at the Royalty Theatre, London and had a reasonable success, running for several weeks.

Then, quite unexpectedly, Deacon Brodie re-emerged as a project.

Wallack was in his little back office when I called.

"You sent for me, Mr. Wallack?" I said abruptly.

"And who are you, pray?" he asked coldly.

"I'm Mr. Henley," I answered.

Wallack jabbed his eye-glass into his ocular and took a long look at me.

"You're not the Mr. Henley I saw at the St. James with the Kendals?"

"Indeed, I am."

"Oh, dear me, you're very young."

"If you give me a lifetime I'll try to get older."

Well the upshot of the meeting was an engagement at the Wallack's at a very pretty salary - not large, but quite as much as I would have asked.'

The upshot was that a Henley 'contact' had been made on the other side of the Atlantic, and Teddy was not slow in taking advantage.

'Returning to America, I rejoined Wallack's... and I put Deacon Brodie on a trial matinee. The cast was the flower of the Wallack company... Later I produced the play on tour with a company of English actors, every one of them chosen for his personal qualifications for the part. The play went well everywhere and I was eulogised to the skies by the critics. But the subject of the play seemed a bit too gruesome for popular success. Double Lives on the stage are perilous motives.

Apropos of this, let me tell you that I, once played Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde without a single rehearsal...'

New audiences meant a new start for the project and for Stevenson and The Deacon it might just be third time lucky for both of them. Performances were soon arranged in Montreal, Toronto, Buffalo, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston and New York and Edward J. Henley (now with his second wife Georgina Wright) would lead a new company with Edmund Grace and Fred Desmond from the London production at the opening performance. The Stevensons were not involved in this enterprise at all. Only three days after the New York 'trial' matinee, Thomas Stevenson had died

'in his 70th year sitting upright in his chair, dressed in his best blue broadcloth and cravat, smoking his pipe, waiting for death as if it were an omnibus.'

The Stevensons travelled to Edinburgh for the funeral. It was the largest private occasion ever seen in the capital but Louis, having caught another chill, was forbidden by his doctor-cousin George Balfour to attend. Stevenson did not object. He wrote to Colvin:

'About the death, I have long hesitated... If we could have had my father that would have been a different thing. But to keep that changeling...

My favourite words in literature, my favourite scene - 'O, let him pass,' Kent and Lear, was played for me here...I had no words...'

99

Flora Mason remembers:

'An open cab with a man and woman in it, seated side by side, and leaning back - the rest of the cab piled high with rather untidy luggage - came slowly towards us... As it passed us, out on the broad roadway... a slender, loose-garbed figure stood up and waved a wide-brimmed hat to everyone in Heriot Row. "Good-bye! Good-bye!" he called to us...

That little bit of west-endy, east-windy Edinburgh with the gray and green of the Castle Rock and the gardens on the one side, and Princes Street itself, glittering in the sunshine, on the other! It was Edinburgh's last sight of Louis Stevenson and Louis Stevenson's last look back at the City that was his birthplace...'²²

It was his final Edinburgh performance.

The Stevensons left Liverpool on the SS 'Ludgate Hill' on 22 August 1887 bound for New York - San Francisco - and eventually, Samoa. Only Sidney Colvin saw them off. Robert Louis Stevenson was never to return. Not that he minded going. He had an American wife and an American stepson and daughter so perhaps he had a right to feel at home in the United States. The Americans certainly liked to think so. It was therefore fitting, that with typical dramatic suddenness, the curtain went up on Deacon Brodie for the third time in North America. As he would be in America himself then, he might even see it at last. He had to. The Henley brothers between them had given the piece its last chance, and if Stevenson were ever to be a surviving dramatist at all, it might also be his.

While on the subject of the actor Henley, a figure of some importance in the story of Stevenson the playwright, the fragment of a letter he wrote to Henley at this time mentions Teddy in a new light. It hardly ties in with the image of the silly, talentless wastrel offered by so many Stevenson biographers.

'He said first, that he either knew nothing at all about acting, or more than any other living man - he knew not which. Secondly, that the British stage was entirely non-existent; and that he dared not visit a theatre, as the actors produced in him the symptoms of approaching death. Third (and most interesting) that Ted was the only person he had seen who seemed to him to belong (however distantly) to human nature; that to have seen any of his rivals was to honour him; and that he augurs great things of his future.'²³

It matters less whose opinion this is than that such an opinion was held then of an actor just twenty-six years of age. Whatever his merits, the next phase of Deacon Brodie, in its postlude, would belong to him.

DEACON BRODIE

AN AMERICAN POSTLUDE

I had some experience of American appreciation;
I liked a little of it, but there is too much;
a little of that would go a long way...
(Letters, 3,13)

AN AMERICAN POSTLUDE

Robert Louis Stevenson ('reeking of horse manure') disembarked from the Ludgate Hill on September 7, 1887 to find himself famous throughout America as the author of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. He and his party were met by Mr E.L. Burlingame, editor of Scribner's Magazine, Mr and Mrs Charles Fairchild, who were friends of the painter Sargent, and Mr and Mrs Will Low -

'They were old and dear friends... they had not seen each other in a long time. It was a delightful meeting. Such handshaking and such embracing you would not expect to see outside France. The men threw their arms round each other's necks with all the effusion of schoolgirls...' ²⁴

A posse of reporters from the New York press awaited them at the Victoria Hotel on Broadway. He stood up gamely to their invigilation, despite a cold he had caught off the Banks, and their resulting reports filled the columns of New York newspapers in the following days:

'When the steamship Ludgate Hill was reported at Fire Island at one o'clock yesterday afternoon the seventy cabin passengers who were aboard thought that they would disembark at Prentice's Stores, Brooklyn... (but) for a matter of convenience in removing livestock (over a hundred Normandy horses) arrangements were made to make the landing at Pier 38, North River. There were but few people present when the steamer, after much persuasion, was successfully brought alongside the pier...

A Herald reporter singled out a tall gentleman wearing a short velvet jacket and a peculiarly cut low hat. His hair was black and fell over his shoulders, and his clean-cut, refined features suggested a Vandyke.

This interesting looking person was Robert Louis Stevenson, the English, or rather Scottish author, (for Mr Stevenson was born in Edinburgh about thirty-eight years ago), whose versatile writings have made his name a household word wherever the English language is read...

Mr. Stevenson was accompanied by his wife whom he married in California when on a visit to this country eight years ago...

In answer to the reporters inquiry -

"What is your object in visiting America?"

Mr. Stevenson said:

"Simply on account of my health, which is wretched. I am suffering from catarrhal consumption, but am sanguine that my soujourn here will do much to restore me to my former health..."

The report ended:

'His buoyancy of temperament rises superior to the depressing influence of continuous illness.' ²⁵

The following notes are from the New York Critic:

'Mr Robert Louis Stevenson arrived in New York on Wednesday last, intending, as we are told at the time of going to press, to proceed at once to Newport -

"I intend to get out of New York just as fast as I can. I like New York exceedingly. It is to me a mixture of Chelsea, Liverpool and Paris, but I want to get away into the country."²⁶

He did in fact stay with the Fairchilds at their home in Newport, Rhode Island - in bed most of the time. He was too unwell to go into New York to see Richard Mansfield play in the highly-successful adaptation of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde which had just opened at the Madison Square Theatre. (Shades of Richmond and Deacon Brodie). The Herald man asked:

"There is a great difference of opinion as to what suggested your works, particularly "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" and "Deacon Brodie?" Mr Stevenson answered:

"Well, this has never been properly told. On one occasion, I was very hard up for money, and I felt that I had to do something... I dreamed a story, not precisely as it is written...(but) it came to me like a gift. ... Even when fast asleep I know it is I who is inventing... So as soon as I awake... I set to work and put it together... of course writing it was another thing...

"Deacon Brodie?" I certainly didn't dream that...

When I was about nineteen years of age, I wrote a sort of hugger-mugger melodrama, which lay in my coffer till it was fished out by my friend, W.E.Henley. He thought he saw something in it, and we started to work together, and after a desperate campaign we turned out the original drama of "Deacon Brodie" as performed in London, and recently, I believe, successfully in this city... The piece has been all overhauled, and although I have no idea whether it will please an audience, I don't think either Mr. Henley or I are ashamed of it.²⁷ We take it now for a good, honest melodrama not so very ill done.

The Henley company had put on a special matinee at Wallack's Theatre.

'On the afternoon of May 5th was acted a much discussed drama of Robert Louis Stevenson and W.E.Henley - Deacon Brodie, or the Double Life. In this, E.J.Henley, brother of the half-author, W.E.Henley, made a powerful impression as the devilish Brodie.

Walter Leslie	Eben Plympton
Deacon Brodie	E.J.Henley
Ainslie	F.F.Mackay
Moore	Charles Groves
Hunt	Luke Martin
Smith	Charles Coote
William Lawson	F.Everill
Rivers	T.J.Patten
Old Brodie	W.H.Pope
Doctor	John Lewis
Mary Brodie	Annie Robe
Jean Watt	Carrie Coote
Mother Clarke	Ella Chudler
Servant	Florence Eber ²⁸

The New York Herald reported later:

'The play of "Deacon Brodie", in the writing of which, Mr.W.E.Henley, Mr. Stevenson's early literary associate is again a collaborator with him, will probably be brought out next month in Boston. One performance of it has already been given in New York. It is a romantic melodrama of the old-fashioned sort, excellent in its way, but hardly a play that will prove popular with audiences at either of the leading theatres in New York (but) its success through the country is highly probable. Its other title, "A Double Life" suggests the leading idea, a man with a double identity...'

And also (in the same issue):

'The dramatic version of "Dr.Jekyll and Mr.Hyde," which has been made for Mr. Richard Mansfield, will be seen for the first time on Monday next... It would be an agreeable incident of the production if Mr. Stevenson could be present, but that, unfortunately, is out of the question...'²⁹

Stevenson was already on his way by steamer and horse-buggy to Dr Trudeau at Saranac Lake. Which was a pity because New York was agog about Mansfield's performance as Jekyll/Hyde. The play had already played in Boston and long lines were already forming at the Madison Square Theatre which was good for Stevenson too. Unlike usual American practice he was actually being paid a performance royalty - which was hardly true of his other production in the United states. Meantime, Deacon Brodie made its debut in New York:

'On February 27th, (1888) entered a play (at the Fifth Avenue Theatre) that should have been better than it was - Deacon Brodie, by Robert Louis Stevenson and W.E.Henley, tried the season before, at a matinee in Wallack's Theatre. Needless to say two such authors could not fail to write something original and striking, but somehow Deacon Brodie did not win the public, with this cast (not so good as that at Wallack's):

William Brodie	E.J.Henley
Walter Leslie	Charles W.Sutton
William Lawson	Edmund D.Lyons
Moore	Edmund Grace
Smith	J.B.Hollis
Ainslie	Edmund D.Lyons
Hunt	Henry Vernon
Rivers	James Sinclair
Old Brodie	Robert Bouchier
Doctor	Fred Beaumont
Hamilton	Bruce Philips
Mary Brodie	Mittens Willet
Jean Watt	Carrie Coote
Servant	Clara Lennon
Mother Clarke	Ella Chudler'' ³⁰

The Wallack's Theatre in New York, formerly Brougham's old Lyceum, had been opened in 1852 by James William Wallack (1791-1864) one of the Kemble school of actors who divided his time between New York and London. His parents had been leading players at Astley's Amphitheatre and later at the Surrey. The Wallack family had a long antecedence in English theatre and this tradition was carried on by James's nephew, and his son Lester, who managed the theatre until 1881 maintaining its policy of staging merely English plays. It was under his management that the Henley Company came to New York with Deacon Brodie in a specially-arranged matinee. American theatre in this phase was virtually English theatre in a provincial mode (appropriate to less severe colonial expectations) but even so, the critical eye was keen as the press extracts of the time show. For instance, some American critics thought that the plot had been plagiarised from a novel by Miss Florence Warden called The House On the Marsh or from a previous drama entitled Jim the Penman or from the career of Peace the burglar, but this was refuted by 'H.B.' in the London Letter of the New York Critic:

'I have read - with very natural interest - some of the criticisms on Messrs. Henley and Stevenson's 'Deacon Brodie', produced a week or two ago at Wallack's Theatre; and I have been struck by the unanimity with which their authors refer to the origin of the piece...It is hardly worth remarking of course, but it is a fact that (as I have excellent means of knowing) 'Deacon Brodie' has existed, in one form or another, for a considerable number of years, and was seen in three dimensions before Miss Warden published her novel, I believe, and most assuredly, before Sir Charles Young produced his play. To this I may add that it has as little to do with the late Charles Peace as with his predecessor, the renowned Jack Sheppard. The principal character is historical. There really was a William Brodie, Deacon of the Wrights; he was a master burglar by night, and by day a citizen whose influence was weighty and wide enough to turn (so it is said) the scale of a parliamentary election. Jean Watt, too, was a real person; and Humphrey Moore, George Smith and Andrew Ainslie all existed, all served the Deacon, and were all in trouble with their master. He, I should note, experienced the fate of his kind. He escaped to Holland; revealed his whereabouts by an unwary inquiry as to the results of certain cock-fights; was pursued, captured (in a cupboard), brought back, tried, and finally hanged upon a drop into the construction of which, it is said, he had introduced, as a good carpenter might, a certain ingenious improvement. You may find the story of his life in Kay's 'Edinburgh', and also in the record of his trial - the plethoric little volume which was printed and sold at the time of his translation. Both are embellished by etched portraits by the aforesaid Kay;

and if Kay was not a libeller, then must Deacon Brodie - who in one is pictured in his prison cell, seated at a table decorated with cards and dice - have been a gentleman of unpleasant aspect. For the rest, the idee mere of the play - the scene, that is to say, in which the Deacon is caught and unmasked in the act of breaking (into) his friend's house - is to be found in Mr. Stevenson's 'Edinburgh', in the shape of a tradition - or a fact, I forget which - still popular and still credible. In the version of his adventures which was produced (at a matinee) at the Prince's Theatre some three or four years ago, he 'cut up ugly' at the end, and died in a madness of denunciation and despair - a piece of 'realism' revolting to the human mind. In the new version, produced at Wallack's, he takes (as I understand) another road, gives way to sentiment, and commits suicide by way of expiation. It is odd, though not unnatural, that both these solutions should have been condemned. The first was found disgusting; the second is set down as unveracious and conventional. I need hardly remark that, to my poor judgement, both sets of critics are right; or that a handsome reward will probably be his who will discover to the authors how to end their drama in any other fashion.'

It was generally understood at the time that 'H.B.' was 'Henley-Burly' - Henley himself, 'Henley's Brother'. There is no doubt that the overall tone of the piece is that of one who is privy to more than the confidentiality normally extended to journalists - and the appeal encased in the last sentence speaks for both authors' real dilemma.

Be that as it may, it was to the junior Henley, Edward John, the North American tour was entrusted. Judging from the press accounts, he did not serve his brother and his partner too badly. Given the Henley history in relation to Henry Irving, the many references to that actor in relation to Edward's performance can only be considered ironical, but it flatters both men if England's leading actor was well-enough known throughout America at the time to serve as a hallmark of acting quality. If the American newspaper reports of the time are to be believed, it would seem that Edward Henley and Deacon Brodie had both benefited from the sea-change. The Henley company opened their North American tour at Montreal on 26 September 1887 with the following cast:

Deacon Brodie	Mr. E.J.Henley
Walter Leslie	Mr. Graham Stewart
William Lawson	Mr. Edmund Lyons
Andrew Ainslie	Mr. Fred. Desmond
Humphrey Moore	Mr. Edmund Grace
George Smith	Mr. Horatio Saker
Hunt	Mr. Henry Vernon
Captain Rivers	Mr. Bruce Philips
Mary Brodie	Miss Annie Robe
Jean Watt	Miss Carrie Coote.

FIFTH AVENUE THEATRE

Lessee and Manager

Mr. JOHN STETSON

Week Commencing Feb. 27th, 1888.

Every Evening at 8 o'clock.

Matinee Saturday at 3 o'clock.

INDEXED

Edward J. Henley

And the Principal Members of his Original English Representation in the
New and Beautiful Melodrama.

DEACON BRODIE

Or, THE DOUBLE LIFE.

By ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON and WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY.

CAST OF CHARACTERS.

WILLIAM BRODIE, Deacon of the Carpenter's Guild. ... MR. ED. J. HENLEY
(His original character.)
WALTER LESLIE, in love with Mary CHARLES W. SUTTON
WILLIAM LAWSON, procurator fiscal, the Deacon's uncle EDMUND D. LYONS
(His first appearance here.)
MOORE EDMUND GRACE
SMITH J. B. HOLLIS
AINSLIE EDMUND D. LYONS
HUNT, a "Bow Street runner" HENRY VERNON
RIVERS, a highwayman JAMES SINCLAIR
OLD BRODIE, the Deacon's father ROBERT BOURCHIER
DOCTOR FRED. BEAUMONT
HAMILTON BRUCE PHILLIPS
MARY BRODIE, the Deacon's sister MISS MITTENS WILLET
JEAN WATT, the Deacon's mistress MISS CARRIE COOTE
(Her original character.)
SERVANT MISS CLARA LENNOX
MOTHER CLARKE MISS ELLA CHUDLER
Vagabonds, Officers of the Watch, and Maid Servants.

The scene is laid in Edinburgh. The time is toward the close of the eighteenth century. The action some fifty hours long—begins at 8 p. m. on Saturday, and ends at midnight on Monday.

SYNOPSIS OF ACTS AND TABLEUX.

ACT I.—Tableau 1.—An Apparition. Tableau 2.—Hunt the Runner. Tableau 3.—Mother Clarke's. ACT II.—Tableau 4.—Evil and Good. ACT III.—Tableau 5.—Unmasked. ACT IV.—Tableau 6.—King's Evidence. Tableau 7.—The Robbery. ACT V.—Tableau 8.—The Open Door.

THE PSALM SUNG AT THE END OF ACT I.

Lord, who abell stand; if thou, O Lord,
Should'st mark iniquity;
But yet with Thee forgiveness is,
That feared Thou may'st be.

SCALE OF PRICES.

GENERAL ADMISSION.	ONE DOLLAR
Orchestra	50c
First Balcony (4 front rows)	25c
Second Balcony	\$12.00 and \$15.00
Boxes	

NOTICE.—Tickets Purchased or Sold on the Sidewalk ARE WORTHLESS, and WILL NOT BE RECOGNIZED AT THE DOOR OF THIS THEATRE.

Smoking Positively Forbidden in the Broadway Entrance.

Opera Glasses to let at Ladies Cloak Room off First Floor.

Toilet Room with Special Attendant will be found on Balcony Foyer.

NO FEES OF ANY KIND ALLOWED TO USHERS.

CLOAK ROOM with attendant; on first-floor lobby. The management will not be responsible for hats, cloaks, wraps, umbrellas, or any articles left under seats.

ANY INTENTION OF ATTACKS SHOULD BE REPORTED TO THE MANAGER.

McGarrick Florist is in this Theatre, 1146 Broadway.

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NOTE: For the purposes of clarity and convenience, and to ease the reading of the many examples given, the following press reports of the North American performances of Deacon Brodie are given in extract form only. All sources and attributions are given in full against the appropriate number and letter in References.

31(a)

'A fine audience gathered at the Grand Opera House last night in defiance of wind and rain storm to witness the initial regular performance in the United States of the celebrated English play, Deacon Brodie, or 'the Double Life', written by the author of "Dr Jekyll," Robert Louis Stevenson, assisted by the well-known London journalist, William Ernest Henley. A play bearing the stamp of such authorship, naturally led the audience to expect great things of it, and the foreign reputation of the principal people engaged in the presentation aroused curiosity... Both were English and had been credited with the scoring of a marked success in one of London's fashionable theatres.'

31(b)

'Notwithstanding the wind storm last evening the cozy new Grand Opera house was filled to see the first production in this country (except for a matinee at Wallack's, New York) of the strong English play, "Deacon Brodie".... Mr Edward J. Henley plays the part of the Deacon with a master's control of his art. He is on stage two persons of strikingly opposite characters. Miss Robe is a striking beauty whose youth and talents combine to make her a leading figure in a cast that is strong throughout...

The performance was an undoubted success. The curtain had to be rung up after every act... the tragic end of Brodie puts a fitting climax upon one of the best-written plays ever put on local boards.'

31(c)

'On the American stage, Deacon Brodie is altogether unique. Produced at McVicar's (Theatre) last night by E.J. Henley and his English company, the play scored an emphatic hit. The psychological element... is easily recognised as the work of Robert Louis Stevenson... In the case of Deacon Brodie, he has given to the stage a character and a play that should live. It contains six actors of great merit who might be dilated upon very justly...

Mr Edmund Grace played Moore, the graceless member of the gang, with a striking make-up (and) Miss Annie Robie (sic) as Mary Brodie was all that could be desired... a capable actress with a voice that carries a hint of Ellen Terry...

Mr Henley, however, scores the hit of the play. He is a young and impassioned actor, suggesting in his work at times the Chatterton of Wilson Barrett... An actor of considerable power, he gave a very effective portrayal... and in several scenes was so intense and realistic as to excite prolonged applause.... Mr Henley, now but 27 years of age, is an actor of great talent and fine ability, and the fault will be wholly with himself if he does not achieve an enviable rank among leading actors. He is capable of much greater work than he may find within the scope of melodrama. A few years hence he should do such roles as Louis XI greatly...

"Deacon Brodie" is a success of the pronounced kind...

The week's engagement has been extended to two..... A rare dramatic treat is in store for those who go to see "Deacon Brodie."

31(d)

'The vivid distinctness of character drawing and the strength of dramatic incident that have distinguished the writings of Robert Louis Stevenson... may be found with equal benefit to his reputation as a playwright in the new play entitled "Deacon Brodie."... One of the best melodramas we have seen in years... it presents a life picture painted in strong colours... though didactic it is not sermonic...

31(e)

Mr Henley's company is a strong one... Mr Henley...has surprising vitality and emotional power... He is one of the most thoroughly dramatic actors now before the public... The audience honoured Mr Grace with a call before the curtain... The play is laid in Edinburgh, Scotland, and one is a little curious to know why only three of the characters have a Scotch dialect? This is a small matter for objection, however... and does not take away from the praise I have accorded it...'

31(f)

'In writing "Deacon Brodie" the authors have added another strong melodrama to the English stage. Not a play of sensational fustian, worked out with cheap, theatrical effects and sham sentiments, but a play as sturdily virile as the country in which its scene is laid... The beautiful effect of having men of literary reputation turn their attention to the stage... is here seen with fine results...the dialogue is crisp and relevant (and) nothing is allowed to interfere with the straightforward telling of the story...There is a hint of Irving, too, in the acting of Mr Henley... He is a strong and thoughtful actor, well poised... with an admirable stage presence... We are glad that so accomplished an actress as Miss Robe has left Wallack's for the broader fields of the drama... Mr Desmond made one of the hits of the evening...and last but by no means least, comes the charming Jean Watt, (Miss Carrie Coote) as sonsie a Scotch lass as ever wore tartan...The play is a charming surprise, a refreshing novelty and we welcome it to the success it will command and which it certainly deserves.'

31(g)

'A strong play, superbly acted is "Deacon Brodie" at McVicars, and it is doubly a pleasure to say this since "Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde" the perversion in dramatic form of a story by the same author, Robert Louis Stevenson, proved to be such a repellent mass of trickery and absurdity. The drama which was seen last evening...is on the same theme as the more widely-known and grotesque piece of work which Mr Mansfield presented; but the theme is treated with directness and naturalness...and with a vivid dash of romantic charm... "Deacon Brodie" is a melodrama ... with a moral...(that) must sink into every soul... This is not one of the raw-beef melodramas of Pettit, Sims and kindred, whose writing materials are a pot of paint and a carpenter's saw, It is amusing at times, though not often... The company in some respects...is surprisingly excellent... Mr E.J. Henley... shows no slavish imitation of Mr Irving, yet the power and charm of the Irving method has not been without effect in the formation of his style... his qualities being more Gallic than English. His acting has much variety, the changes of mood being swift and always true, and a touch of sardonic humor, not unlike that of Mr Irving, giving salt to his impersonation.'

31(h)

'Mr Henley, who plays Brodie, is a born actor. From first to last, he holds the audience in his hands. Though not a tall man, he is very prepossessing, with a clear cut mobile face, and piercing black eyes. There is a perfect freedom and abandon in his action. Sometimes, he reminds one of Henry Irving, but he has none of Irving's mannerisms or affectations. He is ably supported... When shall we have the sense to demand well-trained companies and not one star and a dozen sticks?'

31(i)

'The play is in good hands as presented by the Henley English Company.'

31(j)

'There is not a weak or lame spot in the entire performance. The title of 'Deacon' may be misleading. It is used in the Scottish sense, meaning the president or head of an incorporated trade - 'deacon of the weights' ... Mr Edward J. Henley plays the part with great strength and cleverness... and holds the closest attention of the audience. Miss Annie Robe essays the character of Mary Brodie in a manner worthy of special mention... Mr. Edmund Grace acted his part so well as to be called before the curtain... The play is laid in Edinburgh and the dialect is a mixture of Scotch and English...'

31(k)

'"Deacon Brodie" is a free hand character sketch, with the outlines in bold relief and with no elaboration of details to confuse the eye and dissipate the interest... The problem was to secure the thrill of the drama without borrowing its fustian... In this instance, Robert Louis Stevenson and his collaborator, W.E. Henley have succeeded in focusing... the relationship between the dramatis personae and their surroundings. This is a most uncommon feat in dramatic construction and at once lifts "Deacon Brodie" out of all comparison with the ephemeral dramas of the day that are built to order, or put together in accordance with certain mechanical principles recognised by the gentry who make drama a specialty and write plays "while you wait."'

'This drama is a bit out of real life... and idealised only within the lines of truthful probability. It does not depend on millinery or red flags or the glittering folly of cheap theatrical devices but upon dramatic intensity and a story that commands unflagging interest... The motive of the play is similar to that of "Jim the Penman" (but) is more dramatic and therefore must rank above Mr Palmer's famous play in that one prime essential of stage literature...'

'Edward J. Henley, (is the) brother of the associate-author... (and) this character will stamp him as an actor of rare ability. He is at once quick in perception, graceful in movement and intense in action. Possessed of a highly magnetic organization, he pervades the stage and commands his audience, a most unmistakable feat of genuine dramatic power..... Indeed the company as a whole, is surprisingly strong and efficient, and sustains the already well-entertained fact... that European stock actors are better trained than the general average of American actors.....'

* Wrights.

While the company was playing at Chicago, Stevenson received a letter at Saranac Lake from an American admirer, Miss Harriet Monroe, (1860-1936), a writer herself and founder of the Poetry magazine. She wrote regarding Deacon Brodie in Chicago, and asking if he proposes seeing the play himself while he is in America. He replied:

'Dear Miss Monroe

Many thanks for your letter and good wishes. It was much my desire to get to Chicago; had I done - or if I yet do so - I shall hope to see the original of my photograph, which is one of my show possessions; but the fates are rather contrary. My wife is far from well... if I do not get to Chicago, you will hear of me; so much can be said... I was pleased to recognise a word of my poor old Deacon in your letter. It would interest me very much to hear how ~~it~~ went and what you thought of ^{piece} and actors; and my collaborator... would be pleased too...'³²

Stevenson had missed the 1884 Deacon Brodie in London and was out of New York for its opening there. He was in San Francisco while it was touring the East Coast. Even if his letter to Miss Monroe might argue to the contrary, it would seem that he was deliberately avoiding seeing the play. Yet, writing to Henley, he at least shows a curiosity -

'My Dear Lad... I hear some reports of its success at Montreal.'³³

There is no record of Henley's response. Nor is there any evidence of any great correspondence between playwright, Stevenson, and his leading man, although he did mention seeing one letter from the actor sent to his brother:

'I reenclose Ted's interesting and sensible letter; a devil of a life to be sure; I must try and write to him really. Perhaps tonight.'³⁴

But Stevenson did not write that night - or any other night.

This is unfortunate. He may have learned something to his advantage. One cannot help but be curious as to the contents of Edward's 'interesting and sensible letter'; especially as it drew from Stevenson the comment - 'a devil of a life to be sure'. This would indicate that young Ted had something to say in it about the pointed end of touring a play. However volatile the younger Henley's nature, at least he was at the work-face of theatre and might have given Stevenson at least a whiff of genuine greasepaint. Stevenson was never to see a play of his performed in the theatre. This is to be regretted. He would have learned much from seeing his work received by an audience. This is not only the final test of any play, it is the sole reason for its creation.

It is to be noted that this 1887-88 American tour of Deacon Brodie was virtually coincidental with a tour throughout the United States of the already-mentioned Richard Mansfield-T.R.Sullivan Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. Mansfield had in the previous year refused Stevenson's unpublished The Hanging Judge in order to play Jekyll and now here he was in what might be thought of as a rival stage production to the Henley Deacon Brodie. It was an irony lost to American perception. Not that Stevenson was particularly concerned about any rivalry. Success for either would have been success for him.

Unlike their London counterparts, American critics had praised the Deacon on the whole but the public was less impressed. The same critics however were not so disposed towards Mansfield and his Jekyll-Hyde adaptation, despite its great success with the same public.

The following was typical comment:

'It is hardly possible to conceive a greater contrast than the two dramas of Mr Robert Louis Stevenson present. "Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde" is a horror and monstrosity; "Deacon Brodie" is a strong, suggestive, instructive play... This last play has been the attraction during the past week...' ³⁵

Comment may be made in the context of connections between Deacon Brodie and The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and that is that the former derived, on Stevenson's own admission to the American reporters, from his remembering that -

'in the room in which I slept as a child in Edinburgh there was a CABINET - and a very pretty piece of work it was too - from the hands of the original Deacon Brodie.' ³⁶

And with regard to Jekyll and Hyde, he told the same reporters:

'For instance, all I dreamed about Dr. Jekyll was that one man was being pressed into a CABINET ³⁷ when he swallowed a drug and was changed into another being.'

There is here not only the difference in response by the same critics to different plays, there is also the difference in reaction between England and America to Deacon Brodie. Comparisons may be made on the qualitative differences between a cosmopolitan audience in London in 1884 and a provincial, not to say colonial, audience in the United States during 1887-88, but theatrical mores do not begin and end with the seven theatres of London's West End. There was a wide world beyond and it appeared to take the Deacon to its heart - especially in Chicago. Stevenson was all this time trying to hear how the tour was doing.

'How has the Deacon gone?' he asked of Henley in August 1887, signing himself 'Bulletin McGrinder'. It seemed to be doing quite well. As witness the following:

'A steady increase of patronage night by night is seldom presented to the theatrical manager. Such has been the experience of "Deacon Brodie" and Company at McVicar's... It is a matter of congratulation that "Deacon Brodie" will remain another week at McVicar's. The public may see that a well-written, well-acted melodrama is not the least valuable of dramatic entertainments.'³⁸

Stevenson wrote to Henley again on 16 October:

'I do not know Teddy's address or I would write and send him mine...'³⁹

And again in October:

'We are only at Saranac for the winter; and if this Deacon comes off, why you may join us there in glory; I wish I had some news of it... They had need to pay well! but how do the poor devils live? And how it can pay to take a theatre company over to such a land (where it costs a pound to sneeze and fifty to blow your nose!) is more than I can fancy.'⁴⁰

Certainly a life on the road was very different for an acting company especially when its leading man was its principal handicap. Things had begun to change and there were personality clashes among the cast. The lack of balance in Teddy had begun to show. Perhaps the strain of leading a company was proving too much for such a young player? At any rate, things got worse and future dates were in jeopardy. Edward Henley appealed to Stevenson to guarantee the company's expenses but Stevenson promised only to pay fares home. He wrote to Baxter on 10 April 1888:

'Teddy, (in) his first communication since he's been here, wrote and asked me to support his company for six weeks! I offered in return to pay his and Grace's passage back to England and I suppose he won't be pleased. This young man is quite a hopeless character.'⁴¹

Grace was his wife according to William:

'A nice little girl, a chanteuse, with a remarkable voice, a chanteuse; very lady-like and pretty, and absolutely unprofessional.'

However William Henley's letter, as seen in the Beinecke Collection at Yale, is dated 3 May 1884, at which time Edward had been married for two years to the singer Mary Hampton, with whom he went to America prior to the London Deacon Brodie in July 1884. According to Edward Henley himself, his 'marital complications', as he called them, began when he

then 'married' Georgina Wright, an actress, while he was touring with Modjeska in the United States. What complicates matters further is that Grace was also the English actor, Edmund Grace, who had played Moore in the London and New York productions and had stolen many of the notices from Henley. It is reasonable to suppose that this rivalry between them was often the cause of dissension in the company.*

Edward Henley had all his older brother's energy but with nothing of his discipline. He was certainly a handful for Stevenson. When Fanny had been alone in New York during the winter of 1887, Teddy Henley had tried to borrow money from her and when the actor was involved in a brawl in a Philadelphia bar he was lucky to escape with a fine. Following this, Stevenson wrote again to Baxter:

'I am more upset than I can well say by the collapse of the Deacon Brodie business. I never built one farthing on it; but I cannot but fear that Henley did, and what to do for or about him more than I can think... What adds to my discomfort is that feel I have played a weak game with W.E.H. I have all along allowed him to sacrifice the plays to Teddy, and I knew I was wrong, and I repent... The point is: I have groaned under this slavery to Teddy, a young man in whom I do not believe, and whom I much dislike. I have put up with it, as I put up with the whole affair for W.E.H.'s sake; and now I bitterly blame myself... I have heard different accounts of his success; and I see very plainly that this lad... is bound to bring nothing but evil... The first thing is to keep up W.E.H. against this disappointment. The next is that I must set my face against this whole Teddy business in the future, as I should have done frankly at first. He may be God Almighty's own individual and single man of genius, but by the splendour of the deity, he is not the man for me nor I for him... If you see a chance to blow cold on Teddy do so... The drunken whoreson buggar and bully living himself in the best hotels, and smashing inoffensive strangers in a bar! It is sickening... The violence of this letter comes from my helplessness; all I try to do for W.E. (in the best way) by writing these plays is burked by this inopportune lad. Can nothing be done? In the meanwhile I add another £20 to W.E.'s credit.'⁴²

It is also to Stevenson's credit that he should remember his old friend like this, but if William was his brother's keeper Stevenson was not.

Edward Henley was no part of the initial bargain and his later spendthrift ways greatly affected the attitude of the American backers. Finally they too had had enough. The rest of the performances were cancelled and the tour was brought abruptly to an end.

The New York Herald reported:

* Charles Baxter's wife was also called Grace.

'The "Deacon Brodie" Company, in connection with which suit has been brought against J.M.Hill for refusing to carry out his contract to play this week in the Union Square Theatre, will probably not resume its tour of the country. Mr Redfern, who backed the enterprise, has "laid down," as technically-spoken theatrical people put it, and for this reason, Mr.⁴³ Robert Louis Stevenson's interesting play may not be seen again.'

Deacon Brodie had made his third exit and this time there was no call back before the curtain. Its end had almost been as violent and sudden as Brodie's in the version of the play as played by Henley:

Brodie:

'I've lived a man and I'll die as I've lived. I had but one pleasure in life; it was to fool and jiggle and jockey you one and all. I've done it always, damn you; and damn you, I'll do it once more.' (He dies attempting to escape.)⁴⁴

Teddy meantime, had heard that their beloved mother had died and in his grief did the first thing that came into his head and fled to Chicago.

'I was affected almost to the point of delirium. I set off to Chicago in a madcap quest of anything that might come my way... Oh, I've forgotten to tell you that while on a joint starring tour in the West with Aubrey Boucicault, whom I consider a man of great talent, I met my third wife. Having divorced myself from the first two, I married again.'⁴⁵

Teddy's third wife was his luckiest. A woman of considerable individuality, herself, she was more than a match for his Henleyesque volatility. Helen Bertram was a very successful performer in her day. She was devoted to her art, her wayward husband and their only daughter, Rosina Henley, who became an actress herself and starred on Broadway in A Man From Home in 1913 at the age of seventeen and played opposite Dustin Farnum in the following year.

On March 9, 1888, William Henley sat down in his study at 1 Merton Place, Chiswick, and wrote a fateful letter to Stevenson in Saranac Lake in New York State. He marked it 'Private and Confidential' and it was to prove highly contentious. This was the first letter in the infamous 'Nixie' controversy and it was to have a fatal effect on the long friendship between the two men. The contents of the letter have no great relevance to the present discussion and will be dealt with more fully in the next stage of this study, but it did contain one sentence which had immediate reference to Deacon Brodie.

It was only a line but it was enough -

'As you say, if the play has failed in New York there's an end of it.'⁴⁶

Yet only weeks later, he was still on about plays, writing to Stevenson reminding him that Fleeming Jenkin had once said -

'I am not sure that Henley could not write a play but you are hindering him not helping him.'⁴⁷

Stevenson commented to Baxter:

'He has written me another letter in which he tells me - what is perhaps true - that I have "cumbered him with my aid" in the matter of the plays. I fear it may be so...'⁴⁸

It is yet a further irony of the Stevenson-Henley theatrical saga that William's name should be further extended in America, a country he professed to dislike, and by an American citizen who was also his niece. Similarly with Stevenson, the stage connection was to be maintained by his step-daughter's son, Austin Strong, also an American, who, a decade later, became a professional playwright on Broadway.

The strain may have told on both partners, but the histrionic element persisted in both strains, so to speak, albeit on the stepside as far as Stevenson was concerned. However, at the time now under review, 1887/8, it is only pertinent to consider how far Deacon Brodie had come from the Torquay schoolboy draft through the Swanston and Saville Club redrafts to the final professional performances in Philadelphia and to consider how much the original Stevenson conception had gained or lost by the input of the two brothers Henley.

DEACON BRODIE

COMMENT AND ANALYSIS

In December 1878, Stevenson wrote to his mother about Deacon Brodie:

'I don't wish the play spoken of at all; for of course, as a first attempt, it will most likely come to nothing. It is, however pretty good in parts. I work three hours every morning here in the club on the brouillons; and then three in the afternoon on the fair copy. In bed by ten; here again in the morning, to the consternation of the servants, as soon as the club is open.'

Professor Irving Saposnik, in a chapter of his Stevenson study, headed 'A Skelt-Drunken Boy' neatly sums up the play-beginnings between Stevenson and Henley with Deacon Brodie:

'Stevenson contributed a not-too-well-made play by which they hoped to capture the London public and insure their financial stability; Henley offered a calling card to backstage, a foothold in the greenroom, and above all, encouragement.'

The significance of the credited authorship in the first publication of the performance text in 1879 and again in 1888 and the maintenance of Henley's name as leading the partnership in the first published version in 1892, cannot be over-stressed. As indicated above, it illuminates one aspect of the partnership which is perhaps the key to understanding it, and that is that Henley was very much in charge, even from the beginning, and certainly in this, their first production. For this reason alone, the finished work tended to look back towards the old drama and plays like Paul Clifford and Jack Sheppard rather than towards the new as exemplified in the work of Henry Arthur Jones, for instance, whose plays Stevenson is known to have admired. For Stevenson, as Saposnik points out:

'The models they were using contained too much "string", conventional trappings dictated by outworn fashion rather than by the requirements of "moved representation". Dramatic fashion was caught in a cleverly contrived but ultimately meaningless procedure which devoted itself to the mechanical repetition of devices calculated to please the most primitive and shallow taste of its audience.'

This has evidence of the 'Skelt-drunken boy' whose theatre mores owed much to the transpontine dramas of the old Surrey and Coburg playhouses as Sir Arthur Pinero points out in his lecture on Stenson as Dramatist.

* The Saville Club.

Deacon Brodie was not, nor was it intended to be, a pioneering work of theatre. It was seen as, and written as, a melodrama, albeit with psychological undertones in the eponymous character. No matter any auxiliary or literary finery attached it must always be seen as such and allowed the faults and virtues of the form as it was seen and recognised in its day. Melodrama has been recognised by such as Eric Bentley as 'the quintessence of drama', that is, drama in its elemental form. Saposnik extends this by defining the mode as 'an elemental form whose essence is dream and whose impulse is escape.'⁵²

He believes that the Brodie of the original reading is meant to be a noble rebel whose nobility is diminished by his inability to distinguish between pride and principle, while the Brodie of the revised version is no longer rebellious and is more like a combination of Hamlet and Antony, which Henley considered so well described Stevenson himself. What must be first borne in mind is that Deacon Brodie is essentially a Scottish story, and even more particularly an Edinburgh story with its stress on respectability and the keeping up of front, no matter what things may be going behind lace curtains or closed doors. The duality of the central character of Brodie is yet another metaphor for this. His two faces tend to a condition of 'two-facedness' which is something one feels Stevenson, as an Edinburgh man, would have known particularly well. Yet one can feel Henley's hand here, restraining Stevenson's Scottishness in favour of criminal slang.

The claustrophobic pressure of Edinburgh's two faces, the contrast in social mores, is only hinted at in the scenes between the two women, Mary and Jean, and between the Deacon and his Procurator-Fiscal uncle, Lawson. This last character is one of the best realised because he has recourse to native Scots as well as to his lawyer's Latin. Stevenson's voice is heard clearly in both aspects. But apart from Hunt, the Bow Street runner, one wonders why so many Englishmen are in Edinburgh - Humphrey Moore, George Smith and the highwayman, Captain Smith. To balance these we have only three recognisable Scots - Lawson, Andrew Ainslie and Jean Watt. Walter Leslie is virtually English in speech and style. This lessens the impact that the specific Edinburgh locale and colour might have given the piece. This was North Britain not Scotland. Edinburgh, N.B. is a very different place from Dunedin, or Auld Reekie, the ancient capital of an older Scotland hardly seen in the play.

Dr John Kelman affirms the essential Scottishness of both subject and setting in Deacon Brodie:

'Apart from its merits or demerits as a play, the piece is noteworthy as a living picture of the times it represents. By countless, minutest touches it wakens response in a Scottish reader. Even its use of the title 'Deacon' ("Lie there, Deacon," etc.) is true to the life; for the old-time Scotsman rejoiced in all that was in the nature of a title. He named himself from his work, and was to his neighbours 'the smith', 'the minister' and so on, as by a conscious claim of right. In this characteristic title, and many other touches besides, the native reader sees to what purpose Stevenson loved and studied Scotland. Yet beyond all that there is the grim psychology of the closing scenes of the play, to say nothing of their melodrama... He who would know the real meaning of Stevenson's visit to Brodie's Wynd must read Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde which is its ultimate product...'

But with Deacon Brodie, Stevenson the Scotsman was writing with an Englishman for an English audience. He was also writing for the theatre, and to him, writing for the stage demanded an English mode. Added to which, all his writing hitherto was for English publication so his bias in this respect is not surprising. It lost the play nonetheless a valuable and vibrant dynamic. There is colour in language and rich, rough tones have been lost to an over-riding glaze of city-slickness that is more Stepney than Grassmarket. For instance, in the actual dialogue used there could have been a greater use of colloquial Scots by the native Brodies at home to contrast with their 'Englishness' out in the world - another aspect of the Deacon's two lives. What should have been offered is a more direct contrast between real dialogue and patter. It is noteworthy that while some London critics thought the 'Scotch Dialect' of Jean Watt incomprehensible, the American critics thought it charming and appropriate.

This is only another example of London parochialism. A capital failing she shares with Paris and Edinburgh. It has to be remembered that at the time of the original performances New York had all the status of a large provincial city but that does not always indicate provincial attitudes. Yet on comparing the notices for Deacon Brodie from either side of the Atlantic, one might be reading about two different plays, which perhaps, given young Edward Henley's youthful involvement, may indeed have been the case. The truth was, he reverted to the first draft text, no doubt with embellishments of his own.

Leading actors down the whole history of dramaturgy have never totally subscribed to the primacy of the written text. Too often, in the Deacon Brodie text as published, good speaking lines were clouded by extra lines added (always a sign of heavy rewriting) and the present script might be well served by cutting. The authors were aware of this themselves by indicating passages which might be omitted in the playing. Henley's command of slang is evident all through (he did co-edit Farmer's Dictionary of Slang) but it is occasionally overdone to the point of obscurity.

The good lines are not shown to best effect because of weak characterisation, again another sign of haste. The critic, Desmond MacCarthy, (1877-1952) is not the only one to voice the view that all the Stevenson-Henley plays show signs of being finished in a hurry. Were they, one wonders, so in awe of Fanny's fury that they had to get everything done on paper quickly before the next storm broke? This is not as fanciful as it might appear as she and Henley had been living on a knife edge since Hyeres, despite their original conspiracy about the writing of plays. To Stevenson she might have been 'the violent friend' but to his partner in plays she was, or was to become without doubt, 'the brimstone enemy'. If they were to work together they had to work quickly. The deep study was neglected in favour of the quick sketch and the cartoon likeness was preferred to the portrait in oils. This may have been the reason that resort was made so often to old-fashioned narrative devices such as the soliloquy and the aside.

The soliloquies do not hold because we (the audience) do not know enough about the background of the persons speaking. We need to come to know them in the theatre, to like them if possible, before we can totally believe them. This knowledge is gained by little signs and details given by the playwright(s) in the writing of the play - extra points and subtleties which gradually accrete in the audience's understanding of the person presented so that eventually they have the sense of a real person before them in the character as represented by the actor. This needs time and subtlety of development and is one of the required skills of the playwright. What is most irritating about this play is that there are so many signals here of what might have been entertaining characters in an interesting situation. It is an excellent basic story and should have been told more simply in stage terms.

As it is, it writhes in the contrived and artful manner of already outdated theatrical conventions. The use of the aside in certain situations as presented here (especially in the unmasking of Brodie by Leslie) is not only time-wasting, but technically difficult in the playing. Acting is action for the most part and the words are complementary to it not a substitute for it. Because of the lack of 'background' information the audience is often at loss to ascribe motives for the action they see before them (Brodie's sudden capitulation to the other gang members in Act 2 Scene 9 and the specific reasons behind Jean's visit to the Brodie house in Act 5 Scene 2).

Too many tantalising dramatic possibilities are not carried through - for example, the relationships between Brodie and his father, between Brodie and Jean Watt, between Jean Watt and Mary Brodie - and too many good lines are lost in the general rush towards the end. Even the denouement is hurried and Brodie's death gives the impression that he too is glad to finish and get it all over. This is a real pity as the central idea is first-rate and there are enough incidents in his story to provide half-a-dozen subplots and a stageful of interesting characters. Brodie's Edinburgh was certainly more than a backdrop in a theatre. It was a theatre in itself and was a boon in terms of the theatricality it offered a writer for the stage. It would have written itself had the writers acceded to it. Henley had wit and the feel of it but lacked the spark of drama to realize it. Stevenson had the spark but a wilful playfulness may have worked against its bursting into theatrical flame.

Irving Saposnik considers that the major difference between the first and the last revised version of Deacon Brodie may be measured in the successive lessening of the Deacon's villainy. The character may have a fuller self-awareness, but in Saposnik's words, 'artistic realization is clearly apart from existential fulfillment.' He says:

'Just as the first Brodie is killed trying to escape, his dying words echoing the defiance with which he has lived, so the second Brodie runs out his life upon a sword, his dying words enforcing the bitter irony that a new life can be found only in death.'⁵⁴

His death is a deliberate sacrifice. This Brodie was like Macaire - he stole in order to retire an honest man. He was sick of wearing faces. 'Shall not a man have half a life of his own?' Half being better than nothing. The revised Brodie is indeed a changed man.

But is he changed for the better or for the worse? He could not be ALL bad, in Henley's opinion. If he were,

'The public could not sympathise with him, and sympathise the public must, or the play goes to hell.'⁵⁵

Henley here has hit on what amounts to a theatre axiom and that is if the central character does not engage the audience in a wholly personal manner they will concern themselves little with him in the action of the play and thus deny their sympathy. An audience only follows where it wants to go, and if they do not go with the hero, there is little point in the theatre journey at all. For this reason, most heroes in the theatre tend to be handsome or charming and all heroines are beautiful. This is another instance of practicality determining convention in traditional theatre practice. There is always a good underlying reason for any cliché.

Brodie saw himself as a man of business and was not at all cynical about his duplicity. As he says - 'They call it cynicism in France, but here we call it business instinct.' It was an instinct served him well. J.H.Buckley sees the play as the decline and fall of an strong-willed, activist hero -

'(whose) real defeat strikes home not through any remorse of conscience but rather through a sense of humiliation at the hands of the shoddy villain Moore. His power had gone when he must argue with his lieutenant: "I'm the Deacon, am I not?"... Ultimately his free decision is overruled by the clutch of circumstance. Returning from his last robbery and murder, he is confident that his locked bedroom door will provide the certain alibi... but the doctor, called by Brodie's sister Mary to attend her dying father, has forced it open with the help of a servant to summon him to the bedside...'⁵⁶

Act 5 Scene 5 is the crux of the plot. It is certainlyactable. There is plenty of space left for the actor's interpretation. The use of pause, repetition, uneven lines, rhetorical questions and non sequitur allows the performer a generous licence in playing and most good actors would respond to this. This particular scene nicely illustrates the playing script as opposed to literary drama where the word is meant to be admired on the page and is rarely uttered. The problem of having a poet (Henley) and a novelist (Stevenson) combining to make a play is that they work to each other's weaknesses of style. They think that if a thing reads well it will play well but the opposite is more often truer theatrically.

The big difference between an acting script and a piece of literature is that the former is written to be spoken and the latter to be read. In Brodie, generally speaking, the dialogue is secondary to the monologue because both authors feel comfortable with the soliloquy. For too much of the action, it is Deacon Brodie solus. Despite its intensity of theme, the play never breaks out of the limiting structure imposed upon it. There was a real play here struggling to get out. One feels that the services of a theatre hack for a day at Bournemouth would have been a very profitable investment for all parties concerned. G.R.Sims, or Pettit, for instance, would have repaid his modest fee a hundredfold. Some critics made this very point as did Sir Arthur Pinero in his Stevenson lecture.

'The character and plot of Deacon Brodie offered scope in which Fitzball and the old hacks of the Surrey and Coburg would have revelled. It was as full of melodramatic possibilities as Sweeney Todd but the future author of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, for 'Lack of stagecraft' as he put it, failed to realise the theatrical effect of 'The Double Life' of the title.'⁵⁷

Broadly speaking, if Henley is Brodie in action, then Stevenson is his conscience. One cannot help but be intrigued by the thought of what the young Stevenson's original draft might have been like. No doubt, it would have had all the deficiencies of a juvenile work but it would have had its advantages too - passion, sincerity, immediacy. If the adult Stevenson could have attained the tautness of line he worked to develop in his prose, and retained the comic compassion he sought in the drama he might indeed have written a play here. The recipe was at hand - a strong central character, love interest, subplot and characters drawn from respectable Edinburgh life as well as its Hogarthian underworld. Unfortunately, it was a case of too many cooks - or one cook too many. The piece was over-cooked in fact, and as a result, its original taste was lost. That taste was a taste of Scotland, and more particularly, a taste of Edinburgh, a town taste, with soot in it. Who knew this better than Stevenson, as these excerpts from Picturesque Notes will show:

'And yet the place establishes an interest in people's hearts; go where they will, they find no city of the same distinction; go where they will they take a pride in their old home... Great people of yore, kings and queens, buffoons and grave ambassadors, played their stately farce for centuries in Holyrood... Now, all these things of clay are mingled with the dust, the king's crown itself is shown for sixpence to the

vulgar... from their smoky beehives, ten storeys high, the unwashed look down on the open squares and gardens of the wealthy; and gay people sunning themselves along Princes Street, with its mile of commercial palaces, all beflagged upon some great occasion, see, across a garden valley set with statues, where the washing of the old town flutter in the breeze at its high windows... Egyptian and Greek temples, Venetian palaces and Gothic spires are huddled one over another in a most admired disorder; while above all, the brute mass of the Castle and the summit of Arthur's seat look down upon these imitations with a becoming dignity, as the works of Nature may look down upon the monuments of Art. The lamps begin to glitter upon the street, and faint lights to burn in the high windows across the valley - the feeling grows upon you... that this profusion of eccentricities, this dream in masonry and living rock is not a drop scene in a theatre...'⁵⁸

Yet it was exactly that, this city - his city. This was his play, had he only known it. Edinburgh, not only as the drop scene in the theatre but the centre-stage that was Robert Louis Stevenson's by birthright and instinct. He was always conscious of 'the fragility and unreality of that scene wherein we play our uncomprehending parts.'

The play was all there waiting to be worked on, but then as every theatre person knows, from his day to this, if the play is to work you have to work at the play.*

The most recent Deacon Brodie was produced at the Royal Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh on 9 November 1978 for a three week season in a text adapted by Tom Gallacher, who says he -

'saw Deacon Brodie as a double play with two distinct styles - high melodrama and low comedy with a mix of mordant satire.'

He also saw it as 'a memorial to Edinburgh and posits, like John Kelman, that has its basis in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde but -

'the play being closer to the source, argues a more general application than the chemically induced pathology of the famous book. In brief, we all have access to hypocrisy, few to magic potions.'⁶⁰

The Royal Lyceum production was directed by Joan Knight with design by Mark Negin and lighting by Andre Tammes. Music was arranged by Robert Handleigh. The cast was as follows, in order of appearance:

* A copy of the first version of Deacon Brodie was printed in the Monterey Edition of the Stevenson's Works (New York, 1906. Vol 8).

Mary Brodie	Muriel Romanes
Mrs Clarke	Maureen Beattie
Walter Leslie	William Lindsay
Deacon William Brodie	Paul Young
Procurator-Fiscal Lawson	James Cairncross
Jean Watt	Jeni Giffen
Jerry Hunt	Darryl Forbes-Dawson
George Smith	Roy Samson
Humphrey Moore	Roy Boutcher
Andrew Ainslie	Charles Nowosielski
The Fiddler	Robert Handleigh
Serving Boy	Lloyd Quinan
with Kate Fraser and Thomas Dean Burn as others.	

Critic Allen Wright reported in the The Scotsman:

'R.L.Stevenson's widow noted that he had no particular liking for dramatic composition but he was infected by the enthusiasm of W.E.Henley with whom he wrote four plays. The first of these was "Deacon Brodie" which Tom Gallacher has revived for presentation at the Royal Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh.

Since childhood, Stevenson had been fascinated by stories of the respectable craftsman whose nature changed when darkness descended on Edinburgh and who spent the night picking locks and consorting with rogues. Though the play was not a great success when first produced in 1884 and has subsequently been neglected, it gave rise to one of Stevenson's most popular works - ("Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde"). The distinction between good and evil is not however so clearly drawn in "Deacon Brodie". He simply makes the mistake of failing to keep up appearances and, in a speech from the scaffold, exhorts his listeners - "to cling to hypocrisy". Brodie is made the object of sympathy rather than of scorn. In escaping from the prim conventions of Edinburgh, he has become trapped in a life of crime. Paul Young's commendably subdued performance avoids any show of unctiousness on the one hand, or villainy on the other. He is seen as a victim of circumstances. The performances given by James Cairncross as the Procurator-Fiscal and by Charles Nowosielski as a cringing scoundrel are among the other attractions of the Lyceum Company's first production for six months. But Darryl Forbes-Dawson should have been restrained from playing the part of the Bow Street runner as if he were captain Hook. His extravagance of gesture frequently reduces everything to melodramatic farce. Such flamboyance seems to be out of keeping with the general style of Joan Knight's production which is enhanced by the admirable revolving sets designed by Mark Nevin.'

Richard Mowe ('R.M.') reported in the Edinburgh Evening News:

'There must be something in the Edinburgh air to encourage duplicity - dark deeds below the surface, hypocrisy above - muses the the notorious Deacon Brodie, master joiner and villain. Then he jumps down from the gallows and stands back to admire his craftsmanship - and the play has begun as it means to continue. Tom Gallacher's adaptation sharpens the focus of the sprawling Victorian melodrama... to shed light in equal measure on the two opposing natures of the Deacon and his city...

Paul Young's performance as Brodie impressively catches the character's split personalities. Young relishes his asides to the audience right up to the final moment when he re-mounts the self-made gallows to meet his fate and utters his last words for our benefit...⁶²

In a letter to the present writer, the actor himself, Paul Young, the only man to have actually played the part since Edward Henley, speaks of his own views of Deacon Brodie and of Stevenson as a playwright. While he did not perform the actual script made available to Henley, and worked from a modern adaptation his comments have interest in that they proffer the contemporary working actor's viewpoint - a point of view too rarely considered in academic theatrical research. Mr Young writes:

'I'm not sure that R.L.S. was the world's great playwright and the combined talents of... Tom Gallacher, who adapted the play and Joan Knight, who directed with a firm hand were barely able to take the least desirable elements of melodrama out of the piece. I say this as a huge fan of Stevenson and as someone who has played him and also (acted) in many radio adaptations of his work... There were the usual difficulties with the shape of the piece... Eventually we started with Brodie about to be hanged (on a gibbet he had designed himself) and addressing the audience... The play was then acted out. It ended with another speech from the Deacon on the subject of hypocrisy and the trap being sprung.

It was odd doing the play close to the area where the Deacon went about his double dealings. I wandered about the streets and closes pertinent to the play and, unusual for me, even had the odd pint in Deacon Brodie's Tavern - only to get the feel of the place you understand!

The play had quite good notices (and) the audience quite enjoyed it, but we played to less than full houses. Melodrama in the late seventies was perceived as being dated... As with little performed plays, it is often the case that they are little performed because they fall short of the mark in some respect. All in all, I'm glad to have taken part in the play, but given the opportunity to repeat the exercise, I would think very seriously about it...⁶²

There speaks the voice of the acting practitioner, to whom the script is no more than the practical guide towards the gaining of the required stage effect but Mr Young's point regarding the play's paucity of a performance history is well made even though the same comment has been also made by such as Pinero and Clayton Hamilton.

The Edinburgh reaction was to see Brodie as a victim of his circumstances - and object of sympathy rather than scorn and Paul Young's performance appears to have reflected this.

* This establishment is bogus. It is a former grocer's shop (Andrews).

Christopher Small had another view of Brodie in The Glasgow Herald.

'William Brodie, - so beguilingly described in the Dictionary of National Biography as "Deacon of the Incorporation of Edinburgh Wrights and Masons and burglar" - had, or has more than two lives of course. Apart from the division of occupations noted above there is at least one other, between the Brodie of historical record and that of popular myth; it was the latter, with sentimental additions of their own, that Stevenson and Henley used for their play - a thumping melodrama which fairly briefly held the stage here nearly 100 years ago.

Brodie here is the man who not only brings his father's white hairs in sorrow to the grave but addresses remarks to the audience about the division in his breast, the awful warning of his fate and so forth; and is surrounded by as complete a set of ready-made characters - bluff, honest uncle, sweet, trusting sister with high-minded suitor in attendance, horribly wicked boon companions and accomplices - as ever were taken from nineteenth-century stock. No harm in that; the revival might have made a genial vehicle in which the Royal Lyceum Company, after more than six month's absence, could return home. But it carries with it two liabilities:

First, it is quite incapable of conveying the psychological subtleties of the Divided Self, of black and white within the single soul or city, which Tom Gallacher indicates in his programme notes but (his own brief prologue apart) has signally failed to extract from the original playscript. And second, and more important for effect in performance, it requires an entirely different style of acting from the ordinary, quasi-realistic, and rather flat manner adopted by the cast.⁶³

And there you have the Edinburgh and Glasgow viewpoints, which, almost inevitably, contradict each other. Edinburgh considers some of the playing too flamboyant and Glasgow, that the playing style is not flamboyant enough. The present writer must state his interest here and declare, as a Glasgow man, my agreement is with the latter. Flamboyance is nearer the playing style demanded, which looked for a heightened realism rather than a low-level naturalism. It is after all announced as a melodrama, and by Stevenson himself, as 'hugger-mugger' at that.

Stevenson's obsession with hypocrisy might have theatrical roots. The word itself is derived from the Greek 'hypokrites' meaning pretender or dissembler, in other words, an actor. To many eighteenth-century Scottish minds, despite its being the Age of Enlightenment, God and Satan existed as co-equals and there is a symbiotic element in Deacon Brodie. He has two faces. The actual story in real life is as thrilling and incredible as any make-believe or fiction. This is an element in the narrative which so far has escaped the attention of adaptors in any of the media up to the present time.

The facts of Brodie's trial at the High Court of Edinburgh before Lord Braxfield are still available verbatim as it was the first ever case to be reported by shorthand. These actual records could yet prove valuable source material for the definitive Brodie play. While life may on occasions imitate art, artists recognise that when art imitates life it strikes a common chord between artist and audience/spectator and reverberates to their mutual benefit. We see ourselves in all art if we look closely enough and nowhere more than in the art of the drama. William Roughhead, in his Introduction to the revised edition of The Trial of William Brodie in 1914, observed:

'The trial of Deacon Brodie has many claims upon the attention of a later age. It is of value to the antiquarian for the vivid picture it presents of the manners and customs of our forebears at a time when the life of Edinburgh yet flowed in the ancient arteries of the old city on the ridge, although beginning to circulate more freely in the spacious thoroughfares of the new Town already invading the fields across the valley. To the lawyer it is notable as affording a singularly graphic view of the old-time practice of our criminal Courts, as well as for the galaxy of legal talent engaged upon its conduct - with such men as Braxfield upon the bench, and Henry Erskine and John Clerk at the bar, the proceedings could lack neither picturesqueness nor importance. The psychologic nature of the chief actor's character and the dramatic elements in which his career abounds make a more general appeal; and so long as human nature remains the same will the story of the Deacon's downfall be accorded an indulgent hearing... It may even be that the conception of "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" was suggested to Stevenson by his study of the dual nature so strikingly exemplified in his earlier hero...'⁶⁴

The Scottish playwright, Donald McKenzie, wrote his version of the story as The Private Lives of Deacon Brodie as a rehearsed reading for the Edinburgh Playwrights Workshop Company at the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh on Tuesday 1 December 1987 with the following cast:

William Brodie	- Michael David
Jean Watt	- Vari Sylvester
Provost Hamilton	- Brown Derby
Lord Braxfield	- Bill Murdoch
Lachie Mackinnon	- Roddy Simpson
George Smith	- Paul Dixey
Anne Grant	- Isabella Jarret
Sandy Carmichael	- Bill Murdoch
Harry Maxwell	- Paul Dixey
Charlie Proudfoot	- Roddy Simpson
Doctor Degrauers	- Paul Dixey
Hangman	- Brown Derby

Brown Derby was the only survivor from the Royal Lyceum cast of 1978.

An interesting addition in Mr Mackenzie's adaptation is the character of Lord Braxfield, the model for Stevenson's original Justice Clerk in Weir of Hermiston. This proves to be a good dramatic stroke. If a modern playwright so devotes his time and energy to the subject then it is obvious that the Deacon's story continues to interest. Stevenson's idee fixe of duality in the eponymous role or two persons in or as one as exemplified in Dr.Jekyll and Mr.Hyde and The Master of Ballantrae as well as in Deacon Brodie is a syndrome that appears to have a particularly Caledonian resonance. One cannot help feel that the last word on Deacon William Brodie on stage may not yet have been said.

Finally, it is to be hoped that the film of Deacon Brodie projected by Edinburgh Films and scripted by George McDonald Fraser, may yet be made, not only for its intrinsic value as a Scottish historical escapade but as a further justification of the young Stevenson's perspicacity in seeing the events of William Brodie's life as a vehicle for dramatic representation. This however, may be one of the problems with his play - its long gestation. Considering that Stevenson began a version of it when he was fifteen and that it was not confirmed as a playing text until he was thirty-eight and not published till he was forty-two, it is little wonder that he felt so removed from it by the end. This may have been exacerbated in addition by Henley's many revisions, but the fact remains that not only was the play itself much changed, so was Stevenson. It was not only William Brodie that died at the end of the Bow Street Runner's sword, but something of each of the writers' youth. Play, so to speak, would be men's work now.

It may have seemed the end of the Deacon on stage but 1884 only signalled the beginning of the next drama phase for both of them. The only trouble with the playwriting enterprise at this time was that for all Henley's industry a vital, necessary spark was missing - a total and committed Stevenson. In the face of this lack, it required a doughty stoker to keep the dramatic fires lit at all but Henley was just such an artificer. His attitude was that if his business was now to be plays, then by God, plays it would be.

Stevenson, the man of journeys, was about to make a serious attempt to become a journeyman-playwright, the play-acting youth was set to become a theatre professional, the 'gifted boy' was already giving way to the 'blighted man', but the essential Stevenson was never to change.

The move from Literature to Drama was to prove a difficult weaning process and it would never ever be totally completed for either man. Paradoxically, and aptly, for two such contradictory personalities, they were about to start an even closer association. Even if Stevenson, for his part, was growing daily more doubtful of the whole play project, Henley had enough confidence for both of them, and, what is more important, Mrs Fanny Stevenson still hoped that they would strike 'theatre gold'.

For their old friendship's sake, Stevenson would now give Henley and the partnership its last, but most productive hour. It was to be all or nothing in one last gamble. The dice was thrown and they would both now act on it - and respond to the uncompromising stage direction which now read boldly - MOVE TO BOURNEMOUTH.

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

STAGE FOUR
'Playing Bournemouth'

'If I can only get off the stage with clean hands,
I shall sing Hosanna.'
(Letters, 111,27)

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

STAGE FOUR

Section A

'Then a soldier'

Samuel Lloyd Osbourne (1868-1947) remembers that, 'in the lovely autumn of 1884':

'Henley came - a great, glowing, massive-shouldered fellow with a big, red beard and a crutch; jovial, astoundingly clever, and with a laugh that rolled out like music... and he had come to make us all rich!... RLS was no longer to plod along as he'd been doing; Henley was to abandon his grinding and ill-paid editorship; together they would combine to write plays that would run for hundred of nights and bring in thousands of pounds...'

Playwriting was to resume...

'Beau Austin was written in four days, and I shall never forget Henley reading it aloud - so movingly, so tenderly, that my eyes were wet with tears.'

Lloyd Osbourne's recollections are not quite matched by his mother's. It must be explained that Mrs Margaret Stevenson, Louis's mother, who was a regular visitor, had given her son "a dreadful cold". This prompted the other Mrs Stevenson to tell Colvin that he (Henley) - 'might as well bring his influenza here, and join us, as he can do no (more) harm.'³ Fanny Stevenson writes further:

'My husband had no particular liking for dramatic composition, though Prince Otto was first outlined as a play; but Mr Henley possessed an extraordinary faculty for infecting others with his enthusiasm... The plays were invented and written in the fervid, boisterous fashion of Mr. Henley, whose influence predominated, except in the actual literary form. A very thin, elastic scenario was first sketched out, which was afterward greatly extended and elaborated in a series of paragraphs contributed alternately by each author. It was agreed between them that did one object to what the other had written, it should be stricken out without argument - a proceeding that I cannot but believe was damaging to the work of both. My husband's view of playwriting was to make a literary tour-de-force built on the old conventions, Mr. Henley's to startle the public. It is possible that either, alone, might have been successful, but together they were too much at cross purposes.

"That'll make them jump, my boy!" Mr Henley would shout, striking the table till the ink-bottle rattled. "No, Henley," my husband would protest wearily, "you're too violent. That must be toned down." But, according to the agreement, it had to be ³thrown out, and in the new attack something would be lost by both.'

Henley came to the drama partnership never having written a word for the theatre but having read Alfred de Musset and the elder Dumas in French. He was also able to compare the 'piece bien faite' of Eugene Scribe (1791-1861) with the available theatrical journalism of such as Tom Taylor and G.R. Sim. Of Scribe, he said:

'The theory of Scribe is one of mere dexterity; his drama is a perpetual chasse-croise at the edge of a precipice, a dance of puppets among swords that might but will not cut and eggs that might but will not break; to him a situation is a kind of tight-rope to be crossed with ever so much agility and an endless affectation of peril by all his characters in turn; in fact, as M. Dumas fils has said of him, he is - "le Shakespeare des ombres choisies". The theory of Dumas is the very antipodes of this. "All I want," he said.⁴ "is four trestles, four boards, two actors, and a passion."⁴

There was no doubt that Henley was intellectually equipped to essay a work for the stage and 'there's the rub'. The approach was from the head and not the heart, yet in the same essay on Dumas, Henley states his own case for the drama:

'Drama to him was so much emotion in action. If he invented a situation he accepted its issues in their entirety, and did his utmost to express from it all the passion it contained.'⁵

Henley also made, in the essay, an unwitting comment on collaboration:

'It pleased the great man to consider himself of more importance than any and all of the crowd of collaborators whose ideas he developed, whose raw material he wrought up into the achievement we know; and he was given to take credit to himself not only for the success and value of a particular work but for the whole thing - the work in quiddity, so to speak...'⁶

Henley was a man of many passions, but the first was for words and in whatever medium but now his task was to persuade Louis to join him in this rough wooing of Melpomene and Thalia. Henley's aim was, as Buckley puts it, 'an attempt to bring Art to the English Playhouse'. In Henley's opinion he had the matter and Stevenson had the style; between them they would 're-create the Romantic Drama in terms of prose.'⁷

The prime mover in the enterprise would always be Henley as Stevenson had reason to point out later -

'You were not quite sincere with yourself; you were seeking arguments to make me devote myself to PLAYS - unbeknown, of course, to yourself.'⁸

It was hard to imagine Henley doing anything 'unbeknown to himself', but one way or other, he had got Stevenson interested in plays again.

A cholera epidemic had driven the household, including Valentine Roch, the faithful young maid, from Hyeres in the summer of 1884 and Bournemouth in England was chosen as the next location in the continuing trial and error of keeping R.L.S. alive. To begin with they had moved into lodgings, to Wensleydale, a tall house, high on the cliff, with good views over to the Isle of Wight. By this time, as has been noted above, Fanny's attitude to Henley had undergone a complete change since the relative failure of Deacon Brodie in London.

Her hand was still 'greedy for gold' but she made it clear to her husband that his friend was 'a wearing and ill-mannered companion' who made too many inroads into their small store of whisky. One feels the same went for all the other old, hearty relatives and friends who came to see, talk with, listen to, work with and generally attend her frail but indomitable spouse. She need not have wasted her energy. The Henley force once under way was well-nigh unstoppable. There was a lot of wine (and whisky) yet to flow under the table.

Lucas reports that Fanny -

"quite broke down under the strain"; her one solace being "dear Henry James"... who through it all remained faithful, though he suffered bitterly and openly.⁹

Fanny feared more a worse strain on Louis' slender store of stamina and that he would overexcite himself into another haemorrhage but, like her son, Lloyd, she was all for the drama experiment although one wonders if she really approved as her precious, surviving son proudly enrolled himself as one of Henley's 'young men', making him perhaps the first fragile craft in what came to be known as 'The Henley Regatta'. He hero-worshipped the vociferous journalist almost as much as he did 'Lulu', his invalid step-father.

It was often a very merry occasion this reunion of the two writers in Bournemouth. The old friends had become collaborators - always a dangerous threat to any friendship - but at this time, as at most, each turned a blind eye to the other's demerits and forged ahead in an equally blind optimism. Henley and his wife, Anna, moved into lodgings at the nearby Branksome Park near the Stevensons who were then at Bonallie Towers. The lines were set down, the pages were filled, the days and nights were passed and somehow four plays were written between the three Stevenson Bournemouth residences.

The first two (Beau Austin and Admiral Guinea) were written virtually at the same time although the published editions give the Admiral precedence, its date given as 'Savannah, this 27th Day of September 1884' under the dedication - 'With Affection and esteem to Andrew Lang from the Survivors of the Walrus'. It had been an expensive operation. The very next day, Stevenson was writing to his parents:

'My Dear People,
I find the lockers entirely empty. Not a cent to the front.
Will you pray send some?... The Henleys have gone, and two plays
practically done. I hope they produce some of the ready.
I am, (your) ever affectionate son...' ¹⁰

Thomas Stevenson duly obliged, as always.

Beau Austin is dated 1st October 1884 and is dedicated -

to George Meredith (1828-1909) 'With Admiration and Respect'.

Thomas Stevenson meantime had read Admiral Guinea in manuscript and had some critical remarks to make. His son lost no time in replying, this time, from what he called, 'The Three B's' -

Bonallie Towers, Branksome Park, Bournemouth on 5 November:

'Allow me to say, in a strictly Pickwickian sense, that you are a silly fellow... I think you exaggerate. I cannot forget that you had the same impression of the Deacon, yet when you saw it played, were less revolted than you looked for; and I will still hope that the Admiral also is not as bad as you suppose... it may be, and it probably is, very ill done; what then? This is a failure. Better luck next time... the old defeat becomes the scene of the new victory. Concern yourself about no failure; they do not cost lives, as in engineering; they are the pierres perdues of successes. Fame is (truly) a vapour; do not think of it; if a writer means well and tries hard, no failure will injure him, whether with God or man. I wish I could hear a brighter account of yourself; but I am inclined to acquit the Admiral of having a share in the responsibility.' ¹¹

Thomas Stevenson had come to like his son's American wife and at this time made a very generous gesture towards his new daughter-in-law - he gave her a house. He made an outright gift of what was to become 'Skerryvore' at 61 Alum Chine, as well as £500 for furniture and fittings. It was a final bid by a loving parent to keep his son in Britain at all costs and Bournemouth was the nearest Louis could get to France while still only a train journey away from Edinburgh. Besides, the Bournemouth sea air was bracing and the pine trees above Branksome Park reminded both father and son of Scotland. Meanwhile, they continued to live in the villa, the grandly-named Bonallie Towers.

From here, Stevenson engaged Henry James in a friendly controversy in the pages of Longman's magazine. It sprung from the latter's reaction to an essay by Stevenson called A Humble Remonstrance, which propounded his views on the proper aims of fiction. His contention was that, as in any art, effects had to be worked for and could not be lifted as finished artistic entities 'from life'. In other words, the artist had to work at his art, it did not arrive ready-made. This was something he might have borne in mind as an embryo playwright.

'People suppose it is the 'stuff' that interests them; they think, for instance, that the prodigious fine thoughts and sentiments in Shakespeare impress by their own weight, not understanding that the unpolished diamond is but a stone. They think that striking situations, or good dialogue, are got by studying life; they will not rise to understand that they are prepared by deliberate artifice and set off by painful suppressions.'¹²

Stevenson here might have been speaking for the actor. It was to this same correspondent he was later to write, in a much different context:

'There was no use in turning life into King Lear... here was a little comedy for Henry James to write.'¹³

It is a matter for regret however that Stevenson did not turn these sound professional precepts into theatrical terms and engage James, a theatre buff himself, in a similar discussion with regard to the making of a contemporary play. The 'deliberate artifice' and 'painful suppressions' required in that area might not have yielded the desired gold but it would have given up diamonds instead of rather ordinary stones. A bit of polish might have easily transformed all of them.

Irving Saposnik has the view that the kind of play the two authors had in mind was much like Henry Arthur Jones's The Masqueraders, or even Taylor's Masks and Faces, which Stevenson might have remembered from his amateur theatricals with Fleeming Jenkin. Saposnik considers that the Bournemouth authors could not make up their minds about the kind of play they wanted - 'intending to revive an essential Pan, they instead draped an inconsequential Beau'.¹⁴ A copy was sent to Sir Arthur Jones (1851-1921), who wrote a paper to which Stevenson replied:

'I am so accustomed to hear nonsense spoken about the arts, and the drama in particular, that I cannot refrain from saying 'Thank You' for your paper. In my answer to Mr. James in the December Longman, you may see that I have merely touched, I think in parenthesis, on the drama; but I believe enough was said to indicate our agreement in essentials.'¹⁵

By January 1885, the Stevensons had taken possession of 'Skerryvore' and Louis was able to proclaim -

'I, on the lintel of this cot, inscribe the name of a strong tower...'¹⁶

A model lighthouse stood at the street door and there was a ship's bell in the garden. Whatever part he was playing in his life-drama, Stevenson could never forget he was a Stevenson. Fanny used the patrimony from Thomas Stevenson to buy a Sheraton dining room and have yellow cushions on the long window seat in the blue drawing room.

Stevenson thought the drawing room was so beautiful

'it was like eating just to sit in it.'¹⁷

Neighbours called. Sir Percy Shelley (the elderly son of the poet) and his Lady, who was convinced that Louis was the re-incarnation of the English poet, visited. Sir Percy was a keen sailor, photographer and amateur actor. Henry James was an occasional visitor as was John Singer Sargent, the painter, William Archer, the critic, and Bob Stevenson of course, (easily overriding Fanny's qualms) bringing his wife, Louisa and his sister Katharine Stevenson de Mattos, the vivacious cousin and the writer of the controversial Nixie short story. Sir Henry Taylor and especially Lady Taylor became friends and later regular correspondents and young Adelaide Boodle came in from next door hoping Stevenson would teach her how to write. He however, had plenty to do in keeping up with Henley and the plays. Lloyd Osbourne was still the fervent acolyte:

'Never was there such another as William Ernest Henley. He had an unimaginable fire and vitality. He swept one off one's feet. There are no words that can describe the quality he had of exalting those about him!'¹⁸

His mother certainly had words for Henley and they were not always as flattering. By March 1885, she was becoming more realistic, if not disillusioned, about the whole playwriting business. She now made little attempt to hide her dislike of her ertswhile partner in the 'gold-mining' project, but for her husband's sake she made a truce with the big, bluff Englishman. Possibly, and naturally, she was anxious about the effect that his continual exuberance would have on Louis and, just as naturally, she was almost sexually jealous of their long friendship and deep understanding. Nevertheless, her love for Louis being greater than her hatred of 'Buffalo Will' (her name for him), she made the effort:

'You know we love you, in spite of your many faults, so try and bear with our few...'¹⁹

Although the old watch-dog was still on her guard:

'When you come, which I hope will be soon, you must not expect Louis to do any work.'²⁰

Naturally, Henley paid no attention to the demands of the 'Bedlamite' (his name for her) and the rift between them widened more, even though Louis managed to keep a grip on each arm. Despite herself, Fanny found herself caught up in the excitement of things and was even to suggest some plot ideas to the partners.* At the least, as we have seen, she remained an interested observer. Even if hers were hardly a dispassionate view, it must be accepted as a succinct assessment of the pair as she saw them at close hand. Here were two clever, able, willing, literate men working on something which enthused them, to a greater and lesser degree, and yet, between them, they could not write a completely successful play. Why? The answer may be that Stevenson, for all his theatricality, had no practised theatre skills, and Henley, for all his knowledge of theatre and plays, had no natural dramatic instinct. It would seem that they each had what the other lacked but because of their quaint working methods, that is, in not discussing but deleting any points of difference, they denied each other the best of their partnership. In effect, they cancelled each other out.

It was stalemate.

At least, they did achieve something on paper for all their efforts at Bournemouth, and the first of these, in the present discussion, is Beau Austin.

* One these ideas was to become The Hanging Judge, an original play, which she and Louis were to work on in the following year.

STAGE FOUR

Section A (i)

BEAU AUSTIN

A copy had also been sent to the dedicatee, George Meredith, (1828-1909) whose work as a novelist, The Ordeal of Richard Feverel (1859) The Egoist (1879), had been strongly championed by Henley. He, however, took little notice of Meredith's reservations about the character of Dorothy Musgrave in the play and refused to alter the script in any way. Professor Saposnik, in his consideration of the play, touches on this very point:

'What Meredith objected to most, despite his general approval of the play, was the insistence on Dorothy's seduction. He argued (in his letter to Stevenson) that it would have been better had she only been compromised... As a supreme stylist himself in the comedy of manners, he rightly perceived that their difficulties increased as they adhered to a dramatic form which limited rather than complimented their thematic intentions.'²¹

Stevenson was a long admirer of Meredith and numbered The Egoist among the books which had influenced him and he tells of an occasion when -

'Meredith read me some chapters before it was published and I said to him, "Now Meredith, own up - you have drawn Sir Willoughby Patterne from ME!" Meredith laughed and said, "No, my dear fellow, I've taken him from all of us, but principally from myself."²²

Meredith was to know something of play collaboration, having later to work with Alfred Sutro on a dramatic adaptation of The Egoist. Sutro relates an anecdote which touches on the more effective aspect of collaboration between writers for the stage. Sutro's method was to adapt Meredith's first draft and he complained that one speech of one character was too long in reply to being told by the heroine that she could only regard him as 'a friend'. The scene was already too long in an act that was too long, explained Sutro. Meredith thought for a moment then simply substituted the following line for the whole page - "Friend? Am I to banquet on that wafer?"²³

As Sutro says, 'So gloriously Meredithian. And so superbly adequate.'

This has relevance to Stevenson particularly, because he was more than capable of writing with the same precise and compact skill. Sutro knew that in theatre less is more as far as acting is concerned, and the sub-text often speaks more effectively than that spoken.

Beau Austin was printed by R & R. Clarke (Edinburgh) with the following play details:

BEAU AUSTIN

A Romantic Comedy

PERSONS REPRESENTED:

George Frederick Austin, called Beau Austin	Aetat 50
John Fenwick, of Allonby Shaw	" 26
Anthony Musgrave, Cornet in the Prince's Own	" 21
Menteith, the Beau's valet	" 55
A Royal Duke (Dumb Show)	
Dorothy Musgrave, Anthony's sister	" 25
Miss Evalina Foster, her Aunt	" 45
Barbara Ridley, her maid	" 20
Visitors to the Wells.	

The Time is 1820. The Scene is laid at Tunbridge Wells.
The action occupies the space of ten hours.

SUMMARY OF ACTION

Dorothy Musgrave is in love with, and is betrayed by, George (Beau) Austin, confidante of the Duke of York. Her long-faithful suitor, Fenwick, pleads with Beau to offer her marriage. He does, and after considerable conflict and recrimination, she agrees and at the last moment, all ends happily.²⁴

Kennedy Williamson writes:

'Whereas Deacon Brodie is a grim and dingy tragedy, this new play is something light as thistledown, a melange of dandies and cravats and antique oaths, of satin dalliance and... damsels in distress. Beau Austin is a rake who is past his heyday but still has such a way with him that a pure-souled girl of good breeding and great charm (Dorothy Musgrave) has yielded herself to his light wooing. He is not at all the crapulous and revolting kind of rake that Hogarth painted, but one in whom elegance is the very breath of life, a swordsman and a duelist... who in affairs of the heart is as straight as a corkscrew, and yet has an engaging manner... The young Northumbrian squire who loved Dorothy from boyhood and to whom she has been betrothed learns now... (that) she still loves the man who has betrayed her. Thereupon, the squire hies himself off to the Beau not to thrash him with his hunting crop... but to plead with him to marry Dorothy! The lady, however... spurns with contumely this tardy attempts to make an honest woman of her. It is then that Beau Austin... finds Dorothy more to be desired than any girl on earth. So true and deep is his love that... he proclaims (to) all the gallantry and beauty of the modish world... that he, George Austin, (had) asked for the hand of Dorothy Musgrave and was refused!... Forthwith, Dorothy... falls into his bosom...

"My hero!" - and down comes the curtain.²⁵

Obviously this is not heavyweight drama yet it weighed sufficiently with two prominent actor-managers in their time for them to put it on at their theatres - Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree at the Haymarket in 1890 and Sir Nigel Playfair at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, in 1929. Clearly, there must have been something in the piece to attract two successful men of theatre thirty years apart.

Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree (1853-1917) was manager of the Comedy Theatre in 1887 when he built Her Majesty's Theatre in the Haymarket, London, where he lavished an imaginative and romantic imagination on the visual interpretation of play texts, which in their magnificence appealed to the grandiose tastes of his day. He had a greater literary taste than was common among actor-managers of his time and sought as far as possible a higher quality in the writing than was generally looked for in playing scripts. It was natural therefore that Tree should turn to Stevenson and Henley when he heard that they had combined to write plays. Tree had a great admiration for both men and was eager that they should write a play for him, and in fact, suggested the re-writing the old melodrama Robert Macaire. This was agreed but in the meantime Beau Austin was finished. Tree was given exclusive performing rights in the play for two years. The authors were to receive 5% of the gross receipts of each performance up to a total of £100, after which their share would go up to 7% . For each London performance they would get five guineas for Beau Austin and two guineas for Macaire when written. American rights were agreed on undisclosed terms. On 27 June 1890, Henley was writing from Seaforth, Levenhall, Musselburgh to Charles Whibley:

'Tree purposes to produce Beau Austin and Macaire this autumn.'²⁶

Unfortunately, Tree used the former as a stop-gap and placed it in his repertory of Monday and Wednesday matinee try-outs, from which, if successful, a play could move up to become part of the main repertoire. This however was often less a response to public demand than a reflex of Tree's managerial whim. On this occasion, he chose not to take it into the repertoire despite a reasonable audience reaction. Henley had written a special prologue for Tree, himself, to speak on the first night. Tree promised that he would, if only to prevent Henley's proclaiming it himself. As it happened, Tree did not speak it, and the lines were printed in the programme.

Beau Austin was first performed at one of these matinees at the Haymarket Theatre, London, on November 3, 1890, with the following cast:

George Frederick Austin, called Beau Austin	Mr. Tree
John Fenwick, of Allonby Shaw	Mr. Fred. Terry
Anthony Musgrave, Coronet in the Prince's Own	Mr. Edmund Maurice
Menteith, the Beau's Valet	Mr. Brookfield
A Royal Duke (Dumb Show)	Mr. Robb Harwood
Dorothy Musgrave, Anthony's Sister	Mrs. Tree
Miss Evelina Foster,	Miss Rose Leclercq
Barbara Ridley, her Maid	Miss Aylward

Tree staged the piece superbly. The occasion, like the Deacon Brodie matinee, was a decided social event.

The Henley prologue proclaimed:

"To all and singular," as Dryden says,
 We bring a fancy of these Georgian days,
 Whose style still breathed a faint and fine perfume
 Of old-world courtliness and old-world bloom:
 When speech was elegant and talk was fit,
 For slang had not been canonised as wit;
 When manners reigned, when breeding had the wall,
 And Women - yes! - were ladies first of all;
 When Grace was conscious of its gracefulness,
 And man - though Man! - was not ashamed to dress.
 A brave formality, a measured ease,
 Were his - and hers - whose effort was to please.
 And to excel in pleasing was to reign,
 And, if you sighed, never to sigh in vain.

But then, as now - it may be, something more -
 Woman and man were human to the core.
 The hearts that throbbed behind that quaint attire
 Burned with a plentitude of essential fire.
 They too could risk, they also could rebel.
 They could love wisely - they could love too well.
 In that great duel of Sex, that ancient strife
 Which is the very central fact of life,
 They could - and did - engage it breath for breath,
 They could - and did - get wounded unto death.
 As all times since time for us began
 Woman was truly woman, man was man,
 And joy and sorrow were as much at home
 In trifling Tunbridge as in mighty Rome.

Dead - dead and done with! Swift from shine to shade
 The roaring generation flit and fade.
 To this one, fading, flitting, like the rest,
 We come to proffer - be it worst or best -
 A sketch, a shadow, of one brave old time;
 A hint of what it might have held sublime;
 A dream, an idyll, call it what you will,
 Of man still Man, and woman - Woman still!'²⁷

However, Henley, back now in Edinburgh with Anna, and living at Howard Place, (the very street in which Stevenson had been born) used his editorial prerogative, to publish it in full in the Scots Observer on November 3. He did not attend the first night but that did not prevent his attempting as usual to organise things through Charles Whibley, a Civil Servant and sometime correspondent, who was later to become so close to the older Henley, but for now he was his London contact. Henley wrote:

'I posted your stall on Wednesday. I hope you got it. I was too busy to more than enclose it, and here is Herbert Stephen, who was served the same way, complaining that his pasteboard is missing. If by chance I sent you two, send him one at once at 32 de Vere Gardens. Bruce's number is 48; and Stephen's would therefore be 50. Your own bore 49. Greenwood's is 51, so try and work off a meeting between him and the Infallible. Also if Rudyard is in the house - he returns tomorrow - one between the Infallible and him, and between the Infallible and his father, on whom I have bestowed my last stall. Tree has hedged about the Prologue. He made me cut some verses and write in others. Then, when the thing was in page, and 'twas too late to change again, he telegraphed that he preferred to print it in the programme...' ²⁸

Walkley kept his promise to contribute a signed review:

'Though I checked the players by the book, I never once detected a slip from the elegant idiom of 1820 to the canonised slang of 1890. Indeed, the dialogue throughout was music to the ear, and each dress a separate ecstasy for the eye; the whole atmosphere of the play reproduced the subtle aroma of the age of the dandies.' ²⁹

At the final curtain the 'sketch' or 'shadow' was hissed and whatever a previous generation had 'held sublime' was not appreciated by their counterparts in 1890 who found the eccentric costumes offensive.

Some of the dialogue too was as arch as the Prologue -

"I have been your mistress, I can never be your wife!"

Betrayed maidens, on stage, either got married or committed suicide.

The press reports were mixed although the London correspondent of

The Nation, an American weekly, hailed it as -

'The most important event of the London winter season... It is a refreshing novelty to see a modern play in which manner is as carefully considered as matter, and artistic effect is preferred to melodramatic morality.' This gentleman went on to consider the dialogue as - 'racy, witty, polished' and the play itself as 'well-constructed... the characters live and are not mere puppets.' ³⁰

This is hardly the language of total failure.

William Archer was to write fulsomely in The World:

'The production of Beau Austin showed triumphantly that the aroma of literature can be brought over the footlights with stimulating and exhilarating effect.'³¹

Before this, Henley had written to Whibley (November 9):

'Read the Academy if you want to know the truth about the Beau. It is really impayable. As far as I can see, for the rest, one's own contemporaries are against one - are half-resentful, half-envious, and wholly antagonistic; one's juniors are critical but rejoice and are glad in what they've no reason to deny's a bit of real work.'

And to the same on the next day:

'Did I write about the play yesterday? I think so. Anyhow I've been reading our "notices" and two things are evident:
(1) that Tree's omissions in the Austin/Fenwick scene have given the critics most of their argument;
(2) that to the point of honour these gentlemen are absolutely indifferent. Scott and Knight and Watson wondering why Dorothy declined to be made an honest woman when she had the chance reminds one of Ma Jeffries wondering what any of them could possibly find to object to in a common or garden (!)'³²

And again on November 14:

'Did you read Freddy in the Academy? And the long-eared creature in Truth? Oswald Crawford (the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres) writes that nobody has said the right thing about the Beau. Also that he spoke with a multitude of critics "from James and Archer down" and that they were one and all impressed by it. Poor W.H.P.'s deliverance made me very sad. To think that that view of Dorothy could be taken by a poor devil who had a grand passion for Lady C -...
I've had a sort of clumsy apology from G.B.S., of which I shall take as little notice as of the offence...'³³

It should be remembered that Henley, the critic, was always at war with Henley, the poet, and neither could agree with Henley, the editor. It made it difficult for Henley, the playwright, on occasions and Shaw had seen this. However, it was Henley, the theatre-manager, who had the priority now - 'Tree wires me that the booking is splendid.'³⁴

Tree kept the play on into the New Year, still playing Monday and Wednesday afternoons within the repertory system he had very largely devised himself. When he was asked - "When is repertory not repertory?" he replied, "When it is a success."³⁵ This is more than an example of the famous Tree wit, it is the aphorism of a practical man of the theatre who was aware, as all theatre people are, that it is the audience which really determines the fate of a play.

Henley's vociferous protestations about Tree's 'painful suppressions' (in Stevenson's own phrase) do not hide the fact that the actor's inclination to 'tailor' any script to his own strengths is a natural defensive instinct and for a Victorian actor-manager it was virtually an imperative. Henley, too, no matter what he might have known about stage doors and green rooms, and even the offices of the same actor-managers, knew little of the grubby work-space that is the rehearsal room. This is the actor's province entirely and the eclectic process by which he arrives at a performance is often governed more by pragmatic demands than artistic requirements. Tree knew well what would work and what would not, and, to quote Stevenson again, by 'deliberate artifice' he and his company would arrive at a compromise that, in most cases, satisfies both the public and the author.

In the case of the Londoners who witnessed Beau Austin and its authors, this was obviously not so. It was unfortunate that Henley had to face his critics alone. Stevenson was, by this time, firmly in the South Seas, and, to all intents and purposes, was lost to the entire enterprise. One cannot help feel that his attitude would have been little different had he been there. No, Henley must play the stoic alone.

Sir Max Beerbohm (1872-1956), sometimes known as the 'Incomparable Max', was Herbert Tree's half-brother and dramatic critic of the Saturday Review:

"Beau Austin" is classed as a comedy and since RLS is the creator in fiction he may be responsible for the plot and the character of Beau himself... It is indeed Prince Florizel realised on a comedic plane as a dandy on the pantiles. The paternity of Dorothy Musgrove is dubious. She is a shadow. RLS could never draw women. Could Mr Henley? Or the Aunt? Or the valet or any of the other characters who are unlike anything in Stevenson's books. The construction is timid and frail and may be due to either - the writing is exclusively Stevenson's. Mr Henley's prose style spouts and bristles, Mr Stevenson's waves and caresses. Mr Stevenson wrote the plays. Mr Henley invented them, under the influence of RLS. It implies an admirable elasticity on the part of Henley and is a unique testimony to the glamour of RLS.³⁶

According to Sidney Colvin, the picked audience was 'miles above the average intelligence of the British public' but the British public did not want to know. Tree withdrew it. He was quite unrepentant -

'It's no good giving the public what they want. ³⁷Give them what you want them to want, and in time they'll want it.'

Obviously they did not want Beau Austin.

Yet it ought to have worked with theatre-goers - who were longing for style and wit and romance on stage and Beau Austin had sought to provide all three. Victorian plays on the same kind of theme, like Douglas Jerrold's Beau Mash and his son Blanchard's Beau Brummel are negligible works by professional hands. Beau Austin owes less to these than to an earlier 18th-century model where characters took time to be witty and charming. Buckley, in his comments on the play, recognises the resemblance between the lover John Fenwick and the character of Falkland in Sheridan's The Rivals, who likewise becomes the caricature of a lover rather than the spokesman of true passion. This similarity is further emphasis of the authors' deliberate attempt to evoke an earlier period style, although they wanted to suggest 1820 and not 1747.

The charm of the piece won admirers, none more so than Henry James, as fastidious as Stevenson himself, to whom he wrote, describing the premiere as 'the only honourable affair transacted dans notre sale tripot for many a day'.³⁸ The play's deliberate artifice was no debarment for those followers of Wilde and Whistler (and Henley) who recognised the art in artifice. The literary flavour, noticeable in all the Stevenson plays, sits more easily here and made a distinct appeal to a cultivated West End audience if not to the ordinary theatregoer. It was a rare bloom and should have been cultivated somewhat rather than being exposed to Ma Jeffries's common-or-garden-whatever-it-was. But in the theatre garden a certain sturdiness is mandatory for the critical wind can be biting. Generally, the better the play the stronger it is and it can withstand actors, directors, critics and anyone else who can do damage in the interest of supposedly improving it - even thirty years later.

Sir Nigel Playfair (1874-1934) was of the gentleman school of English actors and came to the theatre via Oxford and Shakespearean tours with Sir Frank Benson (1858-1939) who valued good cricketers in his company even more than good actors but still trained many young actors for worthwhile careers in the theatre. Sir Nigel was one. He played at His Majesty's Theatre under Tree before taking over the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, in 1918 and from then until 1932 he made it one of the most popular theatres in London. It was here on October 3 1929, thirty years almost to the month, Playfair presented Beau Austin for a limited three-week season of matinees.

The matinee audience for Beau Austin at the Lyric was the largest ever seen at the Theatre. In a programme note, he stated:

'Since first - when I was really very young - I saw this odd pretty thing produced by Sir Herbert Tree, who adored it, I have loved Beau Austin and longed to see it again. In the hopes ³⁹ that others may share my pleasure I present it for a brief season.'

Playfair arranged to have a special Epilogue written by artist and playwright, Clifford Bax (1886-1962) to add at the end of the performance. It was spoken by Sir Nigel, himself, 'with great gusto'. He had played Menteith, the Beau's valet - 'a pastmaster both with the curling irons and in the art of frothing chocolate'.⁴⁰

Epilogue - 'These few words more - to leave us better friends.
 Perhaps you questioned, while you heard our play,
 If, even in Beau Austin's leisured day,
 Englishmen dared speak English quite so well?...
 I've little doubt - they did: for truth to tell,
 'Tis women who, remote from business cares,
 Impart to every age the style it bears,
 For good or ill, in manners, dress and speech,
 They set the standard for their men to reach,
 And men, if not wound up, will soon run down,
 Like clocks, and lapse into the boor or clown...
 How, then, will generations yet unborn
 Look back on us? With envy or with scorn?
 Who knows? But if you will, you may surmise
 With whom this age's reputation lies.
 Should you have liked the comedy which they penned,
 Bless bluff old Henry and his blither friend,
 Who wrote of what they thought a far-off theme
 And are, themselves, now memories in Time's dream
 Some few there are so perfect in their art,
 And formed to breast life with so brave a heart,
 That for the world's sake they should never die -
 And gallant R.L.S. was one, say I!
 So then - as long as we have your good-will,
 Gouty Old Age shall drink the waters still,
 And gushing beaux disport with blushing belles,
 Upon the Pantiles here in Tunbridge Wells.'⁴¹

The cast was:

Beau Austin	Bertram Wallis
John Fenwick	Ballard Berkeley
Anthony Musgrave	Roland Culver
Menteith	Nigel Playfair
A Royal Duke	George Skillan
Dorothy Musgrave	Marie Ney
Miss Evelina Foster	Winifred Evans
Barbara Ridley	Yvonne Rorie.

So the curtain fluttered down on the pastel world of Beau Austin and his friends and has remained down on them ever since.

THE THEATRE

HENLEY IN HAMMERSMITH

By IVOR BROWN

Beau Austin. By W. E. Henley and R. L. Stevenson;
Mr. Gladstone's Comforter. By Laurence Housman;
 Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith.
Gooseberry Fool. By Clemence Dane and Helen Simpson.
 The Players' Theatre.

DISCUSSING 'Beau Austin' with some friends after the first night I was amused to hear the piece praised as a joke. There was justification of habit: our Riverside rites are rarely reverent, and we go West for a smiling civility. But to me it seemed as plain as could be that late Victorian romanticism was here speaking from its pulsing heart, and surely Henley's prologue can leave us in no doubt. It is solemn stuff, this prologue, with its house-agents' chatter of "Old-world courtliness and old-world bloom." Henley could obviously have made a fortune writing copy for "realtors." In 1820, we are led to understand, women were "Ladies first of All" and "Women and men were human to the core," a judgment whose precise value escapes me. And so this late Georgian offering is made:

A sketch, a shadow, of one brave old time;
 A hint of what it might have held sublime;
 A dream, an idyll, call it what you will,
 Of man still Man, and woman—Woman still!

Here are the romantic giants of the last generation working the "quaint-old" stuff for all it is worth, and the ungrateful youth of our time looks in smiling astonishment at the bag of lavender which is their labour of love and asks whether it is all a joke. Poor Henley, poor Stevenson!

The bold, bad, but ultimately penitent 'Beau Austin,' and the rare but "ruined" Dorothy Musgrave, of whom he ultimately makes an honest woman, are simply the figures of Victorian melodrama put into Regency clothes and thoroughly soured with the aforesaid "old-world bloom." When Dorothy is endeavouring to dissuade her chivalrous brother, Antony, from challenging the Beau, she addresses him thus:

... I brought you up, dear, nursed you when you were sick, fought for you, hoped for you, loved you—think of it, think of the dear past, think of our home and the happy winter nights, the castles in the fire, the long shining future, the love that was to forgive and suffer always—O you will spare, you will spare me this.

When Dorothy cries, "George Austin, I have been your mistress, and I will never be your wife," the Beau responds, "I will leave England, to-morrow—you shall be no longer tortured with the neighbourhood of your ungenerous lover. Dorothy, farewell!" Is this "Old-world courtliness" or Old Kent Road? It does not appear to have been a long journey from Tunbridge Wells to the Elephant and Castle.

Accordingly the crowds of intellectuals who flocked to 'Maria Marten' should not miss the Terror of Tunbridge Wells. Again the Beau should interest the very large public that has appreciated 'The Man with a Load of Mischief.' For the difference between the Regency fancy of Mr. Dukes and the Regency fancy of Henley and Stevenson is both profoundly informative and profoundly reassuring. Mr. Dukes invented for his piece not only a cynical theme appropriate to the road to Bath, but a style which had the right edge as well as the right elegance; the dialogue was firm as well as fanciful. The style adopted by the Victorian Romantics has a mushy pomposity; the dialogue suggests that Stevenson had taken one of the stickiest and most

unctuous of his essays and written it out in grease-paint instead of ink. But the method suits the matter, for the psychology of the piece is purely Victorian and the curtain goes down on wedding-bells, with the prospect of the hoary old seducer marching up the aisle and so onward, Christian soldier, to a little grey home in the west heavily furnished with mahogany and marriage lines.

Accordingly, 'Beau Austin' is very much a piece to be seen, for it illuminates many dark points. It shows once more the capacity for sentimental dithering latent in the blood-and-thunder school of which Henley was First Bull-roarer, and it also shows the contempt for the theatre which existed in pre-Shavian days. Not unjustly; for if the theatre insulted authors with its neglect, why should they not respond to its childishness by writing down to it and making what they believed to be pretty antics and noises as though to amuse a little girl? The queer thing is that Henley, as the prologue proves, thought the antics and the noises were really pretty. He sniffed the phrase "old-world" and was satisfied.

Of course, Hammersmith makes the piece decorative, and the "old-world" sentiments, well spoken, are music for the ear as the Regency scene is music for the eye. The acting of it, rightly serious, is mostly very good. Mr. Bertram Wallis, as the penitent profligate, is just the sententious Beau of the piece, all good looks and good intentions, a man with a load of missionary zeal. Miss Marie Ney achieves the miracle of making sincerity flash from the sentimental verbiage given to Dorothy and gives to tushery the emotional quality of tragedy, while Sir Nigel Playfair wrings laughs from the valet's humourless part with the diabolic ingenuity of a dentist who can extract invisible teeth.

BEAU AUSTIN
COMMENT AND ANALYSIS

Professor Saposnik sees this play, not as a celebration of bygone elegance but rather as a caricature of Georgian days distorted by Victorian cynicism. This is unnecessarily harsh as far from being cynical, Stevenson still seeks the 'bird-haunted evocation of life's fluctuations... containing both laughter and tears... (and) transcending the rigidity of inescapable logic.' He goes on -

'If we are merely the stars' tennis balls - we can at least enjoy the game.'⁴²

Stevenson had no wish to be another Zola. He always wanted to enjoy theatre, even the pursuit of 'the eldorado of romantic comedy'. He wanted to break away from old, outmoded strictures. Henley, on the other hand, and perhaps not surprisingly, was inclined to see everything in terms of tragedy and reality. His was the passion but he had still not found a plank strong enough to sustain it. He looked to Stevenson for this and Stevenson was hardly strong enough to support himself. Theirs had always been an unlikely pairing but it was now approaching an uneasy mix.

Beau Austin is considered by virtue of its London vogue, however limited, as being the most successful of the Stevenson-Henley plays, although, like the others, it exemplifies all the faults of hasty construction - ie: lack of characterisation, abrupt ends to scenes, unconvincing denouement etc. But one has to bear in mind that it was written in four days. It has the advantage of speedy execution, such as a spontaneous sweep in the opening scenes which carries one along through a cursory exposition in order that we may come quickly to the character of George Austin himself. This is very nearly a real creation, leaning heavily as it does on Beau Brummel, and one can see why Tree was drawn to playing it. The idea of the ageing roue anxious to retire but having to live up to his amatory reputation is a good one ("I believe I was a bit of a devil - in my time.")

This might well have been said about Sir Herbert himself in his day and in modern theatrical parlance he could be said to have cast himself to type. It is all the more puzzling therefore, why he did not persevere with the production and develop it for his main stage.

Perhaps Henley kept too firm a hand on the reins? The partners should have given Tree his head. After all, he was a thoroughbred so to speak while they were still in the novice's handicap but perhaps this is only being wise long after the event. Theatre dealings are for the most part a battle of egos and all three men were highly idiosyncratic to say the least. This is all the more unfortunate since, like all their plays there are so many good things in Beau Austin.

The relationship with the valet, Menteith ("I put a second curl upon Mr George's hair on purpose.") is nicely sketched. That is the main drawback, everything is nicely sketched, nothing is drawn in any detail despite the promise in such characters as Barbara, the maid -

'When Mentieth took me to the play, he talked so much I couldn't hear Mr Kean!'

Even to hear mention of Edmund Kean, (1787/90-1833) the great tragedian, underlines how pastel pink their theatre world was against his scarlet. However it is unfair to make such a comparison. This is a pink world. We are in Tunbridge Wells not Ancient Rome. The play strives to be a comedy of bygone manners and ends up as a drawing room charade with some very witty lines and a final curtain that, with some further work on it, could have been a master-stroke -

'Your Royal Highness, may I present Mrs George Austin?'

Decorum triumphs over emotion but then in 1820 decorum mattered and gentility was prized above any passion. Unfortunately, passion and emotion are the first properties of any play. Everything else, as Colvin hinted at, is decoration. Beau Austin is ALL decoration. The problem in playing the piece is that, as Kennedy Williams states - 'It is too machine-made for truth and too true for farce.'⁴³

Once again, for this talented duo, it is the problem of ambivalence. Two great minds are at work but too often they are in two minds. Yet, a theatre authority like Harley Granville Barker (1877-1946) actor, director, and author, agreed with William Archer that Beau Austin should be recommended for inclusion in the repertoire of Britain's National Theatre if it should ever come to pass. Well, we have our National Theatre - at least a National Theatre company - but Beau Austin still stands waiting in the wings - no doubt, checking his curls in the long mirror...

Lloyd Osbourne, for all his hero-worship of both men, had misgivings about the entire playwriting time. Although, being Lloyd Osbourne, he had these, with all the wisdom of hindsight, nearly forty years later:

'... deep down within me was a disappointment I tried hard to stifle... But disillusion was slow in coming, even though the succeeding plays pleased me as little as the first. The gorgeous dream was not so easily wafted away... But Stevenson, I think, came soonest out of the spell; was the first to rub his eyes and recover his common sense. His ardour certainly declined; in the interval of Henley's absences he very gladly returned to his own work, and had, as a playwright, to be resuscitated by his, ⁴⁴unshaken collaborator, who was as confident and eager as ever...'

Henley's cry now however was exhortatory - he was after all, the poet of Invictus. The crutch was raised like a spear - and his shout was a battle-cry - 'Beau Austin is dead! Long live Admiral Guinea!' The soldier in R.L.S. could not resist the challenge - even if, as Fanny insisted, 'Henley will kill him', Stevenson reassured himself:

'To have played the part of man or woman with some reasonable fullness, to have often resisted the diabolic, and at the end to be still resisting it, is, for the poor human soldier, to have done quite well.'⁴⁵

'Then a soldier...'

Life for Stevenson always wore a military aspect - 'an affair of cavalry - a thing to be dashingly used and cheerfully hazarded'. He lived to the sound of bugles.

'Out/From prudent turret and redoubt/And in the melay charge amain,
To fall but yet to rise again...'⁴⁶

His battle, however, was with his body and his constant fight was against his own ill-health. Henley was a fellow-soldier. Theirs was a similar conscription into the battalions of the sick. His enemy, too, was the tubercular germ that blighted both their lives - attacking in the lungs with Stevenson, and in the hand and lower limbs with Henley. They shared the handicaps and the benefits of the infirm and the nature of their illnesses may have given both that extra impetus to action. In J.H.Buckley's words - 'they each possessed a feverish eagerness to seize the fleeting moments before they pass'. Buckley quotes Dr L.J.Moorman who believes that the victim of tuberculosis feels himself -

'no longer wholly subject to the world's conventional authority, and consequently... exercise(s) a free, critical spirit.'⁴⁷

This would explain the creative restlessness of Stevenson and the iconoclastic daring of Henley and even if the disease may have weakened their total physical expression it could be said that both were compensated by a mutually heightened perceptivity. Dr Alfred Adler, on the other hand, maintains that the invalid, aware of his inferior condition, becomes neurotically obsessed with the weak and strong propensities in others. Dr Adler contends that the invalid -

'apperceives after the analogy of contrast... (and) only recognises and gives value to relations of contrast... (he) raises a defensive masculine protest against uncertainty, insecurity, indecision, in short, against every token of effeminacy.'⁴⁸

Henley met Stevenson in a hospital. Their sickness was only another strand in the weave that tied them together but the same infirmity, afflicting both in such different ways had equal effect on their contrasting personalities and work. Stevenson had his actor's bohemian pretence, Henley, his loud, roaring defiance of an unkind fate. Each facade obscured the real man but each, one feels, saw through the other. They each so much wanted to be men of action in the real world. Will H. Low, a painter friend from the days at Grez, -

'thought it most distressing that Stevenson preferred a life of action to the life of art... (and) viewed his undeniable endowment as an artist to be inferior to the other avocations of man.'⁴⁹

As Henley's poetry is obsessed with imperialistic virilism, so Stevenson's prose is inculcated with the principles of strenuous living 'in the open air' and both are firm against any 'token of effeminacy'. Henley would have agreed with Stevenson's ideal view of the world as -

'a brave gymnasium, full of sea-bathing, and horse exercise, and bracing, manly virtues.'⁵⁰

Even from his Bournemouth sick-bed, Stevenson's cry was always -

'O to be up and doing, O
Unfearing and unashamed to go
In all the uproar and the press
About my human business.'⁵¹

Since his business for the moment was plays, he would soldier on.
But the soldier was now a sailor -
and an Admiral at that...

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

The photograph reproduced here was given to me by the late Mr A. G. Dew Smith, who had taken it when Stevenson was thirty-five. It is of this photograph that Sir Sidney Colvin lately wrote: 'A certain large scale carbon print he took of Stevenson to my mind comes nearer to the original in character and expression than any other portrait.' Certainly no other recalls so perfectly the Stevenson I knew.

J. Alfred Ewing.

STAGE FOUR

Section B

'Jealous in honour'

Jealousy there was among those that gathered from time to time under the 'Skerryvore' aegis during that annus dramaticus of 1884-85. Fanny was jealous of Henley, Henley was jealous of Colvin, Colvin was jealous of Baxter and Baxter jealously guarded his friendship with Louis as much the latter jealously guarded his precarious health. Feelings went round and round in that circle, each honour-bound to do what they thought best for the ailing man at the hub of it all. The dominant theme was the need to buy him time and peace to write. Lloyd Osbourne thought it would all happen with the plays.

'Marvellous plays that would run for hundreds of nights and bring in thousands of pounds;'

and he went on -

'plays that would revive the perishing drama, now hopelessly given over to imbeciles, who kept yachts and mistresses on money filched from the public; plays that would be billed on all the hoardings with the electrifying words: "By Robert Louis Stevenson and William Ernest Henley."'¹

This was the dream into which Stevenson had entered so enthusiastically only the year before, transported by Henley, and to a lesser extent, Fanny. It was a dream not easily lost, although it should be said that Stevenson was the first to come to his senses, even as early as the first collaboration at Bournemouth. His stepson was of this opinion.

'R.L.S. lost not only the last flicker of his youth in 'Wensleydale', but I believe also any conviction that he might become a popular dramatist.'²

Perhaps so, but between 'Wensleydale' and 'Skerryvore' he would seem to have had second thoughts. Beau Austin was in print and there was an Admiral to attend. Everyone was summoned into the play circle. Even Fanny, who says she was promised a ruby bracelet out of the first receipts for Admiral Guinea.³ Surely her price was beyond rubies?

The fact was that Fanny contributed so much to this project that she is reputed by biographer, Ian Bell, to have known every word of every part in it. She was still quarrying for gold, scrabbling, one might say, and she did not mind where she found it. If it were in plays

so be it - but plays meant Henley and that was a very distinct rub. To her mind, Henley was a small price to pay for eventual security. In this way she must be seen as being as responsible as Henley for Stevenson's two-year proccupation with things theatrical, a fact which it is difficult to deduce from her retrospective comments on the situation so many years later.

The published details were as follows:

ADMIRAL GUINEA

A Melodrama in Four Acts and Twenty-Four Scenes.

Privately printed 1884.

First Published in Three Plays (David Nutt, London 1892)

Also by Heinemann, London 1897. (Tusitala Edition Vol 24.)

PERSONS REPRESENTED

John Gaunt, called Admiral Guinea, Captain of the Arethusa

Arethusa Gaunt, his daughter

David Pew, A Blind beggar, once boatswain of the Arethusa

Kit French, A Privateersman

Mrs Drake, Landlady of the Admiral Benbow Inn.

The scene is laid in the neighbourhood of Barnstaple.

The time is about the year 1760.

The action occupies part of a day and a night.

SUMMARY OF ACTION

The plot concerns John Gaunt, a reformed slave captain, who is visited by the sinister blind Pew, who has the villainous intent to rob John Gaunt, with the innocent collusion of Kit French, suitor of Gaunt's daughter, Arethusa.⁴

On August 25 of that year, Stevenson was three chapters into Treasure Island and had written to Henley from Braemar:

'Your Admiral Guinea is curiously near my line, but of course I'm fooling; and your admiral sounds like a shublime gent (sic). Stick to him like wax - he'll do... You would like my blind beggar...'⁵

Henley did. So much so that in the resulting play Stevenson's Blind Pew steals the play from Henley's Admiral. The piece was completed in the autumn of 1884 in the same euphoric burst that produced Beau Austin. The partners had enjoyed themselves hugely on both pieces and it shows. But what had been fun in the writing during those sometime rampageous Bournemouth nights revealed itself as something else in the clear light of the morning after. Stevenson, writing to Henley in March 1885 was candid:

'The reperusal of the Admiral, by the way, was a sore blow: eh, God man, it is a low, black, dirty blackguard, ragged piece: vomitable in many parts - simply vomitable.'⁶

Yet Kennedy Williamson insists that -

'to read Admiral Guinea in a silent house at night (one) may easily get into that frame of mind when an ember dropping in the grate will do lasting damage to the nervous system.'⁷

He is thinking particularly of the scene in the Fourth Act when the Admiral is sleep-walking with a candle and the Blind Pew enters upon him. This scene will be discussed more fully in the analysis of the play to follow but this scene drew the admiration of critics such as Bernard Shaw and made him brush aside the cavil that Stevenson and Henley were not dramatists. But one good moment does not make a play. Admiral Guinea was not performed in Stevenson's lifetime.

It was first produced by the critic, William Archer, in a series of five matinees presented by him under the management of H.J.Wilde under the auspices of New Century Theatre at the Avenue Theatre, (now the Playhouse) London, between November 29 and 3 December 1897.

The cast was as follows:

John Gaunt	William Mollison
Pew	Sydney Valentine
Kit French	Robert Lorraine
Mrs. Drake	Dolores Drummond
Arethusa Gaunt	Cissie Loftus

Robert Lorraine (1876-1935) was to achieve later fame as John Tanner in Shaw's Man and Superman in Britain and America and also in Cyrano de Bergerac and The Prisoner of Zenda. In 1929, he played both Long John Silver and Blind Pew in a production of Treasure Island at the Strand Theatre. Cissie Loftus (1876-1943), also at the beginning of a long career at this time, became a celebrated vaudeville artist in America before returning to play in Peter Pan and Nora in Ibsen's Doll's House.

Despite such juvenile talent in the production, the leading man was weak and Admiral Guinea did not look likely to have the prosperous voyage for which Archer (and Henley) had hoped. Advance interest was disappointing, yet Archer considered the experiment worthwhile. William Archer (1856-1924) was a Scottish journalist who became one of the most influential drama critics in London and a huge influence in the development of the new drama of his day. A friend of Shaw's and the translator of Henrik Ibsen to the English stage he was always protesting about the over-evaluation of the classical plays (Shakespeare apart) and the under-evaluation of contemporary theatre. He upheld the supremacy of the script in the face of the actor's vocal and technical display.

Archer had had some experience of play collaboration himself having worked with Shaw on the first drafts of what became Widowers' Houses when it was presented in London five years earlier at the Independent Theatre. This then was no Philistine backer who offered his support in 1897. Stevenson, having been dead for three years, it fell to Henley to deal with Archer when the latter decided to put on the play himself. He also asked Henley for a Prologue if only for the reason that he had Miss Elizabeth Robins available to recite it. Henley, as usual, had his pen in several ink-wells at once and was unsure about whether he could manage it:

'I've no idea for a Prologue; but honestly, I'll cast around for same. And if I can't get any tomorrow or next day, I'll write to Rudyard. High prices haven't spoiled him, so far as I know... And the very fact that (even if he wrote) the address of the Admiral and the sturdy Rudyardism of his own attitude to the stage might make him turn off something which Miss R. would rather die than deliver... The worst is, the Admiral's so d - d unsuggestive and disinspiring. I wrote a decent Prologue for the Beau... But here, what is there? There isn't even a bloody pirate to keep one going! Only John Newton (in shore-going togs) and a lion-'arted seaman in petticoats to keep him company; and withal the sickest conviction in the surviving author's mind that the whole thing is a flam. That and no more. And I beljeve not Dryden, nor R.L.S. himself, could rise to it. So there!'⁸

What a revealing comment that is about its being 'a flam'. It shows something of the distance Henley had come in just over a dozen years. And for him to link R.L.S. with Dryden as a poet is surely no more than a whimsy. Henley never had it in him to be a dramatist but he was a poet. Stevenson had it in him to be a dramatist but not a poet.

Archer got his Prologue. Lonely in Muswell Hill, Henley grieved for his old friend who died, unreconciled to him, on the other side of the world.

'Once was a pair of friends who loved to chance
Their feet in any by-way of Romance;
They, like two vagabond schoolboys, unafraid
Of stark impossibilities, essayed
To make these Penitent and Impenitent thieves,
These Pews and Gaunts, each man of them with his sheaves
Of humour, passion, cruelty, tyranny, life,
Fit shadows for the boards; till in the strife
Of dream with dream, their slaver-saint came true
And their Blind Pirate, their resurgent Pew
(A figure of deadly farce in his new birth),
Tap-tapped his way from Orcas back to earth;

And so, their Lover and his Lass made one,
 In their best prose this Admiral was done.
 One of this pair sleeps till the crack of doom
 Where the great ocean-rollers plunge and boom,
 The other waits and wonders what his friend,
 Dead now, and deaf, and silent, were the end
 Revealed to his rare spirit, would find to say
 If you, his lovers, loved him for this Play'.

In a postscript he added:

'I'll do my best to attend a rehearsal. Especially if it's in the afternoon... I've gone deaf in one ear, and haven't been able to buy a trumpet yet. However... what I want to know is, what is Pew's make-up? Petticoats of course; and no end of a brass buckle to his belt, and a fur cap (I think), and the most nautical shoes and buckles that never trod the deck of a King's ship. But his head? I want corkscrew ringlets in front, and big brass ear-rings... let me know, too, if I may have some paper for the first night; and if so, how much. Today,⁹ the ill-starred E.J.H. creates John Gabriel Borkmann in Noo York.'

He then dashed off a note to Charles Whibley:

'I've scribbled a kind of Prologue for the Admiral, which comes off next Monday. Archer's enthusiastic about it. But I've no illusions left.'¹⁰

On November 25, four days before the opening, he wrote a long letter to Archer dealing with nautical detail. At least it began as such but it developed into another kind of letter. As always with Henley whenever he opened his inkwell, he opened up his heart as well and it leads where his head might have hesitated. This led to his break with Stevenson and to so many misunderstandings with everyone who had any dealings with him. This particular missive ended:

'And now, dear Archer, for something which I hope and believe will a little dash your spirits, and which I confide to you, because your enthusiasm alone has made this thing possible. I purpose not to be present at the Premiere. For one thing, my nerves are not as they used to be; and for another - this is the chief - I feel I have an impracticable difference in the matter of R.L.S. which compels me to thrust myself into no breach, and to risk no

However, The Nation was again cordial but the American critic who wrote for it was something of a lone voice. (Americans have always had a bias towards Stevenson.) The critical reaction, on the whole, was not totally damning but at best it was qualified. The play was not helped by poor acting and an inferior presentation. As a result 'the performance made no impression' but it was said that - 'Miss Elizabeth Robins most admirably spoke the prologue'. It seems a small piping note on which to bring down the duo brass obligato promised by such as Blind Pew and Admiral Guinea.

The foremost and the most successful dramatist of the day, and himself a Stevenson admirer, Sir Arthur Wing Pinero (1855-1934), might have hit the mark when he defined the play as -

'Mainly rhetoric, beautifully done, but with no blood in it.'¹²

There is no record of the dedicatee's response. Dr Andrew Lang was much too circumspect. Lang, an Anglo-Scottish writer of some erudition and future editor of the Swanston Edition of the Works in 1892, was yet another of the Stevenson London clique although he seemed to prefer the writer to the man. He once refused to speak to Stevenson in Bond St because he (Stevenson) was so outrageously dressed -

'No, go away, Louis. My character will stand a great deal but it won't stand being seen talking to a 'thing' like you in Bond Street.'¹³

Stevenson was wearing a black shirt, red tie, black cloak and velvet cap. Lang no doubt remembered their first meeting in France early in 1874. He related it to Clayton Hamilton in 1914:

'Mentone promenade. Saw him coming. Didn't like him. Long cape. Long hair. Queer hat. Damned queer. Hands; white bony, beautiful. Didn't like the cape. Didn't like the hair. Looked like a damned aesthete. Never liked aesthetes. Can't stand them. Talked well. Saw that. Still, seemed another aesthete. Didn't like him at all...later, oh yes - but, I needn't tell you that. Didn't like him at first. Took time.'¹⁴

And time was the only thing Stevenson did not have.

Lang was to say that Stevenson had the capacity, more than any man he knew, of making men fall in love with him, in the Victorian, non-homosexual sense. This is something not only Lang knew, but Henley, Jenkin, Colvin, Gosse, James, Archer - not to mention Baxter, Simpson, Ferrier and cousin Bob - in short, any man who met him and came to know him well. It was a very unique aspect of the man they called R.L.S.

On 1 December, Henley wrote again to Archer:

'I had the most pleasant letter from Miss Robins this morning. But the bookings-account depressed me damnably. This is is to have to do with "the Boys of the Old Brigade"! Had dear old Clemmy (Clement K. Shorter) smiled, I should have shot myself; but there would have been a decent pit... I am glad indeed that the pace is quickening. I wonder, was there a better pit today? So far as I saw, the whole evening press - Sun, Star(?) (sic) Pall Mall, Echo, St James, Westminster - was with us. Does it make any difference?... In the next variant I have some thought of making Pew ravish Mrs Drake, under an Act of Parliament in public. They wouldn't talk of "melodrama" then. I regret - most bitterly regret - the depleted treasury. Not for my own sake at all. But yours. Still, the fight was worth fighting, the venture worth making. And I honour you for your pluck. Also, I'm beginning to believe, with you, that you'll win in the end...I could have told you lots about the carrying power of the initials R.L.S... it is simply nil with the play-going public...' ¹⁵

Archer's brave effort trailed away in a five-day failure but he was never to depart from his opinion that it was a failure of other elements in the project rather than the intrinsic worth of the play. Henley saw it once more before it finished. In the first week of January, 1898, he wrote to Whibley:

'The Admiral held me - and held the house - with a grip of iron. There was some insolent fluff in the Mail; and the "Old Brigade" - Times, Telegraph, Standard, Academy, Athenaeum played up to the old form. The rest of the Press, so far as I've seen it, was with us. Very heartily with us; though "not a play" was, of course, the general catchword. On the whole, I feel we shall hear no more of the thing. But it has been a pleasant time all round. Archer, Miss Robins, the actors - everybody did his d - dest. And though there was nothing done as I wanted it done - though Pew hadn't a laugh in him, and Gaunt had but one single key, and Cissie even, delightful at times, was inaudible - the house was gripped. I remain of my old persuasion. Give us an actor of genius, and there you are. For myself, a last word: I didn't think we could write so well. Here (Act III) says I to myself, "here's the best English since the big Elizabethans, English that's better than Congreve's - because it's emotional". And by God, I believe I'm right.' ¹⁶

The truth is, he was so nearly right.

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THE SCOTTISH PLAYGOERS COMPANY.
Thursday, 27th May, 1909,
W. E. HENLEY and
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON'S
'ADMIRAL GUINEA'

NOTE.—It is interesting to recall this Play was
suggested by the Famous story, "Treasure Island."

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Section B (i)**ADMIRAL GUINEA**

On 21 April 1909, a production of the play was given by the Glasgow Repertory Theatre and it remained in the repertoire of the Scottish Playgoers until the following year.

The Glasgow Herald announced:

ROYALTY THEATRE
Scottish Playgoers' Company
The Repertory Theatre
AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE Ibsen
Tonight, Tuesday and Thursday
Wednesday, Friday and Saturday
ADMIRAL GUINEA
W.E. Henley and Robert Louis Stevenson
Suggested by Stevenson's story "Treasure Island"*

Archer had written in the Theatrical World before the London opening:

'We are so accustomed to look for style in a modern drama that we do not recognise it when we see it. What I would here suggest is that this play, written by our master of romance in collaboration with a poet... may claim no insignificant place among Stevenson's works, but rather shows one side of his talents at its very best... (Blind Pew) touches the sublime of scoundrelism... an English and nautical Macaire...'

and afterwards:

'I think it only fair to say to the authors that the first performance was altogether too slow... (but) a favourably-disposed and even enthusiastic critic sums up his judgement in the phrase - "Not drama, but something almost better..." Even if it were written in transpontine jargon, its scenes and incidents would be eminently dramatic. But... it is written in a nimble, delicate, nervous and harmonious English that gives (to my ear) a keener joy on the tenth hearing than on the first... This is not "literature" dragged upon the stage. It is the perfection of dramatic writing as applied to a glorified nautical drama... If Admiral Guinea, now that it has made its way to the footlights, is not heard again and yet again for many a year to come, it can only be because the conditions of English theatre are invincibly hostile to anything like distinction in dramatic art.'

Glasgow, of course, represented Scottish Theatre. 'C.R.J.' reviewed the play for the Glasgow Herald with little punctuation and no paragraphs:

- * Note the juxtaposition of an Ibsen play translated only in 1893, and representing the very best of the 'New Drama', with Admiral Guinea, typifying 'Popular' as opposed to 'Art' theatre. Beerbohm Tree, (Stevenson's 'Beau Austin') played Stockman in the first performance of Ibsen's Enemy of the People in London in 1893.

'It is not often that a whiff of the high seas has a chance of invading our stage, but when it does it is thrice welcome. Those who went to the Royalty last night to see the Henley Stevenson play had in every sense an evening of rare enjoyment. The familiar Stevensonian flavour of dialogue, rendered by actors of quite unusual intelligence and ably backed by Mr Creagh Henry's admirable staging, conveyed to a delighted and surprised audience a veritable breeze of piratical adventure and the true invigorating tang of salt. Wordy the play undoubtedly is, and in parts it drags to an extent that would have been more observable than it was had the acting last night been less fine. Indeed the flavour of the dialogue and its inimitable last scene are all the play has to stand upon and it by no means would have stood upon them so well last night had it not been for the five accomplished members of the cast and Mr. Creagh Henry's prowess in the way of the scenery which contributed incalculably to the old world charm of the performance. In the Gaunt's room with its high-hung charts and its geranium in the latticed window from which one had a glimpse of the sea, the naive little broadsheet drama was fittingly played out. John Gaunt the evangelical "Slave Captain" was at home there in a sense rarely achieved on the stage, and Mr. Montague Rutherford made most of the opportunities in a part bristling with difficulties. Even in his lengthy monologues he succeeded in keeping the attention of the audience and this was no small feat for neither the sleepwalking scene nor the scene in which he relates his past to his daughter Arethusa are really good acting passages. Miss Mary Jerrold made a most charming Arethusa, "the child of many prayers", and probably did well in keeping her part as light as she possibly could. Especially where the emotions of delight and terror were concerned did she excel. Her acting when, transfixed with fear, Arethusa watches the wicked blind beggar and her sleepwalking father, was perfect. Mr Hubert Harben as Arethusa's sailor lover, Kit Grench, was "a sight for sair e'en". His seaman's roll, especially when the fumes of rum had mounted to his candid brain, his delightful pigtail, striped shirt and socks, buckled shoes and flappy trousers, combined to make him an ideal seaman of 1760 or thereabouts and his acting last night from the first moment when he hugs Arethusa to the last when he does for Pew with his sabre left nothing to be desired. Pew's part on which the play largely depends, fell to Mr Orlando Barnett and it could surely not have been better cast. Mr Barnett as "the low blind man", was not only a terrifying spectacle - any actor with a turn for make-up can be that - he was a villain full of variety, and moved us from horror to pure amusement and again to something like sympathy. His face has many expressions but his voice had more. From the appalling hypocrisy of tone and gesture when he spoke of his "admiral" to the last genuine outburst - "I don't like rum? Then I'm a dead man, give me water" - he kept our attention riveted, and at the last he won the rarest kind of pity by his farewell to Gaunt and his defiant death chant. Miss M. Aimee Murray, as the landlady of the Rainbow Inn completed the well nigh perfect cast. A one act play by Mr Richard Powell preceded "Admiral Guinea" last night and offered Miss Wheeler a very subtle if rather painful study of a girl who cannot bear the sight of pain or disfigurement, but who is converted to a wider pity by the sudden blindness of her fiance.'

It is strange that the 'curtain-raiser' had the same theme of blindness as the main play but when the Admiral Guinea was repeated on 27 May it was with a different one-acter beforehand. In the interim period between the two presentations of the production, a correspondence was conducted in the Glasgow Herald on the wisdom of presenting serious plays to small audiences, and as well as Enemy of the People, mention was made of Ghosts, also by Ibsen and Shaw's Arms and the Man. None was made of Admiral Guinea.

Alfred Wareing, who was responsible for its presentation at the Royalty Theatre in that city, reported that Tree enquired of him how it went in Glasgow before he put it on at His Majesty's Theatre, Haymarket, in London for four matinee performances on 4, 8, 10 and 11 June 1909 with the following cast:

John Gaunt	Edward Sass
David Pew	James Hearn
Kit French	Godfrey Tearle
Mrs Drake	Agnes Thomas
Arethusa Gaunt	Amy Lamborn

There is no record of any further performances on stage but the play has been broadcast twice on radio - on the BBC National Programme (1932) and on the BBC Home Service (1956). (See Stage Seven)

This would appear to justify Henley's claim for the quality of the text, but for the play itself, although it has had its staunch admirers, (William Archer, Alfred Wareing, Kennedy Williamson, Granville-Barker) there has been no theatrical interest since 1909.

By way of postscript, the following excerpt is made from a letter written by Stevenson to James Payn, from Vailima on 4 November 1894 - only a month before his (Stevenson's) death:

'I'll tell you the worst day that I remember. I had a haemorrhage and was not allowed to speak; then, induced by the devil, or an errant doctor, I was led to partake of that bowl which neither cheers nor inebriates - the castor-oil bowl. Now when castor-oil goes right it is one thing, but when it goes wrong it is another. And it went wrong with me that day. The waves of faintness and nausea succeeded each other for twelve hours, and I do feel a legitimate pride in thinking that I stuck to my work all through, and wrote a good deal of Admiral Guinea (which I might just as well not have written for all the reward it ever brought me) in spite of the barbarous, bad conditions. I think that is my great boast.'²⁰

This might explain Stevenson's 'simply vomitable' reaction to the play on first reading it in print in 1885.

ADMIRAL GUINEA

COMMENT AND ANALYSIS

This play owes everything to Skelt and the conventions of toy theatre even to the nautical background, the girl who waits for her sailor and the presence of pirates in the person of Blind Pew, borrowed to good effect from Treasure Island. The central metaphor of the play is blindness, blind trust in love to win the day, blindness of the eponymous character to see his error and the blindness of the villainous Pew makes for a powerful scene in the play where his physical blindness is contrasted to John Gaunt's sleepwalking as a kind of temporary blindness. Gaunt's conversion in the last scene is equivalent to having his sight restored. Whatever the metaphysical conclusions one might draw when the blind Pew comes 'eye to eye' with the somnambulant 'Guinea', it is strong theatre to say the least. It was described at the time as -

'more claim to be considered as "the finest piece of pure drama on the modern stage" than anything in Beau Austin for all its teacup storminess.'²¹

Good as it is, however, it is only one scene in twenty-four spread over four acts, yet Kennedy Williamson insists that this, the third play written jointly by Stevenson and Henley, 'seems to be far and away the best'. He goes on to make a point which has been stressed elsewhere in this thesis but nonetheless bears repeating in a context where the dramatic efforts of two literary talents are being discussed. He says:

'To read in cold print something which is meant for the stage, to be made aware, by stage directions, of the crude mechanics of theatricalism, is to risk disillusionment. A printed play is not a final work of art; it is simply an actor's manual to help him towards a final work of art.'²²

This must be borne in mind throughout this study because it is a credo known and understood by all practitioners in theatre and comes well from a writer and critic. The essential art of the theatre has to do with 'seeming' rather than 'being' and with the consequent emotion aroused in the audience by the atmosphere created in the theatre by the actions (or acting) of the performers in such pretence. The scene described above is a good example of this and the following excerpt is quoted at length from the text in order to give some flavour of the effect and to stress the point that a play is not literature but drama.

Act IV Scene 3

Arethusa is upstage by the door and Gaunt is pacing in his sleep at left, as if on the quarter-deck. Pew enters to centre and after a few lines of preamble he halts suddenly as he hears Arethusa lock the door. The text continues:

PEW: What's that? All still. There's something wrong about this room. Pew, my 'art of oak, you're queer tonight; brace up and carry on. Where's the tool? (Producing knife) Ah, here she is; and now for the chest; and the gold; and rum-rum-rum. What? Open?... Old clothes, by God! He's done me; he's been before me; he's bolted with the swag; that's why he ran: Lord wither and waste him forty year for it! O Christopher, if I had my fingers on your throat! Why didn't I strangle the soul out of him? I heard the breath squeak in his weasand; and Jack Gaunt pulled me off. Ah, Jack, that's another I owe you. My pious friend, if I was God Almighty for five minutes! (Gaunt rises and begins to pace the stage like a quarter-deck, L.) What's that? A man's walk. He don't see me, thank the blessed dark! But it's time to slip, my bo. (He gropes his way stealthily till he comes to Gaunt's table, where he burns his hand in the candle.) A candle - lighted - then it's bright as day! Lord God, doesn't he see me? It's the horrors come alive. (Gaunt draws near and turns away.) I'll go mad, mad! (He gropes to the door, stopping and starting.) Door. (His voice rising for the first time, sharp with terror.) Locked? Key gone? Trapped! Keep off - keep off of me - keep away! (Sotto voce again.) Keep your head, Lord have mercy, keep your head. I'm wet with sweat. What devil's den is this? I must out - out! (He shakes the door vehemently.) No? Knife it is, then - knife - knife - knife! (He moves with the knife raised towards Gaunt, intently listening and changing his direction as Gaunt changes his position on the stage.)

ARETHUSA: (rushing to intercept him.) Father, father, wake!

GAUNT: Hester, Hester! (He turns, in time to see Arethusa grapple Pew in the centre of the stage, and Pew force her down.)

ARETHUSA: Kit! Kit!

PEW: (with the knife raised.) Pew's way!
(The scene continues)

It is a superb conceit - a blind man trying to kill a man who is walking in his sleep. A man with no eyes as it were against a man eyeless in his subconsciousness. This fulfils the metaphor splendidly and at the same time creates a valuable tension at a crucial time in the play. But then deus ex machina is drawn upon in the form of the sailor-hero at the window and we are with Skelt again. We are also with Stevenson and Henley in Gaunt's transformation from the unconscious to the self-conscious in the unreal piety of the last speech. The curtain should come down on Pew's death. He is the real hero of the piece.

PEW: I say - fair dealings, Jack! - none of that heaven business:
Fiddler's Green's my port now, ain't it?... Pass the rum and
be damned to you.

(He tries to sing)- "Time for us to go now - Time for us-"

(He dies)

Pew may have died in the play but he lives on in Treasure Island. He was too good a character to die. Would that John Gaunt had been as strong. However much the playwrighting partners had improved on their technical command of the stage they still had not invested sufficient flesh and bone into the central character to allow Gaunt to dominate the stage as he should. Pew easily steals the play, but it is not his to steal and the balance is lost if the Admiral is not as effective. The two sweethearts are only cardboard cut-outs and Mrs Drake, the landlady, the only other member of the cast, is peripheral.

Yet it must be said that the language of the play is an improvement on the previous plays. Henley has his usual command of the slang - and Stevenson had a relish for things nautical. Witness Pew for instance:

PEW: Would it have been seamanlike to let on and show myself to an old shipmate, when he was yard arm to yard-arm with a craft not half his metal, and getting blown out of the water every broad-side?

George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) considered that the melodrama was a -

'Frankly boyish compound of piracy and pasteboard, coming occasionally very close to poetry and pasteboard,'
and that behind it lay -

'prodigious literary virtuosity'.

Shaw too, like William Archer, felt that the Admiral spoke -

'a prose no more to be tampered with than the most delicate verse.'
and that Pew touched 'the sublime of scoundrelism'.²³ In addition, certain stage effects are well engineered and Pew's first entrance to the landlady of the Admiral Benbow Inn is a gift to any actor:

PEW: 'Good Christian lady, help a poor blind mariner to a mouthful of meat. I've served His Majesty in every quarter of the globe; I've spoke with 'awke and glorious Anson as I might with you; and I've tramped it all night long, upon my sinful feet, and with an empty belly.'

Whose hand held the pen here?

The lines have vim and verve and clearly come from the same pen as that which created Treasure Island, but contrast this with Gaunt's last speech as he looks down on Pew's dead body at the final curtain.

GAUNT: 'But for the Grace of God, there lies John Gaunt! Christopher, you have saved my child; and I, I, that was blinded with self-righteousness, have fallen. Take her, Christopher; but O, walk humbly.'

Whose hand held the pen there?

Despite a genuine sense of stagecraft, the play fails because of the weakness at the centre. It would indeed have taken an actor of genius as Henley pined for to play Admiral Guinea with any success. One wonders why Edward Henley was not sent for? His name did crop up because Stevenson had written from Skerryvore regarding Edward's exploits:

'Bravo Teddy - and bravo, I'm charmed to hear of it...'²⁴

And again:

'Dear Lad - Can Teddy come on Monday?'²⁵

So, although relations were again cordial, there was no response from the errant Edward. Could he have done as much for the unbending Admiral Gaunt as he did with the dextrous Brodie, which Stevenson now termed his 'step-child'? It is by no means certain. John Gaunt is on one note throughout mainly due to the superficiality of delineation. We, as the audience, know too little about him. Even when we do, it is a long, retrospective soliloquy, which needlessly halts the action at a crucial time. Too often the audience is told of what has happened off-stage instead of seeing it happen before their eyes. The audience must not be blind to the action. Some of the lines are good but too often the balance of information is wrong. For instance, we know too much of Pew's past and too little of the inn-keeper, Mrs Drake's relationship with Kit. ("I declare I love him like my own.") Is she his mother or merely his landlady? The fact is ambiguous as presented.

Stevenson has such a relish of the nautical that by the end of the piece we have had a surfeit of sailor connotations. Like its twin-work, Beau Austin, it has good lines and moments, but has also all the signs of carelessness and negligence. In the first scene between Pew and Arethusa there is the contiguity of 'abroad' and 'aboard' in successive lines which Scribe would never have tolerated in his 'well-made play'. A true playwright would have spotted the difficulty this would have made for the actor. Scripts that are to be spoken aloud should be written aloud as it were. This is often where literary quality is a handicap. Dialogue, to sound as if it natural on stage, often reads unnaturally.

K2

This is a hard lesson for a stylist like Stevenson and a classicist like Henley to learn in one short year. Stevenson nonetheless still had faint hopes for its eventual success:

'Time is our only friend. The Admiral, pulled simply in pieces and about half deleted, will act some day: such is my opinion. I can no more.'²⁶

He was right. He was beginning to see the dangers of overwriting for the stage and the value of cuts in almost any playscript. What is evident however in the construction of this play is that the structure anticipates television playwriting in its use of repeated duologues. Almost every scene is a two-hander. This of course would recommend it especially to broadcasting where the word is paramount. This sadly, even in this their third collaboration, was still the case with both authors - the WORD has primacy not the ACT.

Stevenson's last word on Admiral Guinea was when the published version arrived at Vailima on 17 April 1893. He wrote:

'The plays have come too. I think A.G. the very best of the crowd. The only review I have seen was in the Saturday (sic) and no very great matter. As for performance, I have no very great taste for it, as you know, and very willingly leave the question in your hands.'²⁷

Yet the play continued to have its supporters. One of whom was Leslie Cope Cornford, a Stevenson admirer and Henley disciple and biographer of both. Writing in 1913, he remembered the first night on 4 June 1909, and had this to say:

'The present writer was present at the occasion of the performance at His Majesty's Theatre, and he could not then, nor can he now, discover any adequate reason to account for the fact that the play did not take the public fancy. Such is the luck of the theatre, inconstant ever, and ever inexplicable.'²⁸

The partners could only hope for better luck with their next effort - an adaptation of an old favourite, Macaire

STAGE FOUR

Section C

'Quick in quarrel'

MACAIRE

After a pause to replenish their energies and their friendship, (for both indeed could be sudden and quick to quarrel) the partners met again in the spring of 1885 to write Macaire. In the previous October, after completing Admiral Guinea, Mr and Mrs Henley had returned to London. Henley came back to Bournemouth alone to start on Macaire. Fanny was sorry that Anna had not come. She liked Anna as much as she disliked Anna's husband. However, she accepted that both men would continue with plays and this meant Macaire. Strictly speaking, this was not an original play, but an adaptation they did of the old melodrama, Robert Macaire. For this reason, Sir Arthur Pinero did not include it in the survey of Stevenson plays in his lecture.

Stevenson mentions the title as one of his own Skelt Toy Theatre sheets but the original melodrama was based on Frederic Dumont's L'Auberge des Adrets which Frederick Lemaitre (1800-76) had played the Ambigu-Comique in Paris with such success in 1823. It was thereafter almost exclusively associated with his name. He brought an 1834 version to London in a repertory of plays during 1835. An English adaptation by Charles Selby was presented at Saddler's Wells in October 1838 with J.Lee as Macaire and thereafter it was frequently revived throughout the country. E.F.Saville played it at the Victoria Theatre, London, in November 1841, Henry Wallack (1790-1870) at Covent Garden in October 1843, Samuel A. Emery (1817-81) at the Olympic Theatre in August 1855, Richard Philips at the Grecian Theatre in January 1856 and most noticeably, John Lawrence Toole (1830-1906) at the Gaiety Theatre in February 1877. This is the version Stevenson and Henley would have known as the London-born Toole had many seasons at the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh, from 1853.

Macaire was the idea of actor-manager, Beerbohm Tree who, ever on the look-out for quality plays, had visited Stevenson at Bournemouth during the late winter of 1885. He says he came down to hear Stevenson read The Hanging Judge but this is unlikely as it had not been written yet. That would not however deter Herbert Beerbohm Tree from saying so.

Tree thought Stevenson 'very polite, nervous, graceful, charming, mellifluous of speech' and that he - 'spoke like one of his own books' -

'his sentences were quite literary, but he seemed to enjoy their embroidery... By the by, he told me he hated writing love-scenes - it was like putting on skates - he turned Mrs Stevenson on to them.'¹

Fanny Stevenson, for her part, seemed to enjoy Tree.

'We have just had a visit from Beerbohm Tree, whose name, I am sorry to say, is treated with shocking levity by Louis. He seems a very nice, modest, pleasant fellow, and we were very pleased with him.'²

The Henley-Stevenson version of Macaire was published as follows:

MACAIRE

A Melodramatic Farce in Three Acts.

Dedicated to Arthur Egmont Hake

Privately printed by R. and R. Clark, 1885.

U.S. Copyright - 27 May 1885 (Magazine Sheets)

Published in 'The Chap Book' (Chicago) 1/5 June 1885

and in 'New Review' 12 June 1895

Published - Stone and Kimball, Chicago, 1897.

Also as Four Plays with 'Deacon Brodie', 'Beau Austin' and 'Admiral Guinea' by Heinemann, London, 1897.

PERSONS REPRESENTED

Robert Macaire

Bertrand

Dumont, Landlord of the "Auberge des Adrets"

Charles, A Gendarme, Dumont's supposed Son

Goriot

The Marquis, Charles father

The Brigadier of Gendarmerie

The Curate

The Notary

A Waiter

Ernestine, Goriot's Daughter

Aline

Maids, Peasants (Male and Female), Gendarmes

The scene is laid in the Courtyard of the "Auberge des Adrets" on the frontier of France and Savoy. The time is 1820.

The action occupies an interval of from twelve to fourteen hours; from four in the afternoon till about five in the morning.

NOTE:

The time between the acts should be as brief as possible and the piece played, where it is merely comic, in a vein of patter.

SUMMARY OF ACTION:

An escaped prisoner, Robert Macaire, finds the prospect of gain in claiming the false identity of Charles Dumont's father on the eve of that young man's marriage to Ernestine Goriot. His plans are foiled by the arrival of the real father - the Marquis de la Charte de Medoc.³

Nothing was said of Henley's reaction to the actor-manager although Tree found him a great contrast to Stevenson -

'Henley's talk being crude, his manners brusque, their only resemblance being a love of good wine... Henley was really a fine fellow, but somehow the world seemed to revolve around him... I suggested to them to make Robert Macaire a philosopher in crime... I (also) made a number of suggestions for the play and they wrote offering that I should be a part-author. They were good enough to say that my suggestions were invaluable...'⁴

The offer was made formally in a joint letter signed by Henley -

'Dear Mr Tree, - In consideration of the assistance we have required, we have decide to rank you for one-fifteenth part of the author's right in Macaire. It would give us much pleasure to place your name upon the title-page; and we venture to suggest that on a rigid construction of the word collaboration it has a perfect right to appear there...'⁵

Tree declined.

'as I had done nothing... I had occasion to regret my modesty, for when we came to produce the play I wanted to make some alterations as I considered the construction somewhat faulty. My suggestions were pooh-poohed. The play was produced and the notices given to my performance were more flattering than were the references to the play...'⁶

On 8 December, Tree withdrew from the writing of it, stipulating that the authors should nonetheless send him a copy of the play on which he would mark those passages indebted to his suggestion. These were not to be used in any further production. A voluminous correspondence developed on this point between Henley and Tree.

'Henley wrote to me somewhat violently, saying that I had evidently done the butter-slide trick with the play; to which I replied that if he would not leave his correspondence, I would do the play no more... Still, I have always liked him despite his bludgeonesque manners...'⁷

Henley could never understand why people sometimes found him offensive. During 1888, when he was editing the Scots Observer in Edinburgh, he had occasion to meet Tree, who was touring there, in the street.

"Why did you not come to see me?" he asked the actor, who replied amiably, "My dear Henley, I forgot for the moment that we were on speaking terms!"⁸

In the winter of 1884-85, Stevenson had been beginning to feel the strain and the pace of writing with Henley, but now he had not only to deal with him but with Tree. However, in their typical rush, the thing was done and despatched to the printers - and then nothing happened.

With Tree's withdrawal, the play inexplicably disappeared for fifteen years before a production could be arranged in London, although there had been a reading at the Athenaeum Hall, Shepherd's Bush, on 12 December, 1887 in order to establish authorial and performance copyright. (The playbill for this reading was sold at auction in 1914.) At Stevenson's death it had still not received a stage production.

Macaire was first performed at the Strand Theatre, for a single matinee performance on 4 November, 1900. On November 6, the play moved to the Great Queen St Theatre for one matinee with the following cast:

Robert Macaire	George S. Titheridge
Bertrand	William Cheeseman
Dumont	Sydney Faxtom
Charles	Pym Williamson
Goriot	Charles Rock
The Marquis	Ivan Watson
The Brigadier	Frank Dyll
Curate	Tom Heslewood
Notary	Arthur Brownley
Waiter	A. Carbell
Ernestine	Dora Barton
Aline	Clare Greet

Beerbohm Tree brought the piece to His Majesty's Theatre in May 1901, pairing it with Beau Austin in the same week. It is another regret in this play-project that Tree himself did not play Robert Macaire for longer, as it is obvious that the part was written exactly for his charming, idiosyncratic style. The role required 'presence' and Beerbohm Tree had that. His half-brother Max Beerbohm reviewed it:

'Macaire is a melodramatic farce, though really a farce transformed into a melodrama. R.L.S. is prolific in both forms - 'New Arabian Nights' for farce, 'Pavilion on the Links' for melodrama as also 'Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde'. And the greater part of every romance he wrote... Henley has never shown any tendency to story-telling as he has done nothing in fiction, therefore R.L.S. provided the plot out of Skelt... That is their one possible pedigree... Macaire himself is Stevensonian - Stevenson's 'Villon' out of 'The Dynamiter' - the philosophic scoundrel... His companion, Bertrand, typical of the timid creature thrown into perilous affairs. The passion of fear is the one passion R.L.S. is never able to keep out of his writing. The rest of the characters were supernumeraries. (Stevenson's) sense of words plays tricks with the dialogue - with characters speaking as Stevenson enjoys, rather than as they would speak. The structure too is as one would expect from an amateur dramatist who does not take the stage seriously - the sudden change of key from sheer farce to sheer melodrama and the monotony and superfluity of much in the opening scenes smack sharply of the trifling tiro... Much in the play is characteristic of R.L.S. - of Henley nothing.

He may have drawn the subordinate characters but anyone could have drawn them. He may have been responsible for the construction... It is a conclusion not satisfactory to our general admiration of Mr Henley but he must have done more than what we can give him credit for at first sight.'

Sir Max could not have realized his understatement.

Kate Terry Gielgud, niece of Ellen Terry and mother of Sir John, was a great admirer of Tree. She commented on that actor's performance as Falstaff in 'Henry IV Part 1' at the Haymarket Theatre on 5 June 1896:

'It is a part that ranks high among his best, along with old Demetrius and the immortal 'Macaire'... and that I should much like to see again!'

Hers was what might be called a highly-informed opinion and yet how reliable is it with regard to Macaire? Was it the old version of the melodrama or the new? Was it so fitted for Tree that she saw Titheridge and remembered Tree? George Titheridge was a useful branch of theatre in his time but he was certainly no Tree. Perhaps Mrs Gielgud remembered Irving in the part? He played it at the Lyceum in May 1888 with sets designed by Hawes Craven and music by J. Meredith Ball. But Irving played it in the old version which can only be considered as a deliberate slight to Henley and Stevenson. Edward Henley's stage satire had obviously not been forgotten. At any rate, another Irving opportunity was lost. He could have done so much for not only had he all of Tree's presence, he had an acting genius that was all his own but as he had refused Deacon Brodie, he ignored Macaire. Stevenson himself had the last word. He considered Macaire -

'a piece of job work; hurriedly bockled; it might have been worse, might have been better.'

He had been dead for six years by the time the play first had an audience yet many years afterwards Max Beerbohm was still bemoaning his passing and his possible loss to theatre. Sir Max wrote:

'Would that Mr Stevenson himself were alive to dramatise one of his own extravagant tales for Drury Lane. I fancy he would have delighted in the task. The Dynamiter would have been quite irresistible under Mr. (Arthur) Collins's auspices... Yes, I wish the author of The Dynamiter were here to make Drury Lane delightful in the autumn; more especially because Drury Lane might be made delightful in the winter too by the author of 'The (sic) Child's Garden of Verses.'

This is 'Play' properly seen as make-believe borne on the back of practical stage machinery via the action and imagination of actors.

When the plays were published as Three Plays by David Nutt (Henley's publisher) in 1893, Lionel Johnson gave the volume five leading columns in The Academy to mark the event:

'No better plays have been written in prose than these since Sheridan wrote. I do not say that in the proprieties of the stage, scenic convention, histrionic technicality, but in dramatic spirit, the force and life of dramatic literature. The conceptions are strangely simple; the style is neat, moving, natural; the characters are expressed by creatures of flesh and blood. Here is the stir of action, the business and reality of the world; here is romance, that touch of strangeness and delightful wonder which animates all the work of these authors.

In "Deacon Brodie" we have the contrast between the civic, social respectability, the sober, domestic virtues, and audacious, secret villainies, the flashy joys and sneaking prowess of nocturnal vice. In "Beau Austin" we have the elegance of "the Wells", the airs and graces of "the Pantiles", the tone and fashion of society; and poignant emotions, the truest honour and good heart, breaking out through the dainty mannerism. In "Admiral Guines", we have the familiar smell of the sea, the old memories of the Spanish main, the trade winds, the Caraccas, Execution Dock, mingling with the old, homely English scenes, the village inn, the cottage room. The plays are played out anywhere. Apart from the characters and the actions, we live a definite life while we read these plays...'

This is significant, the plays are READ by the critic and not SEEN by him in the theatre. (John Kelman in his comments on Deacon Brodie suffered from the same disadvantage.) This does not prevent Mr Johnson, in this instance, from giving an extremely detailed description of each of the three plays as he 'sees' them on the page:

'Here we are indebted to the sympathetic imagination, helped by historical insight of the story-teller and the poet. A phrase here, a phrase there, conveys us to Georgian times. Edinburgh magnates, Tunbridge "quality": phrases pointed, speaking, charged with a positive genius of propriety. Further each play has its internal greatness of interest, each deals with the fortunes of a soul, the life of a conscience - not, of course, with the magical concentration of Browning's art upon a single interest, but rather letting a lively train of incident go forward till some sudden collision of motives, or collapse of instances, or flash of light takes places...'

Then follows a detailed exposition of the main plot in each case with copious examples of the text as required. Mr Johnson is struck especially by the use of slang in Deacon Brodie - 'a very modern sound', and wonders 'what Hawthorne would have made of the Deacon'. Beau Austin is 'dainty and delicate' and 'the story is a version of Richardson's masterpiece'. 'The whole piece goes delightfully'.

He also avers - 'it is hard not to trace the hand of Mr. Stevenson dominant in "Admiral Guinea"' and quote several excerpts to prove it.' He admits that the sleep-walking scene 'should be effective upon the stage'. He concludes:

'These are three enchanting pieces, worthy of their authors and of the stage.'¹³

Need one say more?

George Bernard Shaw could, and did, in the Saturday Review following the London production of Admiral Guinea from which a brief excerpt has already been quoted. Mr Shaw goes on:

'Hardly anything gives a livelier sense of the deadness of the English stage in the eighties than the failure of Mr. Stevenson and Mr. Henley to effect a lodgement on it. To plead that they were no (sic) genuine dramatists is not to the point; pray what were some of the illiterate bunglers and ignoramuses whose work was preferred to theirs? Ask any playgoer if he remembers any of the fashionable success of that period as vividly as he remembers "Deacon Brodie"! If he says yes, you will feel that he is either a simple liar, or else no true playgoer, but merely a critic, a fireman, a policeman or some non-functionary who has been paid to induce him to enter the theatre...

Far be it from me to pretend that Henley and Stevenson, in their Boy Buccaneer phase, took the stage seriously - unless it were the stage of pasteboard scenes and characters and tin lamps and slides - but even that stage was in the eighties so much more artistic than the real stage - so much more sanctioned by the childish fancies and dreams in which all dramatic art begins, that it was just by writing for themselves, and not for the West-end houses, that Henley-Stevenson contrived to get ahead of their time...'¹⁴

Herbert Tree about 1885

MACAIRE COMMENT AND ANALYSIS

George Bernard Shaw claimed that Irving had put on the old Robert Macaire in revenge against Shakespeare and as a reaction against months of sustained dignity at the Lyceum, but what annoyed Shaw was -

'that there was, and I suppose still is, in the market a version of that little melodrama by Mr. Henley and the late Louis Stevenson which was full of literary distinction but Mr. Irving stuck to the old, third-class version which gave him scope for absurdity... a choice doubly deplorable when there was available a new and vital version by Henley and Stevenson.'¹⁵

Considering the circumstances in which it was written - Stevenson's increasing apathy, Henley's impatience, Tree's intrusiveness, Fanny's hostility, Thomas Stevenson's failing health - the farce is a joy to read. It is the shortest of the plays and in some respects, the most successful despite its extremely short theatre life. It is certainly the most accessible to modern tastes and emerges, in Buckley's phrase, as 'a nimble and engaging farce, a not unworthy antecedent of The Importance of Being Ernest'. Praise indeed. But does he mean Ernest as in Henley? Buckley goes on:

'Macaire himself presents an amazing complex of intellect and ingenuity. He shares Iago's sense of realism and Mercutio's turn for speculation... At the wedding, he simulates to perfection, the hearty joy of Falstaff... About to murder the Marquis, he finds inspiration in Macbeth...'¹⁶

Some of the dialogue reads like Shaw. See the end of Act 2 Scene 6:

BERTRAND - Murder?

MACAIRE - What is murder? A legal term for a man dying. Call it Fate, and that's Philosophy, call it Providence and you talk Religion. Die? Why that is what man is made for; we are full of mortal parts; we are all as good as dead already, we hang so close upon the brink: touch a button and the strongest falls in dissolution. Now see how easy I take you- (grappling him)

BERTRAND - Macaire - O no!

MACAIRE - Fool! Would I harm a fly when I had nothing to gain? As the butcher with the sheep, I kill to live; and where is the difference between man and mutton? pride and a tailor's bill. Murder? I know who made that name - a man crouching from the knife! Selfishness made it - the aggregated egotism called society; but I meet that with a selfishness as great. Has he money? Have I none - great powers, none? Well, then, I fatten and manure my life with his.'

(Scene continues)

When Henley printed the text in the June issue of New Review, Shaw took further opportunity to attack the Philistinism of the middle-class, bourgeois, London audiences, which, he insisted, could not appreciate - 'the wit, imagination, romance and humour' offered in this Macaire'.¹⁷

One feels that with support such as this, and with Archer's continued good will, with the prospect of Tree's stagecraft and presentation the play could hardly have failed, but Henley was obdurate for his own reasons and consequently Tree withdrew and the play suffered. A smaller irony relating to Henry Irving, to whom the very first play had been sent, was that H.B.Irving, (1870-1919) his son, had been interested in Macaire but had been pre-empted by Tree who was given the first opportunity to work on it with the authors.*

Here were three clever men working on a format that had already been proved on stage with success and with a central character bursting with vitality and interest yet they could not agree on what after all was only an adaptation. There is no doubt that in quality it is an improvement on the original version but it was geared to the artistic climate of 1880-90 and the original of fifty years before may have become too refined in the process. Robert Macaire requires panache not philosophy but had not Tree himself asked for a thinking criminal?

The result is an actor's delight, for even if it is only what Theatre in its review of the London matinee called 'a farrago of nonsense', it is a pragmatic farrago because it is nothing more than a vehicle for actors' 'business' or by-play, that is the scoring of technical points in the playing. This was partly the reason that the original worked. The scenario was lifted off the page and transformed by the actors in performance much in the manner of the old strollers in the Italian commedia dell'arte companies. There was plenty of room left for improvisation and the ad lib. This was the secret of Lemaitre's original success in the name-part. As Edward Gordon Craig states:

'Great actors prefer a play that is not a great play. Frederic Lemaitre took L'Auberge des Adrets, which was a sinister little drama, a plain-sailing trifle, such as went down with the public - went down in the strict sense of the word, as a ship sinks and is lost for ever; but Lemaitre rigged it out anew, and it came sailing in as though it were a Spanish galleon... He turned it inside out; he elaborated here and there, ... and everyone marvelled at his improvisation.'¹⁸

* H.B.Irving was to play Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde in 1910.

The action too has been improved by placing everything in the courtyard. This allows a dropped curtain to indicate time changes. Yet Irving still could not be made interested in it. And it needed him badly. Henley even went to the length of publishing the text in its entirety in the magazine he was editing at the time, the New Review, in the hope of attracting a production.

'We are printing Macaire as an attraction in our next number. I don't suppose it will attract anybody, but at least its appearance in print will save me from the nuisances of Tree's menaces to play it, and the trouble of telling people he doesn't mean what he says.'¹⁹

Yet Tree was his latter-day Lemaitre if only Henley had known it.

Macaire is less a play than a romp and relies entirely on the bravura and panache of the star actor, Macaire himself, who in this version of the old play is much given to philosophising. This has its own style but once again, it has the effect of slowing the action. There are good naturalistic effects in characters directed to overlap and speak at the same time, although Goriot's phonetically written dialect is puzzling. Much use is made of the direction 'Business' in brackets. Stevenson was learning about the contribution actors make to any production, although he was under no delusions about his experience in this area.

As he later wrote to Henley (March 1885):

'Do not let us gober ourselves - and, above all, not gober damned pot-boilers - and p.b.'s with an obvious flaw and hole in them, such as is our unrealised Bertrand in this one. But of this... on a meeting.'²⁰

It is not for nothing that Henley was an expert in slang and it would appear Stevenson, too, knew what he was talking about. He was talking out of his 'gob' and the intention is clear enough. He did not want to waste his time on derisive material. Stevenson wanted to talk about it. Whether they did or not, the character of Bertrand does seem unrealized. He does, however, figure in one good moment which has echoes of Macbeth in it ("Out, out, brief candle") and that is in the opening of Act 3, where Bertrand might be the Porter. However, crime must not be seen to pay, so it is not Bertrand but Macaire, (like Deacon Brodie), who must die in the end. Death is a feature of all the Stevenson-Henley plays (except Beau Austin where the hero is instead, trapped into marriage) but otherwise the final tag (the last word in the play) is always literally that.

DEACON BRODIE - "...The new life...the new life!" (He dies)
 ADMIRAL GUINEA - (sings) "Time for us to go, time for us"-(He dies)
 MACAIRE - "Death - what is death?" (He dies)

On this question of stage dyings, if one takes the the final line of Macaire and places it before the last line of Deacon Brodie there is a felicitous question and answer which might be revealing:

"What is death?"
 "The new life."

This necrophiliac link between the two plays is not their only similarity. The eponymous hero here stands alone against the world and society. This is a manifestation of the sense of rebellion that was in each of the writers but it is also an affirmation that life's ultimate meaning can only be found in death. This philosophical undertow is what gives the comic tide in Macaire its grimmer ebb and at the same time adds that element of witty cynicism which appealed to Henley particularly.

The play is described as a 'melodramatic farce' and there are times in the action when the apprentice playwrights are uncertain when to be melodramatic and when to be farcical. Realistic melodrama was Henley's province, Stevenson's bias was always towards romance and 'bird-haunted' theatrical idealism. Farce, on the other hand, leaning as it does on a supposed realism, is more in Henley's domain - that 'malicious glee which compounds with malicious circumstances'.²¹ It was an area Henley knew only too well from Life as much as from Art.

'Out of the night that covers me,
 Black as the pit from pole to pole,
 I thank whatever gods may be
 For my unconquerable soul...'²²

This temperamental sympathy and extraordinary resource ought to have fused to give them a unique insight into this particular dramatic form but instead an uncertainty is apparent in the co-working and the desired synthesis is not achieved. This is not to say however that Macaire does not contain its portion of good writing for the stage. A comparison between it and Deacon Brodie shows how far the authors have come in the technicalities of stagecraft and the requirement of plays in four attempts. It is not that it is their best play - Deacon Brodie and Beau Austin, even Admiral Guinea have their various claimants- but what Macaire shows is that Stevenson was 'learning to work with given material, and still order it to his purpose'.²³

It is this that makes the dramatist. He has to work within confines yet within them draw his audience into his imagination, or the results of it. Even though Stevenson had not quite achieved it with Henley, in this, their last collaboration, they had left a stage work that still awaits its modern interpreter.

During their seaside Bournemouth year, the partners had laboured hectically in the vineyards of Melpomene and Thalia and had harvested a very mixed fruit, much of it tasting sweet, especially to Henley. Stevenson, on the other hand, appeared to have less taste for its earthy bouquet. Or was it that he had no real appetite for it? Whatever the reason, it was something of a surprise to find Stevenson, within a year, still dancing to a theatre tune. He had not left the floor as was thought; it was merely time to change partners.

THE HANGING JUDGE
A drama in Three Acts and Six Tableau

By

Robert Louis Stevenson

and

Fanny Van Gript Stevenson

Printed by R & P Clark, Edinburgh
for private circulation only

1887

STAGE FOUR

'The bubble reputation'

Section D

THE HANGING JUDGE

The play bubble had burst and between the pinewoods and the sea, not only a dramatist was lost but a friendship, although neither man would admit it. Each resumed his former way, Stevenson with practised insouciance, Henley with bitterness and humiliation. He was not only a failure in his own eyes but a rowdy nuisance to everyone in the Stevenson household - except Louis - or 'Lewis' as Henley still insisted on calling him. Stevenson, for his part was sorely tried. He could not drop his old friend so callously, nor could he blame him. The fault was as much his. Ignis fatuus. Henley's 'noise' had filled all the Bournemouth workplaces, 'Wensleydale', Bonnalie Towers and 'Skerryvore' but now there was silence. And, as after a restless night of bad dreams, for Stevenson, it was good to see the morning.

The Henley playwriting phase was over. It had been a good try in many ways but there was more venture than adventure in it. In the Stevenson scheme of things it looked no more than a little episode. Now he could put it behind him as his mother had taught him to do as a child. Except for some work on Macaire late in 1885, Stevenson never collaborated again with Henley on any further play schemes. The heady highway to riches had revealed itself as no more than a grubby cul-de-sac. They had both been dazzled by the gleam of fool's gold. It was now a time for resipiscence.

Henley was reluctant to let go. In all of their theatre productions he had been the driving force, always ostensibly in charge. He certainly took the first move in most things to do with the plays. He was responsible for getting them produced and for circulating the printed copies. Despite their separation he continued to do this and it made Stevenson increasingly uneasy.

'Do you think you are right to send "Macaire" and "The Admiral" about? Not a copy have I sent, nor do I want sent, speaking for myself, personally... What I mean is that I believe in playing dark with second and third-rate work... I must tackle Kidnapped seriously or be content to have no bread, which you would scarcely recommend.'

Fleeming Jenkin was dead. Stevenson had no one of the same sympathy or intellectual level to turn to for advice about any future playwriting. Sidney Colvin and Edmund Gosse were intimates but they were hardly theatrical. Lang had no interest in plays and James kept himself aloof from Henley. Fanny was all for finishing there and then with him but Stevenson could not do that. Henley was still old Will of Bristo Port. There was a huge mutual investment in their long friendship and a deep interest had accrued to both. Each was reluctant to close the account but Stevenson was never less than frank about his priorities:

'Plays... I can't possibly look at before July; so let that be a guide to you in your views, July or August or September or thereabouts: these must be our times, whichever we attack...'

So playwriting was never quite a lost leader. But he continues:

'I think you had better suspend a visit until we can take you in... I could not even offer you meals with my woman in such a state of overwork. My father and mother have had to go to lodgings...'²

Henley, in response, got himself elected to the Saville Club - Stevenson's own club. If Stevenson wanted to go it alone, then, in Henley's opinion, he was only cutting off his own nose just to save face. Still in the same month, in yet another letter to Henley, Stevenson was adamant about not having any further theatre objectives:

'These are my cold and blighting sentiments. It is bad enough to live by an art - but to think to live by an art combined with commercial speculation - that way madness lies.'³

One would think from this that Stevenson had lost all his enthusiasm for the drama, or at least was in a state of temporary disillusion with Henley. Whichever the way of it, it is all the more surprising then to find him writing to the novelist Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) by the end of May 1886:

'I have read your Mayor of Casterbridge with sincere admiration... do you think you would let me dramatize it?'

These mercurial changes of mind and attitude are, of course, typical of the man and his condition but Hardy replied on 7 June:

'I feel several inches taller at the idea of⁴ your thinking of dramatizing 'The Mayor'... Yes, by all means...'

Another partnership was in the offing.

Arrangements were made for the Stevensons to visit the Hardys at their home, Max Gate in Dorchester, on the 24th to discuss the adaptation but on the day Stevenson had a haemorrhage and was confined to the hotel. But the Stevensons did get to Max Gate. Fanny wrote to Margaret Stevenson:

'We saw Hardy the novelist at Dorchester... a pale, gentle, frightened, little man... one felt an instinctive sympathy for him...'

She also wrote to Colvin (of Hardy):

'He is modest, gentle and appealing... We like him very much.'

Fanny was then left to entertain Mrs Hardy, whom she found -

'very plain, quite underbred and most tedious' - adding -

'What very strange marriages literary men seem to make!'⁵

The Stevensons returned to Skerryvore and nothing more was heard of the project. This was all the more unfortunate since such a collaboration would have teamed Stevenson with someone more congenial to his own temperament and whose own The Trumpet Major (1880) would be successfully dramatised in 1912, but once again for Stevenson as Dramatist a promising and intriguing co-operation was not to be. Hardy himself said later:

'The memories I have of Robert Louis Stevenson are very meagre, as I saw him but a few times... possibly the first occasion at Mr. Sidney Colvin's house at the British Museum... A more distinct image... was the visit he paid me at Dorchester, in August 1885. He came to me unexpectedly from the King's Arms Hotel in the town, where he was staying for a day or two with Mrs Stevenson and a lady who was (his) cousin. They were on their way to Dartmoor, the air of which he had been told would be beneficial to him. He appeared in a velveteen jacket, with one hand in a sling. I asked him why his arm was in a sling, as there seemed nothing wrong with his hand: his answer (I am almost certain) was that... it lessened the heart in its beats... In the following year, in May, after the publication of The Mayor of Casterbridge, he wrote asking if he could dramatize it... I wrote back my ready permission; and there the matter ended. I heard no more about the play; and I think I may say that to my vision he dropped into utter darkness from that date.'⁶

Thomas Hardy joins R.A.M. Stevenson, James Barrie and Henry James and William Archer as compatible talents with whom he might have, and perhaps should have, at some part of his life, conjoined in the making of a play. Instead, he chose Henley, or Henley chose him. And now, inexplicably, he teamed up in yet another combination - with his wife.

If he was no longer pondering plays, she was. At any rate, Fanny was now exploring every dramatic possibility. Her idea was that perhaps she should collaborate with him. On a play? Why not? At least this time it would be kept in the family. Fanny had been considering drama ideas since the end of 1885 but Stevenson hesitated. He knew the hazards only too well but he knew too that he had no option. Louis found it was always better to have Fanny on his side as well as by it. Together they would make one last attempt at making theatre. Their project was to be a drama in three acts and six tableaux to be called - The Hanging Judge. This was not a new project. It had its origins in the Henley collaboration, as Henley explained:

'The 'Hanging Judge' idea was suggested by a story in Sheridan la Fanu's Through a Glass Darkly. I bought it in the cloth as a motif for a play... One was written and submitted to Beerbohm T. But it came to nothing; & it wasn't for many years that he (Lewis) took up the 'Hanging Judge' thing & incarnated it in McQueen of Braxfield who is Weir of Hermiston.'

M.L.G. Balfour, (Sir Graham Balfour's daughter) noted:

'The first public mention of The Hanging Judge appeared to have been made by Colvin in January 1896 when Weir of Hermiston first appeared as a serial in Cosmopolis. In the preface, Colvin referred to The Hanging Judge as further evidence of Stevenson's feelings on the relations between father and son.'

It had been Fanny's original idea at the time to make Le Fanu's story of father and son into a play, and she even suggested this to Henley as something he should work on with Louis. When this came to nothing, she started on it herself. She was no playwright but she said she was - 'emboldened by my husband's offer to give me any help needed'.⁹

Soon both husband and wife found themselves absorbed not so much in the trials but in following the brilliant career of a Mr Garrow, who appeared as counsel in many of the cases. Fanny confirmed that she was

'Still intent on Mr Garrow, - whose subtle examination of witnesses, and masterly, if somewhat startling methods of arriving at the truth seemed to us more thrilling than any novel.'

On 11 March 1887, Stevenson wrote to Messrs. R. and R. Clark:

'Please strike off a dozen or two dozen copies as it stands: but on a large quarto page with broad margins and printed only on one side. I do not want it stitched, simply in loose, numbered single leaves as (when I have time) I must work a great part of it afresh.'

This printing was later to cause some confusion as to the reliability of the later Wise publication's claimed to be the - 'First Edition, Privately Printed.'¹² On the first of May, a manuscript in draft was submitted to Richard Mansfield, the American actor, who rejected it. He was more interested in an adaptation of the recently-published Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde for the stage which T.R.Sullivan had prepared for him after a long meeting with Stevenson in America. On 6 December, 1887, Fanny wrote to Colvin from America:

'The Hanging Judge, amid much dissension and acrimony, has been finished.'

How revealing that phrase - 'amid much dissension and acrimony'.

It would appear that the domestic collaboration differed little from the professional in the effect that it had on the relationship. Despite Stevenson's determination to 'work a great part of it afresh' he seemed to have had little time free from The Merry Men and Other Tales and was now trying to be novelist and dramatist at one and the same time.

His wife, however, persevered with the play and continued to revise the text, which seemed incongruous for one formerly so set against the plays - or was it only because they involved Henley? All the efforts of the loyal and influential Stevenson coterie in London were unable to persuade Beerbohm Tree to mount the play. He thought it, by his own account, 'a rather turgid affair'.¹³

It might have seemed then that theatre in general and The Hanging Judge in particular were dead issues but while in Sydney, Stevenson himself, then a very sick man, made strenuous personal efforts, for Fanny's sake, to have the play produced by Dion Boucicault's actor son, Darley, (known as 'Dot') who 'wondered if he (R.L.S.) would last through the interview', but once again, it came to nothing. There is a saying in theatre that 'any baby carried too long will be still-born'. In other words, any project that is too long in gestation generates its own inertia and inaction. The fact was that The Hanging Judge had hung fire so long that it had burnt itself out. But Fanny would not give up. As late as 1895, she was asking Sidney Colvin if he could get it produced. In 1914, Edmund Gosse, as a gesture, arranged with Thomas J. Wise and Company of Hampstead, London to have a special edition of thirty copies printed for private distribution only. Gosse had imagined that this was the only existing copy of the play but in fact some dozen or so existed.

He wrote in the Introduction:

'When in the summer of 1907, I was consulted by my old and valued friend, the late Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson, as to what should, or should not, be included in the Pentland Edition of her husband's works, which she had asked me to see through the press, she added dubiously, "And then there's The Hanging Judge - what do you say to that?" This was not the first time that I had heard of this play, of which Stevenson had spoken to me as of a project that he was fondly dreaming about. But I was wholly unaware that the dream had ever taken shape. Mrs. Stevenson then informed me that her husband and she had written this Hanging Judge at Skerryvore, their Bournemouth house, early in 1887. I expressed a great anxiety to see it, and she accordingly (July 9, 1907), forwarded a typed copy of it to me, leaving it to my judgement whether it should or should not be included in the Pentland Edition. On reading it I determined that it should not be so included; Mrs. Stevenson acquiesced, but left the play with me, in case my view should change. It has not changed, but as I understand that other copies are in existence, I think it well to have this text privately printed, as it is that which was selected for the press by Mrs. Stevenson herself.'

THE HANGING JUDGE

PERSONS REPRESENTED

Mr. Justice Harlowe

Mrs. Harlowe

Will Gillespie under the name of Jack Johnson

A Person subsequently called Malone

Eleanor Gillespie, known as Eleanor Harlowe

Bernard Hargreave

Old Hargreave

Mr. Sergeant Garroway

Mr. Guest

Mr. Penny

Little Peter Penny

Beamish, a Bow Street Officer

Harne, a Parson

Counsel for the Prosecution

A Watchman

A Bystander at the Trial

A Servant - Watchmen, Crier, Counsel, Crowd, Guests.

The time is about 1820.

The first Act passes within the space of a day; the second, of a day; and the third, of two days. There are 3 weeks between Acts 1 and 11. The scene is laid in Mr Justice Harlowe's suburban house beyond Bloomsbury, except in the fourth tableau, when it changes to the Session Hall of the Old Bailey.

Stevenson's original letter to R. and R. Clark had ended:

'I don't want it stitched, simply in loose, numbered single leaves as (when I have time) I must work a great part of it afresh. Have I made this perfectly plain?'

Penny plain or twopence coloured? Had the ghost of Mr Skelt been laid?

THE HANGING JUDGE

COMMENT AND ANALYSIS

The setting is once again 'about 1820' - the Golden Age for Stevensonian drama it would seem. The dialogue echoes the age of Austen (1775-1817), but it is Beau Austin not Jane - ("Not gallant, sir - not spoke like a son of mine.") The surprise effect is often so surprising it is laughable and the melodramatic devices such as faces at the window, and hiding behind curtains tend to lessen dramatic tension to say the least. The level of character drawing is as high as in the other plays and the comedy by-play between Penny and the Watchman is a pointer to the strength which Stevenson was developing in stage character. More and more in the plays, the 'persons represented' are believable and are playable parts.

This indicates a decided growth in his dramatist's ability. Only the mechanical workings and the structure are evidence of theatrical uncertainty and timidity. Stevenson is here restraining himself and one only wishes he would be as daring in the drama as is suggested by his open reference to Malone's use of opium (foreshadowing Henry Jekyll?) in Scene 7. The quality of the material is often hidden in poor stage packaging. For instance, in Act 1 Scene 4, the entry of Gillespie is undercut by its high melodramatic device and weakens the strong acting possibilities in the scene that followed. Similarly, his return is made to look paltry. Again, the use of whispers in the dark is an effect used with better purpose in Admiral Guinea. Here, Stevenson might be too advanced in his theatrical demands. His kind of theatre asks for more sophisticated sound and lighting that was available in 1888.

In Act 2 the denouement is set up too obviously. The audience is made to assume that Gillespie has been caught whereas it would have been simple to have shown this by an on-stage reaction to the event off before the Act-drop. Malone's character grows in interest throughout, and like Pew in Admiral Guinea and Robert Macaire and Beau Austin is actor-foolproof. Characters like these are full of interest and are given the opportunity to sustain that interest before an audience. Unfortunately, Mr Justice Harlowe (the Hanging Judge himself) suffers in the same way as William Brodie and John Gaunt. While central to their various plays but each is written on one level and lack that extra

dimension suggested by the super-text and sub-text complementing every line they utter. This is what all good theatre writing should aim for - the hint of the other life that the character lives off-stage.

In The Hanging Judge, Stevenson makes excellent use of his theoretical knowledge of the law and court procedure and the legal speeches have the right ring. Mrs Stevenson was right to be pleased with the Sergeant Garroway character. He has good attack but once again he is unevenly placed in the action and not developed to his full extent. Mrs Harlowe seems to belong to that Victorian cliché, the lady with the secret, and one gets the feeling Fanny Stevenson must have enjoyed her, but she too is on one long-suffering plane and such unsubtle delineation requires the audience to be long-suffering as well. Her being seen at the end of Scene 4 with the fatal list crumpled in her hand is the very peak of old-fashioned high melodrama. There is a sense of this being what might be called a woman's play although once again, the trimming of dialogue would much improve its effect.

The specific use of medical terms ('minatory systems') would indicate Fanny's long reading of The Lancet but the occasional heavy-handedness ("Your mother is no forger of chimaeras.") in the lines spoils the good impression created by character. Some of the exchanges are laughable by today's norm. Witness the scene between Bernard and Eleanor, two very earnest and rather wooden juveniles:

BERNARD:	You forget one thing, - that I love you.
ELEANOR:	Bernard, you are sorry for my mother.
BERNARD:	Is this a fault in my Nelly's eye?
ELEANOR:	Ah, and for me!
BERNARD:	For you too, Nelly, when you weep.
ELEANOR:	Take back your troth. You marry me in pity.

This kind of thing however was very appropriate for its time and one should not attach too much blame to the authors. When they do have something fine they ruin it by the extra, unnecessary last word - "It was my mother - " says Eleanor, - "disguised."

The 12-year old Peter Penny is a gratuitous surprise in the action but his exchange with Sergeant Garroway has a Dickensian feeling. It seems that Stevenson jumped at the prose opportunities given in the Judge's long speech in Tableau 4 Scene 3. It has all the lucidity and ease which marks the writer and the dialogue in the Bystander-Mrs Harlowe exchange in the trial scene anticipates modern tele-commentary.

It also confirms Mrs Harlowe's place as the real heroine of the piece. But once again, this is spoiled by Gillespie's faint following hard on hers. He ought to have been protesting strongly as the curtain falls. Too often too many assumptions are made about what the audience knows. Act 3 Scene 1 starts off with much of the pertinent information having been said before the curtain went up. Then again, in the later scene between Bernard and Malone there are too many references to what has been said off-stage, for example, Malone's talk of Bernard's 'quips'. We have certainly never heard Bernard quip in the play.

There are also unusual phrases which jar -

"Life is of a strange tissue," (Harlowe, Scene 2) and

"Robert, I have a prayer to make to you." (Mrs Harlowe) are examples.

The coincidence of the Parson's knowing Malone is just acceptable but why does he not refer to Malone by his real Oxford name?

But the final feeling is that this is Fanny's play more than Louis's.

In Act 3 Scene 2:

MRS. HARLOWE It is the woman's part to suffer; write that in your mind; she should bear all - all - and make her husband happy and her children safe....'

In Act 3 Scene 4

MRS. HARLOWE We should bear ourselves more smilingly on our Nelly's wedding-day.

HARLOWE More smilingly.

The stage then direction reads -

'Each is afraid to continue the conversation'.

It is a good point at which to leave The Hanging Judge even if it only to avoid the ludicrous phial of poison and the inevitable death at the curtain. The younger Stevenson had already written of the need for 'painful suppressions' in the artistic endeavour. Here is another instance of when the cruel cut would have been kinder.

The Hanging Judge, the last completed play of Stevenson's, is now bracketed with Monmouth, his first completed play, in having interest only for having been completed. This is perhaps unfair to the work in having a product of his writing maturity thus linked to his juvenilia. Colonel Prideaux, an authoritative voice in Stevensonian scholarship, has made his plea for its redemption on the grounds that it has a place in the Works but would it work on the stage? Whether or not it ever receives a performance on stage, it seems likely that The Hanging Judge

will remain the pariah of the plays, shunned by actors, ignored by critics and quite unknown to the public. It seems a harsh fate for something that might be made to work one day. Prideaux makes the note in the bibliographical record of the play:

'Stevenson apparently did not think much of it but Mrs Stevenson considered it of some value and the present impression was made from the copy of the text which she herself selected. It is perhaps a reflex of Stevenson's mind at the time it was written and it certainly deserves to be redeemed from oblivion, even if it does not merit a place among his celebrated works.'¹⁶

The Hanging Judge would appear to exist as a Stevenson opus by virtue of Mrs Stevenson's efforts rather than Mr Stevenson's. The fact remains that it emerged from his hand however much his elbow may have been jogged by his wife and therefore it earns its place as the last completed work in the Stevenson dramatic canon. Twenty years had now passed since the juvenile Monmouth. If it was his prologue as a dramatist then The Hanging Judge might serve as his epilogue.

In 1894, Macaire was added to the three plays already in print and published as Four Plays by David Nutt. The proceeds were then divided equally between all parties concerned and the books were closed on the Stevenson/Henley partnership.

But the story of The Hanging Judge had not finished.

As John Carter relates in his article for The Colophon in the Spring Issue of 1938, the genuine first edition of 1887, that is the copies ordered by Stevenson himself of R. and R. Clark and comprising six copies according to Carter, sold for £90 at auction in 1918 and re-sold for £310 in 1929. Lloyd Osbourne had sold his copy at Sotheby's (Lot 704) for £208 in 1923. The first American copy, which had been William Archer's, sold to the American Art Galleries (Lot 64) for £1,150 on April 22, 1926. It can be seen then, that for a purportedly negligible work it has had a chequered career to say the least, and it has certainly earned more in the auction room than in the theatre. What is proved by this is Miss Balfour's assertion (See P175) that the Thomas J. Wise Edition of 1914 was not, as claimed, the real first edition. But as Carter says, 'Do six copies constitute an edition?' Nevertheless, as he concludes:

'The Hanging Judge leaves the courtroom without a stain on its character - still a virgin - and likely to remain one.'¹⁷

Yet another play scheme, untitled, based on an idea for private theatricals at Vailima (according to Graham Balfour) was taken up and again discarded. Stevenson would say nothing of it and the spell of the drama, which had for so long enchanted him, was broken at last. He would never again think of writing for the stage.

But at least in terms of playwriting, he had learned much from the first play to the fifth and one lesson he had learned early was that theatre is a better mistress than wife, but he found out too that a wife is not always the best partner in pursuit of good theatre. Mrs Stevenson no doubt meant well but her motives were not entirely artistic. She wanted the plays to be written solely for money and her energies were totally directed to that end. She also tried to order her husband's brief life for his own good but she erred in thinking she could similarly order his muse for hers. Bearing this in mind, the comments made by the Scots Pictorial, on the publication of the Edinburgh Edition of the Works, seem apt:

'The appearance of the new Edinburgh Stevenson containing the dramas reminds us that the author of 'Kidnapped' and 'Virginibus Puerisque'... did not forget the stage. We hope it is no blasphemy to add... that the drama is a region where, nowadays at any rate, the man of high and graceful imagination is more likely to fail than to succeed... one needs not therefore be surprised or pained because 'Deacon Brodie' is immeasurably below 'Treasure Island'. What a pity it is that Stevenson never made that prince of Scottish burglars and hypocrites into the hero of a novel... There is no figure in the annals of old Edinburgh... more grimly attractive. Why did not Stevenson handle him in fiction instead of in drama, and, above all, why did he write his play in partnership with Mr Henley, to whom, doubtless, some of the crudities of the piece are due? Stevenson, in truth, was too much given to collaboration - never a very safe or commendable practice - nor was he, as a rule, happy in his collaborators...' 18

Pace, Mr Henley.

Pace, Mrs Stevenson.

THE PLAYS

GENERAL REMARKS

THE PLAYS

GENERAL REMARKS

'De pictore, sculptore, fictore, nisi artifex judicare non potest'
Pliny (Epist.1,10)

Only the artist should criticise the work of another artist.

If anyone is to comment expertly on the plays of Robert Louis Stevenson one would have thought that Sir Arthur Wing Pinero (1855-1934) would have seemed to be the appropriate man to do so. A former actor, (he was with the Irving company in Edinburgh) by the end of the 19th-century he was one of the foremost dramatists of the day with The Magistrate (1885), Dandy Dick 1887), The Second Mrs Tanqueray 1893), Trelawney of the Wells and The Gay Lord Quex 1899) all performed and acclaimed. Sir Arthur was the first to comment publicly on the Stevenson-Henley plays and he could not have done so from a position of surer authority. The first thing he wanted to know was how serious Stevenson was about the drama? The answer might lie in the letter Louis wrote to E.L. Burlingame, his American editor, in October 1891:

'I add to my book-box list... the plays of A.W.Pinero - all that have appeared, and send me the rest in course as they do appear.'¹⁹

When they had not arrived by the following summer, he was complaining -

'What about the... belated Pineros?'²⁰

It is hardly the attitude of someone uninterested in the drama.

Again, on 27 March 1894, he was thanking William Archer for a copy of his The Theatre World:

'Do you know it strikes me as being really very good?... So far as I've looked, there's not a dull or an empty page in it. Hazlitt, whom you must often have thought of, would have been pleased. Come to think of it, I shall put this book upon the Hazlitt shelf... You must sometimes think it strange - or perhaps it is only I that should so think it - to be following the old round, in the gas lamps and the crowded theatres, when I am away here in the tropical forests and vast silences!'²¹

Is it possible that there is a wistful note here?

One remembers that this exile was once also a man of metropolitan theatre and had pretensions as a theatre critic himself. The then contemporary theatre world at the time of writing that letter was the world of Pinero in his prime and Victorian theatre at its height. It was a long way removed from the twopence-coloured theatre of Mr Skelt.

Pinero, for his part, as a working artist himself, would no doubt have been reluctant to criticise the work of any other artist no matter how able he was to do so, especially one so favoured by the public as Stevenson was at that period. However, Pinero similarly understood that if any work is attempted seriously, it must be seriously considered, and this he attempted to do in his lecture. But how seriously were we meant to take the plays? This was the question that was to underlie his talk.

In the decade from Stevenson's death in 1894, the Stevenson plays, as we shall now refer to them, were generally ignored in favour of the cult of Tusitala, the romantic exile of the South Seas, who had died so suddenly and so romantically so far from home. The legend of the velvet jacket had given way in the end to that of the yachting cap. It was not until Pinero was asked to speak on Robert Louis Stevenson, as a Dramatist^{*} that the first formal attention was given to this aspect of the latter's creative work. The lecture was presented under the auspices of the Philosophical Institute of Edinburgh and was given at the Music Hall in that city on Tuesday 24 February, 1903.

Sir Arthur began by asking his audience for a show of hands from those who had actually seen any of the Stevenson plays on stage. There was a sparse response. One wonders if the response today would be so different? They have never been performed since their own day, if one excepts the Playfair Beau Austin in 1929 and the Edinburgh Lyceum Deacon Brodie in 1978. Few today even know that Stevenson ever wrote plays. Sir Arthur's lecture goes some way towards explaining why.

Four main points were made by the dramatist in his survey of Stevenson drama as exemplified by Deacon Brodie, Beau Austin, and Admiral Guinea. He discounted Macaire as an original work regarding it as a reworking of an older play in terms of dialogue. Similarly, Monmouth and The Hanging Judge are not considered, being held to be more in the nature of a library manuscript in the case of the first and a discarded work in the case of the second. Pinero concerned himself therefore with the performing texts of the three plays produced commercially in the professional theatre - Deacon Brodie, Beau Austin and Admiral Guinea.

* The text was printed privately before being published by Columbia University, New York, in July 1914 as *Papers on Play-making*, Number 4. with Introduction by Clayton Hamilton.

The four points indicated were as follows:

1. - The art of the drama is not stationary, but progressive -
"showing the age and body of the time his form and pressure".
Most literary men writing for theatre tend to use outmoded models, thus Stevenson imitated the transpontine melodramatists of the early 19th-century. This makes for literary or closet drama and not for contemporary theatre.
2. - Dramatic talent is of service to the theatre only as the raw material of theatrical talent and a dramatic talent is born, not made. It is developed into a theatrical talent by practice and experience. The task of writing a play is less of writing than of building. A play is a dramatic structure. It is more an architectonic, than a literary art.

3. - It is a matter of strategy and tactics.

(Sir Arthur defines 'strategy' as the general laying out of the play and 'tactics' as the trick of getting characters on and off the stage, of conveying information to the audience, and of suggesting a realistic truth.)

There is no theatrical mystery in the making of a play - only in how it is received by an audience, who would rather see a well constructed play rather than any literary drama, however finely written. This is one of the prime difficulties in the convention of the poetic play.

4. - Eloquence is not always good theatre. Fine speeches alone do not make a play. There is a distinction between the absolute beauty of words and the fitness of words in a dramatic situation.

In his introduction, Clayton Hamilton gives the view as traditional that

'all biography would be autobiography if it could. Similarly... all dramatic criticism should ideally be given by dramatists. No one better understands... that 'compression of life without falsification' which the stage demands, nor the infinitude of technical devices that must be employed. Unfortunately, dramatists are too busy writing plays to be critics. Aristotle (was) the greatest of all critics... but how much more instructive might have been an analysis of 'Oedipus Rex' by Euripides or even Sophocles himself. Lessing and Shaw are examples of playwrights who are also critics...'

Sir Arthur finds the plays of Stevenson defective in all the four points mentioned above and holds Stevenson's work in the drama anachronistic, since the models he used were outworn. They were also unworthy. R.L.S., according to Sir Arthur, never took the time or trouble to develop a strong dramatic instinct into an effective theatre talent. He relied too much on his collaborator, and made the mistake of

not trusting his own instincts. As a result he never learned either the strategy or the tactics of playmaking. He did not know enough about theatre practice to see that it was inferior work he was imitating. He insists that the real reason for Stevenson's inadequate success in the theatre was that he did not take the stage seriously.

'He worked in a smiling, sportive, half-contemptuous spirit... The stage is a realm of absurdities - come let us be cleverly absurd... In fact, he played at being a playwright and made the error of regarding drama as child's play... Hence his own plays can be seen as a derivation of his own childhood obsession with Skelt's Juvenile Drama... To the end, he regarded professional theatre as an enlarged form of the toy theatres he had known as a boy.'

According to Pinero, Stevenson saw himself as being no more than a child with a paint box as far as plays were concerned and even when his partner, Henley, continued to see them as practical pieces of working theatre, Pinero contends that Stevenson soon lost interest and even belief in them. This is only half-true. Stevenson's attention span in all the work he did was not extensive - all the more successful books were written in two segments. Pinero recognised that the artist in Stevenson could not be fooled, which was why he was reluctant to send out copies of any of the plays. It is undeniable that had Stevenson applied his undoubted genius with words to genuine dramatic effect, we might have had a major dramatist as well as a major essayist and novelist. At the time of his writing, the art of the drama was undergoing a significant change. The 'New Drama' as it was called was just emerging. William Archer was only one of the critics who tried to foster this modern expression of dramatic ideas (others were J.T.Grien and A.B.Walkley and of course, George Bernard Shaw, also a Stevenson friend.)

The writers and directors of the New Drama believed in the theatre as an agent for social change as much as it was a social event. It was more than a good night out. There was also a curiosity about new forms and a need to experiment among the younger theatre writers such as John Galsworthy (1867-1933) and Harley Granville-Barker (1877-1946). They wished to free theatre from the rigidity of the conventional play and to see the stage as a reflection of everyday life. They were also intrigued by the possibility of a more demanding, literary drama than was then available on the London stage.

Stevenson was at the very crest of his creative powers in the 'eighties when everything was new - the new drama, the new art, the new realism, the new woman, the new age, as the Victorians prepared themselves for the new 20th-century. Stevenson was more than capable of adding something to this surge forward and he might have made a real contribution to the new intellectual theatre had he been in London to profit by it. But he chose, or rather Henley chose, to echo the old-fashioned dramatic style of decades before and a possible 'new' dramatist was lost. This point is deliberately iterated as it is the undoubted burden of the study - that it would have taken so little to have diverted a major writing talent towards its effective manifestation in the drama, but sadly, that small effort was not made.

Sir Arthur goes on:

'In considering any phase of Stevenson's work, we must bear in mind it is essentially memorial. His muse was without doubt the muse of memory. His stories were emotions recollected, and not always in tranquility. But they were sensations he had experienced in the past. Everything he wrote (outside of theatre) was an artistic record of his own individual experience. Yet his experience of theatre was almost entirely confined to his toy theatre of his childhood...

Of his experience of drama as a living reality, we have already mentioned his only appearance as an amateur. This was as "Orsino" in Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night". Mrs Fleeming Jenkin who was the 'Viola' in that production remembered in a conversation thirty-five years later, that "Stevenson had a fine voice and read well, if somewhat artificially, but could never be persuaded to take rehearsals seriously. He regarded them merely as an occasion for antic, sport and gaiety".

Stevenson... never seemed to have taken advantage of seeing the English theatre of his own age and generation. He went to the theatre more frequently in Paris, particularly to the Comedie Francaise (and) made a serious study of Dumas Pere, a giant of French theatre, but again this solitary study of a dramatist was from a literary point of view, not that of an initiate or apprentice to live theatre.'

In this French connection, the present writer would argue that the critical notes made by Stevenson at the end of the plays in Henley's bound volumes on Alexandre Dumas pere indicate an eager student of dramatic form and method as Stevenson then was under Fleeming Jenkin. Sidney Colvin makes this same point when he reprinted the notes after the annotations had been discovered by W.P.Ker, Professor of English Literature at the University College, London, who bought the Dumas set after Henley's death in 1903 and made them available to Colvin who wrote:

'Of Dumas as a master of romantic narrative he (Stevenson) has expressed an opinion in an essay familiar to everyone. The following notes show for the first time and in detail his views of the same prodigal and prodigious craftsman's detail in the art by which he (Dumas) first won fame, the art of the stage. Stevenson set down these notes, we may assume, in order to get his ideas on the subject clear, both for the benefit of Henley (also a great Dumas enthusiast) and for his own use.'²²

Colvin then provides a selection of the Stevenson comments on the twenty-four Dumas plays, from Henri III et sa cour (1829) to Les Blancs et Les Bleus (1869), which runs to no less than four pages and includes a long discourse on Hamlet. The points he makes are too numerous and detailed to reproduce here but they are NOT literary ones. He was reading the plays admittedly but he comments from a practical and serious point of view. He also spoke as one who had seen all the plays concerned in Paris and therefore appreciates their effectiveness on stage. Stevenson always responded better to France than to England. Even the language seemed to come easily to him, and like another Scot, Mary Stuart, he could say 'Ma patrie, la plus chérie, adieu, plaisant pays de France.'⁶ Perhaps, like Wilde with 'Salome', he should have written his first play in French? After all, William Brodie had more than a passing resemblance to Francois Villon. Sir Arthur continues:

'In his essay on 'Victor Hugo's Romances', Stevenson set forth a theory of the respective limitations of the drama and the novel. Again, the second paragraph of another essay entitled 'A Gossip on Romance', Stevenson draws a distinction between drama as the poetry of conduct and romance as the poetry of circumstance. But this is only abstract theory and shows no real evidence of a genuine commitment to drama as a craft.'

At the time of writing the plays, Stevenson's health was at its lowest ebb. His motives in collaborating with Henley were complex and, to a degree, mercenary, but the basic reason was because he enjoyed the company of a clever and witty man who, for a time, took his mind off his illness. Henley however took the task of playwriting more seriously than Stevenson seemed to do. Pinero considers that he lacked that intentness by which success might have been achieved. He concludes:

'Stevenson, with all his genius, made the mistake of approaching the theatre as a toy to be played with. The facts of the case were against him, for the theatre is not a toy; and facts being stubborn things, he ran his head against them in vain. Had he only studied the conditions, or in other words, got into a proper relation to the facts, with what joy should we have acclaimed him among the masters of the modern stage.'

With these words, Pinero effectively put paid it would have seemed to any further serious consideration of Stevenson as a dramatist. However, in November 1912, Neil Munro, a fellow-Scot and fellow-novelist, wrote an article for a special edition of The Bookman (1913) which was to be devoted to aspects of Robert Louis Stevenson. Many notable Stevensonians contributed but Munro wrote of the plays:

'(They) have never been successful from a box-office point of view or in the estimate of the dramatic critics, and the passage of time, which, sooner with prose drama than with any other kind of literature, makes the fashion of the work antique or obsolete, renders it more unlikely every year that any of the plays in question can ever be revived with even moderate popular success... (there are) certain elemental qualities in the plays which in any age would militate against their acceptance on the stage however they may charm in private reading... the mood in which the work was done was inimical to dramatic success... That merry and illuminating essay, 'A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured' gives the clue to Stevenson's attitude to the drama; he was the child of Skelt... touched up with genuine literary style... but coloured with crimson lake, the speeches orotund and rhetorical and thrown far enough back in period to obviate any chance of the audience finding out that action and speech were of no age and clime but simply Skeltery. The plays in short, were written with tongue in cheek, and no audience will stand for that... on stage the brilliance of (the) writing, (particularly in the sophisticated banter) fails to make up for their ability to arouse emotion. It was the verdict of a quarter of a century ago; it is the verdict of today.'²³

His today was 1912 of course. But Munro goes on to make the point -

'(that) the spirit of the paper game with which Stevenson set about play-writing, only to discover that the grown-up world takes its plays seriously, in no way impairs the effect of 'A Child's Garden of Verses', also composed in sportive hours - 'the sportive hours, as it happened, of an author at the time experiencing the mingled joys of haemorrhage, sciatica and ophthalmia... 'Though the gentle ironist peeps out... the deliberate artist always, there is never any mood of insincerity...'

Writing around the same time, G.K.Chesterton elaborates further:

'His relation to the huge half-truth that he carried was, in its very simplicity, a mark of truthfulness. For he had the splendid ringing sincerity to testify, in a voice like a trumpet, to a truth he did not understand.'²⁴

This is true of the creative artist in any medium. He divines more than he can confirm. His is often the inspired guess. Chesterton continues:

'I should say that nobody, as fond of play-acting as he was, could possibly be insincere...'²⁵

'The primary paradox... the real joke about Stevenson (is) of all that intellectualism in Bohemia the result was the return to Skelt. Of all that wallowing in Balzac the remarkable outline was Treasure Island... Stevenson was not really looking forward or outward to a world of larger things, but backward and inward into a world of smaller ones: in the peepshow of Skelt, which was still the true window of the world.'²⁶

But what is true in a play? The primary paradox of theatre is that it is a lie in itself. In its very pretence IS its truth. Drama is a deliberate pretence, staged to convey its truth through a series of rehearsed lies put into the mouths of actors by the playwright and the better the stage lie the greater the theatrical truth. Stevenson understood this and the importance in any work of the artistic lie:

'To tell the truth, rightly understood, is not to state the true facts, but to convey a true impression; truth in spirit, not truth to the letter, is the true veracity.'²⁷

Francis Watt, a near-contemporary, writing of the Stevenson plays in 1913, had a first-hand comment to offer:

'I was told by Henley himself that what each did was revised and gone over by the other so that no part could be said to be the work of one... R.L.S. had almost an antipathy to the plays. At any rate, he soon lost interest or belief in them... Mr Charles Baxter told me that R.L.S. was inclined always to consider the Plays as nothing. Henley to the last believed in them, not merely as literature but as practical working pieces. I have often heard him express this view, for he spoke more of the Plays than he did of his other works. He discussed them chiefly in connection with the theatre. He thought highly of the Deacon, as he called the piece. It was played in America through a somewhat lengthy tour. The name part was taken by Edward Henley, a brother of W.E.H. and an actor of very considerable promise, which time was not given him to fulfil, for he died young...'²⁸

Mr Watt then goes on to discuss each play in full, including Macaire, of which he says, 'We may leave out of account' as only having a 'success of esteem'. He does not regard the others as popular successes, but -

'they cannot be classed as failures. They make excellent reading. They have many choice and powerful passages. They are full of fine and strong character drawing and striking situations. I have seen two of them, the Beau and the Admiral to wit, on the stage. They went very well; they satisfied what was perhaps a picked audience... Failure is no proof of merit, yet it cannot be said that success shows a stage piece to be worth very much. The fashion of the day, blatant appeal to bad taste and worse instincts, cheap rhetoric, tawdry sentiment, all may give an unworthy triumph. There must of necessity be reasons for a failure, but the fault need not of necessity lie with the authors...'²⁹

He goes on:

'The Plays were too good to win a popular success. It was almost impossible to get sufficiently cultured audiences in sufficient numbers to support for any length of time such works. The mass want forcible not fine language, broad not delicate shades of character, simple rather than subtle effects. Their minds are not sufficiently alert to grasp subtleties, and they weary of things they do not fully understand. Shakespeare succeeds on the stage on his lesser, not his deeper merits.'³⁰

At least, this could be said to be a very definite point of view, although his chapter on the plays ends with the the observation -

'However, we have not yet the final verdict.'³¹

Further consideration of the dramatist was to wait for J.A.Steuart's, anecdotal Life of R.L.Stevenson in 1924 where he allows himself the briefest comments on the plays, to which, he states:

'The British public evinced a philistine indifference... Drama critics have pointed out, quite justly, that the Stevenson-Henley plays are too consciously literary for the stage - (they) fail to cross the footlights... Literature and the theatre were not then, any more than they are now, convertible or interchangeable terms. A more serious fault, since it was radical and fundamental, was that neither of the collaborators could sink or merge his own identity in that of their characters... Personality, individuality, so precious in the essay or the sermon, are dangerous, one may say deadly, ingredients in creative work.'³²

This is so true, and it would seem that the authors were too much bent on providing a fine artistic finish before they had even got off to a good start. In so doing they were only perpetuating the literary tradition within the whole history of dramatic representation. Sir Max Beerbohm talks of the bad play written exquisitely by a poet, or thoughtfully by a philosopher or strenuously by a propagandist, and in the same context, critic, James Agate, maintains:

'(That) the critic is right who lavishes praise on a brilliantly executed farce about a scrap of paper, while rejecting a White Paper which, admirable in itself, does not begin to be a play...'
(As Montaigne says) 'many dramatists never grasp all that the special conditions of theatrical representation demand. Their plays remain essentially novels or lyric or didactic poems or pamphlets or Socratic dialogues.'³³

G.K.Chesterton goes to the heart of the matter:

'Where does the story of Stevenson really start? Where does his special style or spirit begin and where did they come from? How did he get, or begin to get, the thing that made him different from the man next door? I have no doubt about the answer.'

He got them from the mysterious Mr Skelt of the juvenile drama, otherwise the toy theatre, which of all toys has the most of the effect of magic on the mind... he has written it all in an excellent essay and at least one very real sentence of autobiography - 'What is the world and what is man and life but what my Skelt has made them?'³⁴

Chesterton goes on:

'Taking the toy as a symbol, Stevenson lived inside his toy theatre, in his own home, in his own bedroom - the nursery wall always darkened by the shadow of death. He was thrown back into the world of his imagination - a world of his own... a thing not so much of firelight but pictures in the fire.'³⁵

A valuable judgement from a man of theatre came later from Harley Granville-Barker who, in 1930, wrote in a letter to Kennedy Williamson:

'I have a qualified admiration for the plays, but H. and S. never quite got away (I think) from their 'toy theatre' days - they thought the theatre great fun as a plaything. They had (a) literary conscience - and that appears in all the writing. But as to the main essential part of the business, I don't believe they ever felt the necessity of losing themselves in that, as they were ready to in a poem or a novel. Hence, there is a surface effect of a sort gained, and how much can that be made to count for, well, only experiment will show. But the things ring rather hollow. Deacon Brodie, was, I believe, merely put together to give Henley's brother, the actor, an effective part. Beau Austin and Admiral Guinea are the two best, and the latter the better of them in my judgement. Macaire is a disciplining into decent shape of the hotch-potch that Lemaitre gave life to and that other (English) actors followed him in. But it remains a skeleton that has to be clothed with flesh; and I'm not very sure they understood that.'³⁶

This is a view that has to be respected since it is that, not only of an actor, but a director and a noted writer on dramatic theory. It is therefore the more interesting to note his 'qualified admiration'. This is what is so tantalising about each of the plays. There are so many good things among the dross but not sufficient in any one of them to create the alchemy that would turn it into gold. The 'pictures seen in the firelight' did not reproduce ideally in limelight.

* As this study has shown Deacon Brodie was always intended for Irving and Alfred Wareing confirmed this. He said Henley told him it was written 'after many nights in the gallery of the Lyceum Theatre'.

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

Copyright, 1916, by Clayton Hamilton

A hitherto unpublished portrait of Robert Louis Stevenson, reproduced from a photograph in the possession of Clayton Hamilton. This picture was taken at Bournemouth, between 1884 and 1887. The original was given by Stevenson himself to William Ernest Henley, who gave it to Brander Matthews, who gave it to the present owner. The card on which the photograph is mounted bears the words "Robert Louis Stevenson, Skerryvore, Bournemouth" in Stevenson's handwriting. No other copy is known to be in existence.

Brander Matthews (James Brander Matthews 1852-1929), an American theatre historian and playwright, was the first to be appointed as a Professor of Dramatic Literature in the United States when in 1892 he was appointed at Columbia University in New York. In 1915, he contributed an article to Scribners' Magazine entitled A Moral from Toy Theatre which was devoted to Stevenson and the stage. That such an authority, author of The Development of Drama (1903), Shakespeare as a Playwright (1913) and the later The Principles of Playmaking (1919), should give time and thought to a Scottish writer dabbling in the drama is an indication of the importance attached by the Professor to Stevenson's excursion into theatre.

Matthews' first contention was that playwriting demands not only a native gift but an acquired craft and he must have been aware of whom he was writing when he added of the putative playwright:

'He must - to use the apt term of the engineers - keep himself abreast of the 'state of the art'. Each of the greats learned from the master before them - Sophocles from Aeschylus, Shakespeare from Marlowe, Moliere from the Italian comedians. The stage door was wide open for Stevenson but he fell through the trap-door of Skeltery because he was in too much of a hurry and did not take the time to see where he was going. And as a result, he was disappointed, and like Lamb, cried -

"Hang the stage, I'll write for antiquity".

But those who do must not be surprised if they fail to delight their contemporaries. He should have followed the example of Victor Hugo, who also had a taste for melodrama, and who set himself to learn the secrets of Pixerecourt and the others. He did so to such effect, that the success of Hernani and Ruy Blas was almost assured. He wrote in strict accordance with a given formula because precedence had proved that it worked. He blinded the spectators with the varnish of his rhetoric so that they could not see the artificial skeleton below. In Kemble's phrase, Hugo's pieces were 'consonant with the taste of the age'.

Stevenson heeded neither the warning of Lamb nor the example of Hugo. Deacon Brodie was born out of date. So was Admiral Guinea. He (Stevenson) looked to make money by constructing³⁷ ornament instead of making a play by ornamenting a construction.

These are wise words from a man who had been early to recognise, like Shaw, the importance of Ibsen to the new drama of the fin de siecle, but they came too late for a writer who was so in tune with its poetic and non-realistic demands and with its desire for contemporary meaning. Stevenson knew unerringly what was artistically true but he was at the behest of a partner - or partners, who confused what was true on stage with what was real in life.

J.C.Furnas, an eminent Stevensonian, in his two page consideration of the dramatic collaboration in 1952, grudges the absence of what might have been in literature if Henley had not been so enthusiastic about plays and involved Stevenson in the writing of them -

'English dramatic literature would feel much the same if all these plays vanished tomorrow... What (Shaw's) approval boils down to (is) largely amusement at seeing this notable pair devoted to an insignificant idiom, plus a high opinion of the quality of prose in the dialogue - not, be it noted, their dialogue as structural contribution to an actable script...

Pinero acknowledged that they were trying to inject aesthetic quality into the old conventions of the transpontine British popular stage (which) Louis called 'Skeltery' - in Treasure Island he succeeded just where these plays failed - transmuting the cheap into literature...

Louis later maintained that, towards the end, he had thrown good time and energy after bad merely to uphold Henley's stubborn hands. This may be somewhat distorted afterthought; perhaps loyalty did help to keep him on the dramatic lay...'³⁸

This rather severe view is that of the literateur rather than the dramaturg but it is reflected exactly in the view of a journalist, Ian Bell, now turned Stevenson biographer, in 1992:

'What to say of the dramas? The interested reader can at least take comfort from the fact that a biographer feels a duty to read them; no one else should. They are perhaps the least Stevensonian of the works to which Louis's name is attached... Their author's ignorance of the stage is obvious; the dialogue is almost unrelievedly risible; the plots are hackneyed... Brodie is the worst sort of amateur psychology; Macaire is Louis's love for French wit gone haywire; Guinea says something about slavery, but not much. All swarm with dull prose, as though woodworm had been loose on the rickety structure of Victorian drama...'³⁹

This hatchet-job on the plays indicates that Mr Bell makes no allowance for the fact that each was a Victorian production and that a reading of Irving's first great success, The Bells, would be almost as 'risible'. This adaptation by Leopold Lewis of Erckmann-Chatrian's Le Juif Polonais was exactly a product of its time, an uncompromising melodrama. The difference was Irving and all the technical team he could bring to it under the Bateman management at the Lyceum Theatre. Henley and Stevenson had hoped for exactly this for their work. What a difference it might have made. Nonetheless, the kind of modern reaction, as indicated by Messrs Furnas and Bell above, raises again the question of who is to blame, or where does the credit lie (depending on one's point of view) in the playwriting partnership. Hear Max Beerbohm:

'To evaluate from a work produced by A and B, the share of B, your best way is to proceed by elimination. Analyse the work into its component parts - its matter, method, style and so forth. Then set aside all in it that might be due to A, as A is known to you through the work done by him single-handed. The residue, presumably, must have done by B. This presumption becomes a certainty if, referring to any work done by B single-handed, you find that any of it coincides with the joint work which does not seem to have been done by A. You may now, of course, find in the joint work things that could have been done either by A or B. Some of the things that were A-like may, in the light of B's other work, seem to be equally B-like. For them you must give half-credit to both men. You may, on the other hand, find things that you can attribute neither to A or B. For these, also, you will divide the credit. They are the result of fusion.¹⁴⁰

Four plays resulted and no matter the varying reaction to them by reputable authorities since, there is no denying that they now do exist historically as pieces of theatre. Credit must at least be given to the writers for finishing them and congratulations are also due, particularly to Henley, for having all four staged. That is no mean feat, particularly for beginners at the practice. As the work of authors, who in their different ways, touched genius intermittently, they deserve a serious consideration despite the alleged un-seriousness they may have shown towards the business of theatre in their time.

'In their time' is the key phrase perhaps towards a proper understanding of their place in dramatic literature. Theatre practice, in any form, always belongs to its present tense - it has its own NOW.

The bulk of the plays were written between two novels, Treasure Island and Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, arguably the best-known of Stevenson's works. Between these twin towers, as it were, hung the plays, like the wires of a suspension bridge. Stevenson needed that bridge to reach from one level of writing (Treasure Island) to the other (Jekyll and Hyde) before he could get on to the final, greater heights of Weir of Hermiston. One must also remember that the germ of this last was in The Hanging Judge just as the seed of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde lay in the characters of William Brodie (Jekyll) and Blind Pew (Hyde).

It can be said therefore that Stevenson was the better novelist for having written the plays despite the mixed reaction to their performance. Present-day attitudes, as evinced by biographers, too often underestimate the part played by Henley. Theatre was not entirely lost to R.L.S. however as witness his involvement with Fanny in The Hanging Judge and his tinkering with a play idea in his final year.

Stevenson, for all his natural theatrical flair made the mistake of approaching a play as if it were a play-thing. A fact that so many commentators have indicated. Had he taken it half as seriously as Henley, for instance, this study might very well have been devoted to acclaiming him, as Pinero said, as a master dramatist. And yet - is not theatre exactly that - a play-thing?

'The play's the thing' - yes, but at its greatest it is a play-thing, a thing of moment that is taken up by the actors as an ephemeral ball to be thrown about between them; to catch a light here and there, sometimes to dazzle, sometimes to illuminate, and then to fade as the light fades to exist only as a memory to the spectator. Actors know well their own impermanence but what in the theatre they make of their play, is more than a play on the word, it is a hint of the immortal that is in all art and is the price paid by their very evanescence. Who is to say that Stevenson was not playing at theatre, but with it?

Irving Saposnik, a latter-day champion of the dramatic interlude in Stevenson's writing life, calls his Chapter Three, in which he deals with the plays, A Skelt-Drunken Boy. He says:

'It is wrong to dismiss the plays as - 'ephemeral' (Furnas) or as 'less than sufficiently serious' (Pinero) or 'because Stevenson imperfectly understood the requirements of dramatic action' (Swinerton).'⁴¹

Jenni Calder on the other hand considers that the flirtation with the theatre was just another manifestation of what she calls his 'feverish enthusiasms'. She goes on:-

'The dramatics with Henley were an aspect of this. The need for Louis to find ways of passing the time when he was to ill to write or do anything at all very much resulted in brief and vigorous concentration on things he could not do very well... modelling wax figures... the piano... the flageolet...'⁴²

It strikes the present writer, that contrary to this view, Stevenson's obsession with the stage dream was life-long:

'...to me it is, and must ever be, a dream unrealized, a book unwritten. O, my sighings after romance, or even Skeltery, and O! the weary age that will produce me neither!'⁴³

The plays were all written in a hectic, 'feverish' burst before, during and immediately after the Henley years - 1875-1887. A twelve year wonder is surely rather a sturdy flirtation by any standards.

Again, it seems to be the case with Stevenson, that when he was well, he played and talked and when he was ill, he wrote. His personality conditioned his whole output rather than his condition determining his personality. He was virtually at death's door at Bournemouth with pulmonary haemorrhages yet he wrote a considerable body of work - Kidnapped, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, Ollala, Markheim, Prince Otto, Underwoods (Poems) were completed and work was begun on The Memoir of Fleeming Jenkin. This is in addition to writing The Dynamiter with Fanny and three full-length stage plays with her and Henley. This would be a fair, almost frenetic output for a well man over a handful of years still less an invalid. He was certainly of the 'working' class. When he was in America, and being courted by Scribner's with a huge offer he felt ashamed of such wealth and had written to William Archer:

'I am like to be a millionaire if this goes on, and be publicly hanged at the social revolution; well, I would prefer that to dying in my bed; and it would be a godsend to my biographer, if I ever have one.'⁴⁴

He was certainly never to lack for biographers, and the latest, at the time of writing, is Frank McLynn (1993) who is of the opinion that the more fundamental problem with the Henley-Stevenson collaboration was that both authors were pulling in different directions. Emotion was all-important in drama for Henley and everything was larger than life, especially villainy. For Stevenson however, according to McLynn:

'Evil was not the simple matter it seemed to be to Henley. Characteristically, he (Stevenson) wished to portray ambiguity; not just the moral ambiguity of a Shaw play, but an ambiguity rooted in the very structure of the drama. He was always drawn to the 'problem comedies' of Shakespeare where the elements of traditional tragedy and comedy were fused... and (it was) a dialectical fusion between the determinism of tragedy and the voluntarism of comedy was achieved. This made him, as a playwright, infinitely more imaginative and ambitious than Henley.'⁴⁵

It is the considered opinion of the present writer that had Stevenson applied himself completely and consistently to the drama from the beginning he would have written a great play by the end. This is contingent however on his writing SOLO. All his best work is unmistakably his. His own worst enemy was never himself - he liked himself too much - no, it was whoever he was working with at the time. However much he had 'played the sedulous ape' as a youth he was very much his own man as a writer. Professor Sasponik agrees:

'Few would argue that, had Stevenson pursued the drama more vigorously, or had he worked alone, his plays would have emerged with more quality than they now possess.'⁴⁶

G.B.Stern also concurs:

'Without his friend Henley, Stevenson might never have wasted his small reserve of nervous energy writing... very bad, rumbustious plays. Or he might have written better plays, for he was fundamentally a dramatist; all the most famous scenes of his novels and tales could be acted with hardly any change.'⁴⁷

'Theatre is a gold mine. On that I must keep my eye,' he had written to his father in 1883, echoing Fanny's scribbled postscript to Henley, but by 1887 this was patently not so, although he may have felt as many in his circle did, that the prizes of the dramatist are out of all proportion to the payment of the man of letters.⁴⁸ Why then this lure of fool's gold, this shallow belief that he and Henley could turn out a good play with far less mental effort than it cost either to write a good novel or a good poem? What gave them - and Fanny - the conviction that they would be rewarded a hundredfold?

The answer is Henley's enthusiasm and Stevenson's amiable gullibility. Henley was well aware of his own shortcomings in the dramatic area. However much he may have loved theatre, he was hardly, on his own admission, the ideal person to advise in theatrical ways and means. His sincerity was often mistaken for arrogance, his honesty for bombast, but his was a jutting integrity.

'To hold opinions and state conclusions about an art whose technical processes are strange, and whose practice is impossible; this, it has ever seemed to me, is to take one's self more seriously than he may do who would sit well with posterity - and yet, humanum est errare...'⁴⁹

Yet how often they come so near to making the pieces work. Some lucky literary strikes were made, but a play is not a series of fortuitous effects arrived at by chance. Serendipity does not apply. It is a dramatic construction patiently built on a solid thematic foundation and structured to reveal its artistic intention when played before an audience. It is a working artefact rather than a objet d'art. The two partners never took time to learn the basic techniques of the craft required. They did not see that a true playwright writes for his audience and not for himself. It is with the audience in the theatre not the reader in his study that the final verdict lies. They are the keepers of the crock of gold and it is among them that the rainbow ends.

Jerome Hamilton Buckley closes his chapter on the plays with this paragraph:

'The failure of the Henley-Stevenson plays on the English stage was less remarkable than the eulogy heaped upon these plays by the keenest dramatic critics of the 'nineties. Alan Monkhouse, who spoke of the "high excellence" of the plays in general, felt sure that Beau Austin in particular was "destined to become a classic," insofar as it was "witty almost as Congreve, and with a far better hold on life."' ⁵⁰

And in the same paragraph Buckley goes on to quote Clement Shorter, who, in his jubilee survey of Victorian literature described the same piece as -

"probably the greatest contribution to the drama of the era." Historically, such judgements are not incomprehensible; for critics familiar with the talents of Wilde, Jones, and Pinero, of the translated Henrik Johan Ibsen (1828-1906), and of Shaw himself, could look back upon the 'eighties only as a barren decade, a decade to whose taste the three hundred tearful nights of Buchanan's *Sophia* were sufficient index. In the midst of that desert, Henley and Stevenson stood, a promising but neglected oasis. They alone in an otherwise "aesthetic" period considered drama as an "aesthetic" problem. Though neither of them possessed or understood the dramatic imagination, their collaborated plays yet remained as a serious experiment in style, an inspiration to the greater playwrights of the 'nineties.' ⁵¹

An even greater waste was in the matter of their deep friendship, begun when they were both so young in the ways of the world and ending a dozen or so years later when they they were both so busy attempting to be worldly, that they let their real world go by. They were a union, a tandem, a team, and despite all their disparities there was something warm and fine and uplifting in their long, manly friendship. It had seemed so durable but it hardly survived their marriages. Anna Henley loved her rowdy husband and accepted his friends. Fanny Stevenson loved her frail husband just as much but resented his friends - especially Henley. She may have had very good reasons but this was the vital factor in the equation. One is drawn to conjecture about the difference there might have been had they married the other's wife? The placid Anna would have happily nursed Louis but one shudders to think of Buffalo Will's volcanic eruptions breaking on Fanny's cold shoulder.

In this context it is well to bear in mind the comparative consistency in the relationship between the husbands up until the escalating quarrel in 1887, which from this distance seems more a matter of crossed purposes than cross words. A quick telephone call, had it

been possible, would have nipped it all in the bud. Just how high the two men stood in each other's eyes is revealed by the following letter written by Stevenson from Bonallie Towers on his 34th birthday -
13 November 1884.

'My Dear Boy - A thousand thanks for the Moliere. I have already read, in this noble presentiment, La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas, Le Malade Imaginaire, and a part of Les Femmes Savants; I say, Poquelin took damned good care of himself; Argan and Arysule, what parts!...

My birthday was a great success;... and in the evening, Bob arrived, a simple seraph. We have known each other ten years; and here we are, too, like the pair that met in the infirmary; why can we not mellow into kindness and sweetness like Bob? What is the reason? Does nature, even in my octogenarian carcase, run too strong that I must still be a bawler and treader upon corns? You, at least, have achieved the miracle of embellishing your personal appearance to that point that, unless your mother is a woman of even more perspicacity than I suppose, it is morally impossible that she can recognise you. When I saw you ten years ago, you looked rough and - kind of stigmatised, a look of an embittered political shoemaker; where is it now? You now come waltzing around like some light-hearted monarch; essentially jovial, essentially royal; radiant of smiles. And in the meanwhile, by a complementary process, I turn into a kind of hunchback with white hair! The devil. Well, let us be thankful for our mercies; in these ten years what a change from the cell in the hospital, and the two sick boys in the next bed, to the influence, the liberty, and the happiness of today!...

You have got yourself into a fine green paddock now to kick your heels in. And I too, what a difference... in my work, in my situation, and unfortunately, also in my health! But one need not complain of a pebble in the shoe, when by mere justice one should rot in a dungeon. Many thanks to both of you. Long life to our friendship, and that means, I do most firmly believe, to these clay continents on which we fly our colours; good luck to one and all, and may God continue to be merciful - Your old and warm friend,
R.L.S.¹⁵²

Their acquaintance went into 1887, cold now, mistakes and misunderstandings having done their mischief. The two turned away, not only from the joint efforts, but from each other. The bubble reputation had been burst, and, sudden and quick in quarrel as both were, like two wounded soldiers, the playwriting partners, jealous of each other's honour, leave the stage by their separate exits...

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

STAGE FIVE
Exit Henley

'I do not wish to pay for tears anywhere
but upon a stage'.
An Aplogy for Idlers
Virginibus Puerisque
Chatto and Windus, 1915, p80.

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

STAGE FIVE

Section A

'Then the Justice'

If justice is to be done to both men in this study, then mention must be made here of the incident that estranged them. Known as the Nixie quarrel it stemmed from that letter written by Henley from Chiswick in March 1888 to Stevenson at Saranac Lake and grew by degrees of cross-purpose and misunderstanding, obduracy and plain insensitivity, impulsiveness and petty pride, to become a cancer that killed the friendship completely and left both unreconciled and grieving to the last. It had all started from something so small.

Katherine de Mattos, Stevenson's cousin, had written a short story about a Nixie, (a water-spirit) which she had abandoned. Fanny Stevenson then took up the idea and wrote her own version which she sold to an American magazine. Henley, in his letter, claimed this was still Katherine's story ("It's Katherine's; surely it's Katherine's?") and, by inference, accused Fanny of plagiarism. Although he may have been delighted to score off his old enemy, he was well aware of the slippery ground he was on, which was why his letter also said - "Don't show this to anybody," and ended "Burn this letter."

Stevenson replied at once, "with indescribable difficulty and if not with perfect temper" to defend his wife's honour and insist on an apology somewhat priggishly. Although Henley answered at once, his letter was delayed. This was misconstrued by Stevenson who wrote to Baxter who contacted Henley who wrote to Baxter who wrote to Stevenson who wrote to Katherine and so it went round and and round, each letter from each party drawing the affair further and further into unintended reaches. Henley was perplexed, Katherine was confused, Fanny was furious (naturally), Stevenson was "utterly miserable". Only Baxter remained lawyer-cool and steadily objective about the whole thing.

Charles Baxter (1848-1919) was Stevenson's oldest and best friend. They had been companions since university days and Baxter was to remain a devoted ally throughout Stevenson's life. He was not only his lawyer and business manager, he was his anchor and reassurance. Baxter, liking both men as he did, had no doubt at all where the trouble lay:

'The fact is that these cursed plays have been at the bottom of all the mischief. I have never heard a grumble from Henley with regard to you except in that connection. He relied hopefully on them for money, and thought you little interested in them, and blamed you accordingly; but beyond that no word of adverse comment ever passed his lips to me... You have earned great success and fame and money, while he remains, not only hard up but hampered by the misdeeds of the wretched Teddy... Let us make allowances. Let us remember that the same stock which produced the worthless Ted, in whom he believed so long as the saviour of the family, produced him...

My dear Louis, take everything into account... you must see it would break the man's heart if you split with him. He loves you, snarls at you, envies you - if you were his wife, he'd beat you; but he cannot get on without you. And you must not kill him. Remember the great disadvantage of correspondence; how tones, looks, touches, modify the words, while on paper you have nothing but the hard nib of a steel pen. Remember everything, Louis, my friend, and forget, forget only to think of parting with one who would, I verily believe, give his life in your service...'

These are the words of a friend to a friend on behalf of a friend but they fell, if not on deaf ears, then at least on a head that was turned away. Fanny had gone to San Francisco to hire a yacht. Stevenson only wanted to get away to sea to forget everything, but he could not forget - "this affair hag-rides me". It was at this time he wrote of Cumbering Henley with his aid in writing the plays, but it was more than the plays that was bothering him now. He was losing a part of his life and he knew it. Henley, curiously, was still bothering about plays. He wrote to Baxter enclosing a message for Stevenson:

'I read the Deacon last night. I want you, when you write to Louis, to tell him that I told you I think (I do) it contains his best work. I had no idea how good it is. I have decided to print

In addition, Stevenson also paid allowances to Katherine, to Bob Stevenson, to Belle Strong and virtually to anyone whom he thought could do with help. He may have been a rich man but he was not a mean one. Once having made up his mind to travel, he wasted no time in beginning his voyages - first to New York City, then upstate to Saranac Lake then across that continent-country of the United States to San Francisco and from there to Hawaii and the South Pacific to make his final landfall in Samoa on 7 December 1889. He was to die there - quite unexpectedly - five years later almost to the day on 3 December 1894. Only weeks after news of Stevenson's death had been confirmed in London

'...a cab trundled up from the Strand into Bedford Street. It stopped outside Number 21; and from it emerged - with some assistance from the cabby - a very large, stout gentleman. He leaned upon a crutch and a stick with a crooked handle. He wore a big, soft, rakish black hat. His coat and waistcoat were sprinkled with tobacco-ash. His face was florid; his eyes blue, bold and prominent. His beard was long enough to be fluttered by the breeze; it had been tawny, but it was now streaked with grey; and his moustache, above his big, full lips, flowed finely, but was yellowed by nicotine stains. His voice was sonorous and melodious, and his manner genial if somewhat boisterous...'⁴

Mr Henley was reporting for work as editor of the New Review.

Since he had hobbled off stage from Bournemouth, he had made his limping way through the labyrinth of Grub Street via a very happy return to Edinburgh with the Scots Observer which meant making a temporary home in Musselburgh. Anna was delighted but soon they were back in London with the adored 'Emperor' as he called their lovely daughter, Margaret, who had been born in 1888. The Scots Observer became the National Observer in 1892 so it was back to London again for all three. Then, in February 1894, Margaret died of cerebral meningitis. Henley received a letter from 16 Tite St, Chelsea:

'My Dear Henley - I am sorry indeed to hear of your great loss - I hope you will let me come down quietly to you one evening and over our cigarettes we will talk of the bitter ways of fortune, and the hard ways of life. But my dear Henley - to work - to work - that is your duty - that is what remains for natures like ours. Work never seems to me a reality, but as a way of getting rid of reality... Ever yours, Oscar.'⁵

Oscar Wilde understood.

But Henley grieved and manifested his grief in verse which all the time was approaching poetry. Unlike Stevenson, he did not realize his own forte and for too long, the journalist denied the poet.

TO WORK!

He soon gathered around him a team of young lions that was his pride - H.G.Wells, J.M.Barrie, Rudyard Kipling, Kenneth Grahame, Alice Meynell, Katherine Tynan and T.E.Browne - then, of all things, he was asked to be a juror at the trial of Oscar Wilde, but was excused when he sent a doctor's certificate. One wonders if the result might have been any different. It is unlikely. Wilde was a scapegoat as Henley and everyone in London knew. All Henley would say was:

'Why he didn't stay at Monte Carlo, once he got there, God alone knows?... He returned to face the music and play the Roman fool to Caesar's Destiny, I can only conjecture that, what between personal and professional vanity, he was stark mad. Be this as it may, he is mad no more. Holloway and Bow Street have taken his hair out of curl in more senses than one...'⁶

One is reminded of Beau Austin, still waiting in the wings, but Henley was able to report at a New Review dinner:

'Beerbohm Tree and Young Irving are after Macaire.'⁷

So the stage door had never quite closed.

One man can only be of his time, and these two men, Henley and Stevenson, from such contrasting homes and countries, so unlike and yet so drawn to each other by their common enthusiasm for living, lived out their lives under the orb and sceptre of Victoria Regina. More than anything else they were Victorians and it is with this in mind that this study must now consider the theatrical age in which they lived.

Although he knew his hey-day in Edwardian theatre, nevertheless, Sir Seymour Hicks (1871-1949) grew out of the same Victorian theatrical tradition as Stevenson, and particularly Henley, might have known. He also appeared in an adaptation of Stevenson's The Suicide Club which was presented at the Coliseum Theatre under the title The Hampton Club. Known in theatre circles as the 'Admirable Crichton', Hicks introduced the first-ever revue in London, Under the Clock.

But it is as a wit and stylist that he relates most to the subject of this study. A typical instance is his description of his friend, the barrister cum playwright, Joe Comyns Carr. In this, one can glimpse the world that Stevenson and Henley had pursued. Sir Seymour writes:

'My ever-lamented friend, Joe Comyns Carr, was one of the best after-dinner speakers imaginable. He could hold forth and raise shouts of laughter even on subjects of which he had little knowledge... It was a strange thing, though, that the moment he took a pen in his hand for playwriting purposes, his wit flew out of the window. He, more than anyone I have ever known, needed a flint for his steel...'⁸

Is there a better parallel for Stevenson than this?

After all, he had failed to strike sparks from Henley when they tried to put their wit into their plays? Joseph Willams Comyns Carr (1849-1916) was later to adapt Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde for H.B. Irving at the Queen's Theatre in 1910. Again, by a contemporary example, more typical of Henley perhaps, was W.S. Gilbert, of whom Hicks remarks:

'His small piercing eyes, which looked as if they had been long robbed of sleep, were generally fixed, maliciously it must be truly said, on big people, and seldom directed towards the smaller fry. He always gave me the impression that he got up in the morning to see with whom he could have a quarrel... I never met anyone who wasn't rather afraid of him. I think that often he had no intention of being unkind, and perhaps he did not realize how much his cutting wit hurt... To the secretary of an Amateur Dramatic Society, who asked the author what he thought of the players of his club, he at once answered, "Oh, not so much a club as a bundle of sticks."' ⁹

This was Victoriana and it served for the age that produced all of the above as well as R.L. Stevenson and W.E. Henley. Both were, theatrically speaking, and something in their excuse, victims of the times they lived in. That period from Waterloo to the Crimea, broadly speaking the first half of the nineteenth century, so rich in great poets and novelists, and even in great actors, was poverty-stricken in term of playwriting. No one was writing for the stage at a level approaching the quality of literature, generally because there was little incentive for writers to do so.

The years between the accession of Queen Victoria in 1837 and the repeal of the Theatre Licensing Act of the same year in 1843 represented the very nadir of English drama - in George Rowell's simile:

'a slack-water period between the high tide of Tom Robertson's comedies and Arthur Pinero's society dramas.' ¹⁰

Or, as William Archer aptly put it - 'a winter solstice for English Drama'. Thomas Lovell Beddoes (1803-49), a literary critic and playwright, wrote as early as 1825:

'The man who is to awaken the drama must be a bold, trampling fellow... With the greatest reverence for all the antiquities of the drama, I still think we had better beget than revive - attempt to give the literature of this age an idiosyncrasy and spirit of its own.' ¹¹

But all the age produced for the stage was Richard Lalor Shiel, Robert Jephson, Frederick Reynolds - and Mr Skelt. Yet who could have been more bold and trampling than Henley - or less so, than Stevenson?

One event, however, did more to stimulate new interest in the Late Victorian stage and its affairs than almost anything else which had happened in the previous fifty years. On 25 May 1895, Henry Irving, (John Henry Broadribb, 1838-1905) was gazetted in the Queen's Birthday Honours as Knight Commander of the British Empire and the craft of theatre was finally and indisputably recognised as social fact. The stigma on all theatre persons had finally been expunged and the rogues, vagabonds, hawkers, mountebanks, tumblers, strollers and gypsies were allowed at last to gambol down the corridors of history and sit, as equals, at the tables of the great where before they had only be allowed to play before these same tables as jesters and clowns. The actor and his theatre had at last been accepted.

With typical irony, Irving's knighthood was followed only two days later by the sending of Oscar Wilde, the country's most successful dramatist, to two cruel years in prison. This could only happen in England, and Victorian England at that, where the greatest sin was to be found out. It was not until 1897 that a second actor was knighted, Sir Squire Bancroft (1841-1926). Bancroft had a very successful career with his wife, Marie Walton, (a favourite actress of Dickens) and they managed their marriage, their careers and their theatres in a long, happy and rewarding tandem. Bancroft discovered and nurtured the talents of T.W. Robertson (1829-71), the writer of the new domestic comedies, which were soon to supplant the melodrama in public favour.

Tom Robertson offered a straightforward English beer aimed at the middle audience rather than the Scandinavian lager already being concocted by Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) or the didactic lemonade then being proffered by George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950). These beverages properly belonged to that feast of theatre known as the New Drama - (Wilde might be said to be his own rare champagne) - but it had yet to come to its full vintage. Tom Robertson pioneered a credible, colloquial, prose style (which Henley in particular had hoped for) and Bancroft had encouraged this new vogue. As a result, the naturalistic play in practicable scenery (the box-set with doors and windows and even a ceiling) became the theatre fashion in the Mid-Victoria era.

Henry Arthur Jones, Arthur Wing Pinero and William Schwenk Gilbert (1836-1911), already mentioned above, were all Victorian writers who wrote plays and all of them were knighted for their services to theatre.

One wonders if the same accolade might have come to Stevenson had he remained in England? Given that he, or Colvin, had found a respectable team of names to propose him for the Chair of History at Edinburgh in 1881, it is likely that he could have done likewise to the Prime Minister's office from the Saville Club by 1891. It is certain that the author of Treasure Island impressed Mr Gladstone more than Mr Gladstone impressed the author of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde; especially one who numbered Oscar Wilde among his admirers. Sir Robert Stevenson then was unlikely. Sir William Henley was impossible.

Meantime, farce and burlesque prospered at the hands of writers who were less playwrights than journalists of the stage, a type of clever professional Stevenson might have sought out. Writers like Mark Lemon (1809-70), the first editor of Punch, Sir Francis Cowley Burnand (1836-1917) another editor of Punch and Tom Taylor (1817-1880) yet another editor of Punch, who had worked with Charles Reade to create Masks and Faces. Lesser known names of the time included Henry James Byron (1834-84) and George Robert Sims (1847-1922), who was very well-known to Henley. But perhaps the most typical of the times was Dionysius George Boucicault (1859-1929). Dion Boucicault was a son of a man of theatre and a complete man of the theatre himself - actor, writer, director and producer both in England and America. He is perhaps better known as a dramatist with London Assurance (1841) The Corsican Brothers (1852) and The Colleen Bawn (1860). Allardyce Nicol, sums him up.

'(His) importance as a dramatist rests on two things - his uncanny sense of theatrical values and his keenly observant eye. No man knew better than he just what would appeal on the stage. The construction of his plays, if we make allowance for their frankly melodramatic framework, is excellent; and of countless theatrical devices he was the eager inventor.... Crude as many of his effects may seem to us, he had an acute eye for oddity in real life, and many of his best scenes rely, not on scenic splendour, but on the depiction, through laughter or tears, of domestic interiors. It was this - the cultivation of naturalistically conceived scenes allied to melodramatic excitement - which gave him his contemporary importance.'¹²

This was exactly the protean stage animal that Stevenson had needed if his dramatic potential were to be realized. He needed, if he needed anyone, just such a practical man of theatre who would see the writing of plays as being something more than what Stevenson termed 'a lark!'.

If Boucicault had been able to give Stevenson the bones, he soon would have fleshed them out and given them stage life. As it was, the characters presented by Stevenson with Henley were all clothes and no bones beneath. Consequently, they could never stand up to the demands of a rigorous theatre existence. Both the player and what he plays require stamina. Boucicault knew this. If only the playwright of The Corsican Brothers had been able to work with the author of The Master of Ballantrae what a play might have resulted. Had a theatrical chaperone such as Boucicault been available at an early stage of Stevenson's courtship of Dame Theatre a marriage might indeed have been arranged.

By the end of the century, what is called English Theatre was rich in talent of every kind - a richness which only served to underline the poverty of its first fifty years. Timing, so essential an ingredient in any play performance, was out as far as Stevenson was concerned. He was unfortunate, in his most impressionable time, in coinciding with a bad patch in the drama. It had been more than a hundred years since Congreve, Goldsmith and Sheridan, and Ibsen and Shaw, despite Archer's advocacy, were still a minority taste, although Stevenson could write in one of his letters of 'little Ibsens'.¹³

However widely he may have read of theatre and of plays, (On Reading Anthony and Cleopatra for example), Stevenson had only the less than first-rate to serve him as role-model in theatre writing. Even Dickens had only written for himself as a stage soloist and Thackeray's stage work was pallid in comparison with his novels. Stevenson had no inspiring example available to him for the stage was at its nadir. It was aesthetically low-powered, socially unacceptable and technically sub-standard. It needed a champion to revive it and Robert Louis Stevenson was reluctant to enter the lists. A champion, however, did emerge before the century ended - Oscar Wilde. Oscar Fingal O'Flaherty Wills Wilde (1854-1900) stands in a class by himself. His quartet of comedies - Lady Windermere's Fan (1892) A Woman of No Importance (1893) An Ideal Husband (1895) and his masterpiece, The Importance of Being Earnest (1895) - remain as an undying bouquet of green carnations to his unquestioned theatrical genius. Had not personal tragedy overtaken him in the form of a hypocritical society's vengeance he would certainly have done even greater things in the drama. When he died, an exile in Paris, the age died with him.

There were so many things, Wilde had in common with Stevenson. They both presented the world with a seemingly flimsy facade but each was like flint beneath. They each made light of their respective work but none toiled as much over every word - behind the scenes. Wilde's output of plays was virtually the same as Stevenson's - six written, of which he had five performed. Stevenson's tally was six written from which four were performed. In addition, both wordsmiths were stylists, in more ways than in literature. The bronchiestastic Scot who strolled down Bond Street only a few years before in a black shirt, red tie, velvet jacket and smoking cap and affronted Andrew Lang was a distinct relation to Reginald Bunthorne. Both Stevenson and Wilde were almost studiously eccentric and individual. Both died in exile and too early - with perhaps their best work to come.

They were alike in so many ways as writers, but only one was a real dramatist. Or at least had made the deliberate effort to become one. And he would certainly have scorned the very idea of a collaborator. Wilde recognised instinctively that plays cannot be written in committee. One man cannot really be two persons creatively, which nicely introduces some consideration of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

It is relevant at this point since Wilde is linked to that novel through his own Portrait of Dorian Grey (1891) which is virtually the same story as Stevenson's, but in converse as it were. Dr Isobel Murray discusses this point in - The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Oscar Wilde:

'All available evidence suggests that Oscar Wilde was a genuine admirer of Stevenson's writing... He gave his sons Treasure Island... Before his second trial he wrote to ask Ada Leverson:

"If I do not get bail today will you send me some books? I would like some Stevensons..."

He was curious about the Vailima Letters but he found them disappointing. He wrote from prison:

"I see that romantic surroundings are the worst surroundings possible for a romantic writer. In Gower Street he could have written a new Trois Mousquetaires. In Samoa he writes letters to the Times about Germans."

Lines and phrases in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde point towards the works of Wilde and the idea of 'doubles' is light-heartedly parodied in The Importance of Being Earnest... Arguably (this play) parodies the whole Jekyll/Hyde idea - "the truth... that man is not truly one, but truly two." A very similar complex of ideas can be detected in The Picture of Dorian Gray (which) capitalizes on the notion of the duality of man's soul... and the "multiplication" of personality.'

Dr Murray quotes Wilde himself:

'Nothing could be further from my purpose... than an accusation of literary palagiarism... (however) naturally plausible. Andrew Lang in an article entitled Literary Plagiarism for the Contemporary Review (June 1887) "curiously anticipated or suggested" Wilde's debt to Stevenson. But he goes on to assert that - "Plagiarism (is) a crime easy to prove and almost impossible to commit." Wilde's closeness to Stevenson's tale is typically deliberate and typically daring the charge of plagiarism.'¹⁴

Would that Stevenson had been able to find similar inspiration in The Importance of Being Earnest. Had he done so he might have aspired to Wilde's Olympian standards in the theatre but then R.L.S. only knew the importance of William Ernest Henley and consequently only discovered the impotence of being Robert Louis Stevenson - Dramatist.

On New Year's Day, 1886, Stevenson had sent his favourite cousin and friend, (in happier times), Katherine de Mattos, a copy of his latest book which he dedicated to her with a little rhyme:

'It's ill to loose the bands that God decreed to bind;
Still will we be the children of the heather and the wind.
Far away from home, O it's still for you and me
That the broom is blowing bonnie in the north countrie.'

He added a note:

'Dearest Katherine,
Here, on a very little book and accompanied by lame verses, I have put your name. Our kindness is now getting well on in years; it must be nearly of age, and it gets more valuable to me every time I see you. It is not possible to express any sentiment, and it is not necessary to try, at least between us. You know very well that I love you dearly, and always will. I only wish the verses were better but at least that you will like the story; it¹⁵ is sent to you by the one that loves you - JEKYLL, AND NOT HYDE.'

This is the actor in him disclaiming that he is the part he plays.

As he had explained to the New York Herald:

'All I dreamed about Dr. Jekyll was that one man was being pressed into a cabinet, when he swallowed a drug and changed into another being. I awoke and said at once that I had found the missing link for which I had been looking so long, and before I again went to sleep almost every detail of the story, as it stands, was clear to me. Of course, writing it was another thing.'¹⁶

It certainly was a prodigious feat for a Bournemouth invalid, bedridden with intermittent haemorrhages, occasionally blind and not allowed to speak, communicating soley with Fanny by means of of a slate and crayon.

The worked-out tale has parallels in the story of a Connecticut dentist, Horace Wells, (1815/48) who had been experimenting with chloroform and nitrous acid and killed himself in a police cell. In this context it is interesting to remember that chloroform was discovered as an anaesthetic by Sir James Young Simpson, (1811-70) father of his student friend, Sir Walter Simpson, also known as 'Bart'. It has been suggested by Dr Myron G. Schultz that Stevenson's astonishing energy in writing the first drafts of Jekyll - 64,000 words in six days, 10,000 words a day - might have been due to his taking cocaine for his respiratory condition. Be that as it may, the words poured on to the page in a white heat. The whole was copied out in two days and was in the post by the third. But who is to say whether the story is based on anyone or anything at all and is but a dream begot from a dream as R.L.S. insists.

It is the belief of this research that its roots lay in Deacon Brodie and were encouraged to grow by Stevenson's further work on the play's revisions. It could be said, therefore, that a second-rate play produced a first-rate novel. It was while working on a revision with Henley in 1878 that the idea suggested itself to him again. He had read a paper on the subconscious in a French scientific journal which, combined with the Brodie play and similar elements used in Markheim and also, if to a lesser extent, in The Master of Ballantrae, resulted in the famous novel. Dr T.B. Scott, his physician in Bournemouth, recalls that Stevenson was pressed for funds at the time and that his publishers had suggested 'a shilling shocker for the Christmas trade'. Stevenson was reluctant but obliged -

'I drive on with Jekyll, bankruptcy at my heels.'¹⁷

The world gained a novel and a new phrase entered the language -

'Jekyll and Hyde'. By the way, it should be noted that Stevenson's own pronunciation of the name was 'Jeekyll' not 'Jekyll' but since the name first came to the world aurally via Richard Mansfield's stage adaptation it has become the latter pronunciation in spite of Stevenson's many disclaimers. It is not the first thing about Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde that has become other than the author intended. The novel was copied and submitted to Longman's Magazine on 1 November 1885 as a serial. It was they who suggested book form and although it was ready for Christmas, the trade decided it would be better to delay publication until 1886.

It was reviewed in the London Times, on 26 January. 40,000 copies were sold in six months, and it has been selling ever since. The success of the 'shocker' was phenomenal both in England and America, although the American royalties were affected by the book's not being registered for copyright. Pirated editions abounded and the plot was even used as a text for a sermon at St Paul's. Stevenson himself however, was only too aware of the monster he had created.

He wrote to J.A.Symonds:

'Jekyll is a dreadful thing, I own; but the only thing I feel dreadful about is that damned old business about the war in the members;'¹⁸ This time it came out; I hope it will stay in, in future.'

How appropriate then is this story of one man as two or two in one, which is both metaphor for the condition of the actor in the theatre, and for the Scot, particularly in his own society. The Scot, publicly identified as R.L.S. was, by the time of the book's success, a world-renowned author en route to the South Pacific. This was the duality he was to maintain to the end. He, however, happily accepted this self-symbiosis and took his other self with him wherever he went. These two sides of himself he maintained in a manner similar to the dichotomy that exists between the play actor on stage - the man and the part being two as one, even though each is at all times aware of the other, or should be. Neither can function without the other and it is the fusion that makes the performance. The question is always who is in charge in such a situation - the outer physical man, the actor Jekyll pretending the part, or his inner subconscious self, the Hyde, who is the real man beneath. Which is the monster and who is really in control?

This question is fundamental to any consideration of acting techniques and is the basis of most of the writing done on the theory of dramatic representation over the centuries. As soon as the actor steps on stage the mask must be applied and as soon as that mask is presented to the audience that is the reality of the actor as far as that audience is concerned. It is not merely the externals, however, that convey the character being represented, it is in every gesture, every nuance of the voice. It is, in short, in everything that is in the actor himself. It is the man who drives the performer but it is the performer who is seen as the man at the time of the action, and there is the key to it all.

What is commonly called talent is the energy plus ability required of the performer to suspend the belief of the audience for such times as he needs to convince it of the seeming truth of his impersonation. Stevenson must have understood this, yet his dramatic characters do not have the ring of truth that his literary characters have despite the fact that he wrote to Gosse:

'My life is an impersonation of living - and that's a poor creature.'¹⁹

A poor player perhaps?

But however much Stevenson might have strutted his hour upon the stage with Henley, neither of them really did himself justice in the plays that resulted, although none of them is really as bad as they appear on first reading. As has been shown in this study, there are occasional flashes of lightning in all of the plays but not quite enough in any one of them to illuminate any great dramatic moment or to allow the performer that fusion of mask and man in the actor that makes great and unforgettable theatre. Mention of Walter Simpson above brings to mind Stevenson's happy times on the waterways of France and Germany in a canoe with Bart. One is reminded too, that it was in that journey on the inland waterways of Europe that police everywhere looked at Stevenson askance. In every country he was seen as a mountebank, fancy in dress and actorish in manner. There were many occasions when Simpson's imperturbable urbanity and gentlemanly air saved both of them from the prison cell. It was not for the first time that Stevenson's appearance immediately classed him as foreign to whatever environment he was inhabiting. But, bearing in mind, the personality differences between 'the Bart' and 'the Cigarette', they are unlikely to have got very far in their holiday voyages if he had pulled one way and Simpson the other. One has the feeling that this is precisely what happened with Henley - they were paddling in different directions.

Psychologically, there is as much to explore in Jekyll and Hyde as the two young men found on the Continental canals. Stevenson's novel illustrates uniquely the Scottish trait of 'two-facedness', that is the propensity for hypocritical presentation which is as sincerely held as any genuine religious attitude. James Hogg, (1770-1835) the 'Ettrick Shepherd' found the same inspiration in this double identity, or Calvinistic schizophrenia for his Confessions of a Justified Sinner.

This was perhaps because he and Stevenson, as Scots, were aware of the schematic polarities of Calvinist theology. One was either in or out, saved or damned, whichever way you took it, as a Scot, with guilt attached. It was the guilt that made the sin not the deed. At the other theological extreme, St Augustine always thought of himself as two persons. In the Confessions he says - 'I was beside myself'. And Shakespeare's Sonnet CXLIV contains the lines:

'And whether that my angel be turn'd fiend
Suspect I may, yet not directly tell;
But being both from me, both to each friend
I guess one angel in another's hell;'

The idea of the double is ancient, but was one which pervaded the 19th-century, rising with the Romantic Movement as a reaction against the Enlightenment and coinciding with the crisis of religious faith throughout Europe. Poe, Gogol, and Dostoyevsky were other writers who used the image of two persons in one or as complements of the other. Stevenson's work in Jekyll and Hyde (and to a lesser extent, Deacon Brodie) may be closer to the mythic and moral source of the phenomenon as any earlier Gothic romances. With the rise of psychology towards the end of the Victorian age and the reassertion of reason, dualism became something of a literary fashion and it is no surprise that Stevenson should know it and should proffer to the public a character who is not as he seems. What mattered most was the outside front and in keeping the true self concealed. What more is asked of the actor on stage?

His is more than a social skill or the management of manners in accordance with a given code. His private self is irrelevant to his professional requirement to present the particular face called for at the moment of action. His two faces of comedy and tragedy are self evident, but with Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, because of Stevenson's consummate skill, the attributes are not so neatly divided. The artist in him has recognised that if no man is wholly good, neither is he wholly evil, and that is something more than a literary or theatrical truth. It is also a very effective theatrical device, allowing one man to play two very different characters from the same body. The actor has only one body to draw upon. It is his only resource and from it he must find all that is required for the playing of his part. His part of the play is derived from all the parts of himself. This is something that has to be remembered about any form of artistic creation in any medium.

Boucicault's The Corsican Brothers, mentioned previously, exactly illustrates this histrionic opportunity in the presentation of two look-alike leading parts, which can be played by the same actor. The dualism then is not merely in the body and soul in the individual man as evinced in the actor on stage playing a double role, but it can be extended to the abstracts of good and evil evident in a conflicting universe. The local becomes the cosmic in the way the microcosm of the individual reflects the macrocosm of the world he lives in. Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977) in his Cornell University lecture on Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde took up this point. Nabokov's view was not that Jekyll was the other part of Hyde but was already a composite of both of them, having within him a tiny particle of Hyde even before he is consumed by the whole Hyde in the end. In a sense, Hyde is Jekyll's parasite. The portrait given here of Henry Jekyll, and his link with Wilde's converse Dorian Gray, is typically Victorian in that all his weaknesses are concealed behind a formidable and respectable facade. Just as all the actor's personal faults should lie behind his mask. They are not the business of the beholder in the theatre.

Nabokov claims that there are three personalities - Jekyll, Hyde and a third, the Jekyll residue when Hyde takes over on the action of the drug. If within Jekyll, Hyde always is, then round Hyde is the halo of Jekyll. The phenomenon of the actor in relation to the part he plays could not be put better. Which is why the theatrical parallel is so apposite in dealing with Stevenson's work for the theatre as a whole and the place of this particular novel within it.

Bearing in mind the matter of this dissertation, it is interesting to note that The Story of the Door, the opening chapter of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde opens as follows:

'Mr Utterson, the lawyer, was a man of rugged countenance that was never lighted by a smile... He was austere with himself; drank gin when he was alone to mortify the taste for vintages; and though he enjoyed the theatre, had not crossed the doors of one for twenty years...'²⁰

Theatre was thus never far from Stevenson's conscious or subconscious mind and it is no accident that all his works bear so many allusions to the stage, either literally or metaphorically. The instinct that drove him, or his 'brownies' to creation on the page also nudged him, whether he liked it or not, towards the footlights.

A last thought in this consideration of dualism and its relevance to Deacon Brodie - Henry Irving, so eagerly sought by the partners in 1880 for the part of the Deacon Brodie because of similar twin-character demands, albeit within the one man, played both The Corsican Brothers at the Lyceum in that very same year. His refusal to consider the Deacon must only have rubbed salt into William Henley's many wounds for there is no denying, with all the technical and artistic resources available to him, Irving would have made both the part and therefore the play work in the theatre. Thereafter, the course of the Deacon's dramatic progress would have been much different. And so too would Stevenson's.

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

W. E. HENLEY (1892)
By Leslie Ward ("Spy")

STAGE FIVE

Section B

'Wise Saws'

The trouble with saws, however wise, is that they often have a cutting edge, and in Henley's case this was serrated. He used his conversational skills on occasions to such effect that the wounds he left went deep and he could never understand, metaphorically speaking, why blood flowed. He never meant to hurt cruelly, only to prick playfully, but his friends did not always understand this. And his enemies, of which he had more, were glad to use the incidents against him. His talk was so wide-ranging, playful, meaningful and erudite that the content was often obscured by the pithiness of the language and the unashamed use of slang. He could almost seem a fool while uttering something wise, but once he had made up his mind on a topic, it was set and nothing would budge him as we shall see. Yet he did not rush to defend Professor J.S.Blackie (who told R.L.S. that 'he did not know his face') at Edinburgh University when that reputed seat of wisdom censured the learned professor for lecturing on the drama and introducing the students to the works of Aristophanes. The same controversy was to arise when Glasgow University instituted its course in Theatre Studies within the English Faculty in 1950.

The playwriting year at Bournemouth could now be seen as an aberration, a kind of summer madness. One wonders why they did not try more adaptations from the French. Both were fluent in that language and conditions were encouraging for adaptations even after the Copyright Act of 1875 had extended the cover on imported plays to include adaptations as well as straightforward translations. Macaire was a pointer and a new adaptation from a Paris success might have attracted Irving who was 'overwhelmed by five-act dramas, many by authors who proudly claimed that they had made a point of never going near a theatre'. Lynton Hudson in his survey of The English Stage 1850-1950 commenting on the indefatigability of the closet dramatist, finds it -

'All the more incomprehensible because at that time there was no reading public for plays, and, in fact, except in French's sixpenny edition of acted plays, no plays were published, and there was not in London, as there was in Paris, an Odeon or a Theatre de Cluny where the rejected might appeal to audiences for unappreciated merit.'

The Stevenson-Henley plays were all published in book form of course but the thought remains that the Bournemouth surge might have found a possible outlet in the quieter waters of a drama library rather than risk the theatre rapids. The stage was less a lottery than a business, as Henry Irving always insisted. "Damn the English drama," he once exclaimed. "To succeed as an art the theatre must succeed as a business."² This is something both writers should have kept in mind. Yet Stevenson proved that he knew his London audience well enough:

'English people are apt, I know not why, to look somewhat down on incident, and reserve their admiration for the clink of teaspoons and the accents of the curate.'³

Instead of writing for this known audience, they had written for themselves and their putative audience naturally felt excluded and unwanted. An audience must be wooed by the playwright and won over by the actor before any kind of match can be made, but the chance was missed. Remembering Stevenson's sole success on stage as an actor was as Sir Charles Pomander in Masks and Faces with the Fleeming Jenkin troupe, two things are brought to mind. That the setting of this play was Georgian although the sentiments were Victorian (just like Beau Austin) and that the play was the result of a collaboration between a novelist and a man of the theatre - Charles Reade and Tom Taylor. Stevenson obviously remembered the style but had forgotten the method which had kept Masks and Faces on the stage for more than fifty years.

But now, less than five years after Bournemouth, the friendship with Henley had foundered. The deep bond which had its genesis in that first winter meeting of the two in the dim ward of the Old Infirmary in Edinburgh was loosening rapidly. Henley was not King Lear after all but a discarded Falstaff and Stevenson was more Osric than King Hal. Yet, enigmatic and charismatic, he was still 'most of all' the Hamlet his friend had described. Henley's famous pen-portrait of R.L.S. for all its superficiality, showed an admiration and affection that is irresistible. It remains an evocative description of the essential man who was always younger than his years. The Stevenson Henley knew still remained exclusive to Henley and would do so as long as Henley lived. Latterly, Henley would become sour, resentful, querulous and unjust on so many matters relating to Stevenson, but he knew his man from the beginning and loved him to the end.

For the rest of his life, Henley was forced to maintain a rigorous regime of editorial journalism. This may have paralysed his lyrical instinct - he described himself as 'beaten in art' - but it may be said that he made journalism an art. He was never to be ever free of financial embarrassment, but, as always, Stevenson helped where he could. This, of course, only angered Henley all the more. Perhaps because he was glad to receive it. For all his editorial skills, he never seemed to have any luck in his magazine ventures and regularly had to start from scratch. As always, it was the scratch of an unceasing pen on whose nib the ink was never allowed to become dry. But for all his rejection as Poet Laureate he had his verses published. The Song of the Sword and Other Verses of 1892 was reissued as London Voluntaries and Other Verses in 1893. Reaction was good. The man was a poet after all, a fact which Stevenson for one had always known.

As he mentioned to Charles Baxter:

'Glad to hear Henley's prospects are fair. His new volume is the work of a real poet. He is one of those who can make a noise of his own with words, and in whom experience strikes an individual note...

(A touch, a sense within sense, a sound outside the sound, the shadow of the inscrutable...)

There is perhaps no more genuine poet living, bar the big guns. Please let him hear of my pleasure and admiration.'

Better still, hopeful of a reconciliation, he made one last effort and wrote directly to his former old friend only a few weeks later:

'My Dear Henley,

It is impossible to let your new volume pass in silence...

Again and again I take the book down, and read, and my blood is fired as it used to be in youth... I did not guess you were so great a musician; these are new tunes, this is an undertone of the new Apollo; these are not verse, they are poetry - inventions, creations in language. I thank you for the joy you have given me, and remain your old huge friend and present admirer.'

But being Stevenson, he had to add a post-script of emendation to one poem called Echoes. Was this only his old 'brisk fastidiousness' and a desire to genuinely improve or were the real echoes that of tables being overturned? Henley, typically, never replied.

One of Stevenson's very last letters also made mention of Henley. He was writing to James Payn (1830-98), a prolific writer himself (he wrote a hundred novels) and also an invalid. Stevenson had known him as the former editor of Chambers Journal and the Cornhill magazine.

He wrote:

'I hear from Lang that you are unwell... I have often been unwell myself. I have always been a great visitor of the sick; and one of the sick I visited was W.E.Henley; which did not make very tedious visits, so I'll not get off much purgatory for them. That was in the Edinburgh Infirmary, the old one, the true one, with Georgius Secundus standing and pointing his toe in the niche of the facade; and a mighty fine building it was. And I remember one winter's afternoon in that place of misery, that Henley and I chanced to fall in talk of James Payn. I am wishing you could have heard that talk. I think that would make you smile... Perhaps, after all, this is worth something in life, to have given so much pleasure to a pair so different, in every way, as we were, Henley and I.'⁶

He would always think of the two of them as they were.

1893 was the peak of Henley's career - his book had come out to acclaim and St. Andrew's University had made him a honorary Doctor of Laws. He had caught up at last with the education that had been denied him. But then, early in the following year his little Margaret died of cerebral meningitis at the age of six. Honours were as ashes to him and all work but a vanity now that his 'Emperor' was gone. James Barrie had praised the 'exuberance of vitality about her as if she lived too quickly in her gladness'⁷. (She was the model for 'Wendy' in his Peter Pan of 1904.)

All the Henleys were exuberant, all larger than life. They had to be. Life had dealt them some poor cards but there was always a Joker in the pack and the thing was to have the last laugh. That was not always easy. Henley's only relief was work - work, and more work. Stevenson, for his part, was glad of the excuse to write to his 'old friend' when the Poems came out, but Henley was unbending. He even refused to make peace with Sidney Colvin, when that gentleman wrote kindly. Henley had never forgotten that Colvin had always thought him a bad influence on R.L.S. Henley was unblushing in his contempt for the Stevenson circle - 'a crowd of harpies', as he called them.⁸ He derisively referred to Colvin himself as that 'relict of R.L.S.'

When news of Margaret reached Samoa, Stevenson wrote at once to Henley: 'Margaret was the one thing I always envied you - I envy you still.'⁹

It was the last communication between them.

When Stevenson died suddenly in Samoa soon afterwards, and the telegraphs flashed across the globe from Auckland, most of his friends in London refused to believe it, they did not want to believe it and Henley asked Archer to confirm it before he put the obituary to press.

When confirmation came from San Francisco, Henley's immediate reaction in print was formal and correct, but in a letter to Whibley, he said, more revealingly:

'You will have learned by this time of the death of R.L.S. It has upset us not a little; for though there have been differences, he was, save for my wife, the oldest friend, as he had been the dearest, I had on earth...' ¹⁰

It was not for seven years that he was able to say more.

But, even at the nadir of their relationship, he had said something to their mutual friend, Charles Baxter, in March 1888, that bound all three.

'Do you remember
That afternoon - that Sunday afternoon!
When, as the kirks were ringing in
And the grey city teemed With Sabbath feelings, and aspects.
LEWIS - our LEWIS then
(Now the whole world's!) - and you,
Young, yet in shape most like an elder, came,
Laden with BALZACS,
(Big, yellow books, quite impudently French)
The first of many times
To that transformed back-kitchen where I lay
So long, so many centuries - Or years, is it! - ago?
Dear Charles, since then
We have been friends, LEWIS and you and I,
(How good it sounds, "LEWIS and you and I")
Such friends, I like to think
That in us three,
LEWIS and me and you
Is something of that gallant dream
Which old DUMAS - the generous, the humane.
The seven-and-seventy times to be forgiven!
Dreamed for a blessing on the race,
The immortal musketeers.'

Louis is virtually trumpeted as LEWIS and with the iteration of the name Henley ties his Stevenson colours to the mast of his private opinion and recollection. Like Stevenson, he would never forget those first years in Edinburgh when both were full of optimism, words, ideas and life.

But then came Fanny Osbourne, Bournemouth, the Nixie affair and Stevenson's self-imposed exile, however involuntarily begun. In a sense Henley lost another limb, and one which had subconsciously as well as practically supported him since they had first met. He never really recovered. Baxter was right. Henley loved Stevenson as a wife might love him, and was just as wifely in abusing him and taking him for granted. Now he was gone, Henley was never quite the same again.

They had been more than old friends and it shows in every Henley line.

'Friends...old friends...
One sees how it ends.
A woman looks
Or a man tells lies,
And the pleasant brooks
And the quiet skies
Ruined with brawling and caterwauling
Enchant no more
As they did before;
And so it ends
With friends.

Friends...old friends...
And what if it ends?
Shall we dare to shirk
What we live to learn?
It has done its work
It has served its turn;
And forgive and forget
Or canker and fret
We can be no more
As we were before.
When it ends, it ends,
With friends.

Friends...old friends...
So it breaks, so it ends.
There let it rest.
It has fought and won
And is still the best
That either has done.
Each as he stands
The work of its hands
Which shall be more
As he was before...
What is it ends
With friends?'¹²

Almost by osmosis, Stevenson had written to Baxter at around the same time from the Pacific Ocean -

'Februar den zen 1890 - Dampfer Lubeck zwischen Apia und Sydney...
Ay, ay, it is sad to sell 17; sad and fine were the old days; when
I was away in Apamama, I wrote two copies of verse about Edinburgh
and the past, so ink black, so golden bright... they will say
something to you...
They're pretty second-rate, but felt -

TO MY OLD COMRADES
Do you remember - can we e'er forget? -
How, in the coiled perplexities of youth,
In our wild climate, in our scowling town,
We gloomed and shivered, sorrowed, sobbed and feared?

The belching winter wind, the missile rain,
 The rare and welcome silence of the snows,
 The laggard morn, the haggard day, the night,
 The grimy spell of the nocturnal town,
 Do you remember? - Ah, could one forget!
 As when the fevered sick that all night long
 Listed the wind intone, and hear at last
 The ever-welcome voice of the chanticler
 Sing in the bitter hour before the dawn -
 With sudden ardour, these desire the day:

(Here a squall sends all things flying.)

So sang in the gloom of youth the bird of hope;
 So we, exulting, hearkened and desired.
 For lo! In the palace porch of life
 We huddled with chimeras from within -
 How sweet to hear! The music swelled and fell,
 And through the breach of the revolving doors
 What dreams of splendour blinded us and fled!
 I have since then contended and rejoiced;
 Amid the glories of the house of life
 Profoundly entered, and the shrine beheld;
 Yet when the lamp from my expiring eyes
 Shall dwindle and recede, the voice of love
 Fall insignificant on my closing ears,
 What sound shall come but the old cry of the wind
 In our inclement city? What return
 But the image of the emptiness of youth,
 Filled with the sound of footsteps and that voice
 Of discontent of rapture and despair?
 So as in darkness, from the magic lamp
 The momentary pictures gleam and fade
 And perish, and the night resurges - these
 Shall I remember, and then all forget.'¹³

They would not only say something to Baxter, but to Henley as well.

In February 1991, Henley was writing enigmatically to Whibley:

'I've printed some verses this week; the only answer I shall ever
 make to that infernal screed from Samoa...'¹⁴

And in response to the printing, Stevenson wrote to Baxter:

'All you say of Henley I feel; I cannot describe the sense of
 relief and sorrow with which I feel I am done with him. No better
 company on God's earth and in some ways, a fine fellow, a very fine
 one. But there's been too much hole-and-cornering, and cliquing,
 and sweltering, too much of the fizz and cackle of the low actor
 lot... et puis apres so they both died and went out of the story;
 and I daresay young fellows short of a magazine article in the
 twentieth century (if our civilization endures) will expose the
 horrid R.L.S. and defend and at least do justice to the misused
 W.E.H. For he is of that big, round, human, faulty stamp of men
 that makes lovers after death...'¹⁵

Both Henley and Stevenson continued throughout this period to use Baxter as a middle-man in order to sort out the various accreditations in the plays. Henley wrote from 14 Howard Place on 17 September 1891:

'Thanks - many - for the communication of Stevenson's proposals and ideas. I think it fair that he should know, in respect of Beau Austin, that the effect of it was neither failure nor success; only an immediate disappointment. The truth is, that we - you and I that is, and especially you - were let in. Tree produced the Beau as a stop-gap; he was under contract to produce The Dancing Girl at a certain date, and he was ready with nothing else in the meanwhile, so he put us on. It was an excellent stroke of business - for him; but it has not advanced the interests of the Henley-Stevenson combination in any way. We made some pounds apiece, it is true; but there have been no offers for country rights, and none for American; nor (tho' I hear that Tree has bought the dupes, let) has our manager repeated the experiment. No doubt the thing will have its day; but for the present there is nothing for us to do but to wipe it up and say no more about it.

All this means that I am indifferent - absolutely - to the fate of the projected plays. There is not the slightest chance, as I think, that any one of them would touch the actor-manager heart. And if there were, I should think twice (and more) before I ventured to condescend to such a crowd as the "elite of the British Theatre". Moreover, I do not believe myself complete enough to push through a play alone. Please signify all this to Stevenson, and add that, so far as I am concerned, he can do as he pleases with those drafts. I don't know where they are, nor what is their condition, nor anything about them. I should like to try and write the Ajax, for the fun of the thing; and if we had an actor, I would do my best for Honour and Arms. But even here my sentiment is purely Platonic. Let him do with them, to be brief, as he will. I make no other condition than this: that, if he take on another collaborator, he makes no sort of mention of me.

As for those at present in existence, I send you Deacon Brodie, as it was played in the U.S.A.; he can have more copies if he wants them. Also Nutt (and Nutt is not alone in this) is anxious to publish the Theatre of W.E.H. and R.L.S. The passing of the American Copyright Act has halted the pirate, I believe (for I haven't had time to go into the question), and Pinero, Jones, and the rest are coming out as men of letters at 3/6 apiece. I think we might go in and scoop them as dramatists who can at least be read; and if he will, I will be happy to lead the adventure. There is no occasion to print Macaire, since he objects to Macaire, and for the other three, they can be published (1) singly in a limited edition, (Walter Blaikie has produced an excellent sample page), (2) singly for all the world and his wife to buy and to read, and (3 and 4) singly or in bulk in (a) a limited or (b) a general edition. It is for him to decide. I shall but note, in the event of publication, I should like to sweep away the stage directions - at all events, to restrict them to the essential - and print the plays as Congreve printed his; as pieces of English, and no more.'¹⁶

The letter shows Henley not only as a business man anxious to make the best of a bad job but as a writer reluctant, for all his protestations, to let the drama go. As Henley's good talk could descend into garrulousness and old-woman gossip and spinster bitchiness, his letters often went on too long and mangaed to give the opposite intention of his correspondence, but there was no doubt at any time that even if his pen ran ahead of him, his great heart was fixed in its constant place. R.L.S was no more 'horrid' than any other man but his flimsy wispieness allowed him to flit around the subect or the incident with much greater ease than the bulky, stumpy Henley could manage. Stevenson had genius no doubt and Henley had brains but to do him justice in the twentieth century, as Stevenson predicted, it must be acknowledged that he had genius in certain areas of his journalistic trade and he was a poet of no mean order. Despite his lack of formal education he had made himself into a highly-educated man and one having an inordinately wide-ranging knowledge of English and French literature. This was the opinion of many influential contemporaries. In July 1895, Arthur Waugh writing his regular 'London Letter' to the New York Critic said of the forthcoming election at Edinburgh:

'There seems to be very little doubt that Mr. Henley would be appointed to the chair of English Literature... the post would only necessitate half a year's sojourn in the Scots capital, so that it would practically have little effect upon Mr. Henley's literary occupations in the South.'

The rival candidates included William Sharp, Walter Raleigh and George Saintsbury among others and it came down to a straight choice between Saintsbury and Henley. Saintsbury won on a narrow decision. Henley was further disappointed in August of that year when he was passed over for The Poet Laureateship in favour of 'such an ape as Alfred Austin' (1835-1913) as he put it but Henley was the kind who never won anything.

These two disappointments, coming as they did after the deaths of the two people to whom he was devoted - his beloved daughter, Margaret and his dear Lewis, almost shattered Henley but he recovered enough to take up his pen again to edit, with T.F.Henderson, a four-volume 1896 Centenary edition of the works of Robert Burns for the Caxton Publishing Company. In 1898 he moved his family to Worthing in Surrey after receiving a Civil List pension of £225 a year on the recommendation of Prime Minister, Arthur Balfour (another link to R.L. Balfour Stevenson).

Neither could quite escape the web they had built around themselves and it had cost both much pain to cut themselves free but there was another bond from which Henley was never to be free. This was the filial obligation to his younger brothers - especially Teddy. Sometime in the previous year, Edward had lost his voice after singing through a sore throat in Philadelphia and it worsened during a burlesque of Hamlet in New York and he was dumb for months. The Dramatic Mirror reported that Mr Henley's doctor, Clarence Rice, has promised him that his voice will, by careful treatment, return within two weeks. Its report continued:

'This will be welcome news to the theatregoing public.
Mr. Henley is an actor who cannot well be spared.'

Meantime, where could he go, and how could he live, an actor with a wife and without a voice? On 28 January 1898, William Henley was writing to Charles Whibley:

'Ted is on his way home - too ill, I fear, to do more. He arrives on Monday - is it? Anyhow, he arrives.'

Edward Henley was now thirty-seven years old, but as young-looking and eager and enthusiastic as ever despite being gravely ill with a diphtheretic throat. He visited on this occasion with his third wife, Helen Bertram, an actress and singer. Only the year before Teddy had created Ibsen's 'John Gabriel Borkman' in New York but now he was seeking help and shelter. Otherwise, the youngest Henley was little changed and appeared to have his voice back by all accounts. By March 18, William was writing again to Whibley:

'You asked me what is Ted to do? Faith - nothing! He cannot hold his tongue. 'Tis as resolute a talker as George's Julius Caesar; and it smokes and it drinks and it swaggers as 'twere sweet and twenty, and will not be stayed or considered or gainsaid. It seems to have seen enough to have set up sixteen ordinary novelists; it estimates its voice at £100 per week - £5,000 per annum! But it can't stop talking or drinking or smoking. And there you are! A violent baby. And his wife, good soul that she is, is another. Two Babes in the Wood. And when they die, the robins will bury them under scraps of old playbills, and additions de restaurant and "notices".'

Teddy tried to persuade Will to return with him and help open a private theatre at Lake Placid where, Teddy insisted, they could work out both their theatre hopes. Will declined the invitation, too tired now for theatrical projects. Ted was diagnosed as having consumption of the throat. He left soon after with his wife for America.

Both Henley brothers knew they would never see each other again for by May 25, William, by now very ill, was writing to Whibley:

'Yes; I am pretty bad. Work is impossible. There's nothing for it but an operation... I purpose to submit my return to the knife... Ted's still here; they cannot (so far as I know) raise their passage home. And I've done my best for them and failed. He may live indefinitely in the right climate. But I fancy the actor's done.'²¹

And on October 18:

'Poor Ted died on Sunday. It is a thousand times better so, of course. But he is the first of us to go. And it is a shock - a shock. Meanwhile, where is that copy of yours?'²²

Ballade of Dead Actors had been written earlier for the Magazine of Art but was now published with a new inscription - I.M.E.J.H.

In Memoriam Edward John Henley,
Born Gloucester, England 17 August 1861,
Died Lake Placid, New York on 16 October 1898.²³

It was the final billing for a sadly wasted talent.

The funeral service was held at the Little Church Around the Corner, the actors' church in New York, and friends and colleagues crowded in from all over the city and state to hear the Bostonians sing the hymns at the service. The group featured Helen Bartram, the third Mrs Edward James Henley. Helen Bartram was a character in herself. When she sued for bankruptcy in 1905, she claimed that her only assets were her cat and her dog. She made no mention of her only child by Teddy, their daughter, Rosina. Nor is she ever mentioned by her Uncle William. Perhaps he was never told. The same reticence applies to Teddy's wife, William rarely mentions her by name. He would seem to have been shy of every wife but his own.

There was no doubt that Edward John Henley had lived an actor's life. One way or another he had survived for thirty-seven years but one has the feeling he could have done so much more had he not been a Henley. It was the lot of the three Henley brothers in their lifetime not to know the rewards of their artistic gifts, neither from Edward's acting, Anthony's painting, nor, most of all, William's prodigious gift of words. Each had his gifts but they were bought at a price and had to be paid for. The cost to all three was failure and lack of recognition. William alone has achieved something of a posterity because of his association with Stevenson but it is now seen he had his own status too.

His values were those that belonged to the age he lived in but his gifts, especially as a poet, if not as a playwright, are increasingly appreciated because they show him, for all his faults, as a considerable artist in the written word and a truly honest man. Like Teddy, he was his own worst enemy.

He, on the other hand, appeared to be everybody's enemy at some time, including his brothers, his three wives, Henry Irving, perhaps Stevenson and most of all, his fellow actors who either loved him or loathed him. Not an uncommon fate for the strong-willed in the theatre. Despite this, audiences warmed to him, for he had the gift of likeability on stage but he lacked the cold steel of control. Otherwise, who knows, Deacon Brodie might have had a happy ending after all.

He was given lengthy obituaries in the New York Clipper (22 October 1898) and on the same date in The Era and in the New York Dramatic Mirror and all the other theatre trade papers, and typically for actors, a group of friends gathered round a table at the College Inn in Toledo and talked about him -

"that clever actor who was his own greatest enemy" "every stage manager in the country was glad to have him for a certain line of parts notwithstanding that... sometime during the engagement there would be trouble" - And he could sing a parody -

'Blige a hactor,
Blige a hactor,
Blige a hactor, sur.
O' course, hes gags is very, very good,
But 'es goin' a bit too fur.
When a little fat man
With a little fad wad,
From the the manager's office cried,
"If 'e ain't satisfied with the way 'es to play
Let the hactor step outside."²⁴

This ditty is pure Crummies in terms of theatre style. It reeks of the very worst kind of Victorian theatre but it also suggests the spirit, the elan, the sheer courage of those who make a greasepaint living. Edward Henley might have been totally forgotten today but for the fact that, because he was William Henley's brother, he had played Deacon Brodie for Robert Louis Stevenson. He will be remembered for that if for nothing else and yet he does not deserve to go entirely unheralded into the wings of theatre history. His brother had written:

The Ballade of Dead Actors:

Where are the passions they essayed,
And where the tears they made to flow?
Where the wild humours they portrayed
For laughing worlds to see and know?
Othello's wrath and Juliet's woe?
Sir Peter's whims and Timon's gall?
And Millament and Romeo?
Into the night go one and all.

Where are their braveries, fresh or frayed?
The plumes, the armours - friend or foe?
The cloth of gold, the rare brocade,
The mantles glittering to and fro?
The pomp, the pride, the royal show?
The cries of war and festival?
The youth, the grace, the charm, the glow?
Into the night go one and all.
The curtain falls, the play is played,
The Beggar packs beside the Beau;
The Monarch troops, and troops the Maid;
The Thunder huddles with the Snow.
Where are the Revellers, high and low?
The clashing swords? The Lover's call?
The Dancers, gleaming row on row?
Into the night go one and all.'

Envoy

Prince, in one common overthrow,
The hero tumbles with the thrall.
As dust that drives, as straws, that blow,
Into the night go one and all.²⁵

The following is an excerpt from his final 'notice' which read:

'He was an actor born; one who, in some circumstances, might have set his mark upon the stage and charmed the world... His art, which was when he was at his best, made him the peer, - if not the superior, of his English-speaking rivals, (and) was the result of his wide training...

An Englishman, (like Irving, whom some hoped he might succeed)... he was known in his own country only as a marvellously skillful (sic) burlesquer. But he was made for better things than parodies. His Deacon Brodie, his Iachimo, his Borkman proved to most of us that he had the true tragic quality. And now he has passed from this small stage of life with his noblest longings unsatisfied...

Had he been spared he might have realised his most cherished dreams by producing the "Robert Macaire" which his brother, W.E. Henley once wrote for him with Robert Louis Stevenson. There are lessons to be learned from his successes, and his failures too. Let them wait.'²⁶

E. J. Henley, who has been trying every other department of the drama, finds his right place, at last, in eccentric comedy. His Peter Sledge soon became the hero of Charley's Uncle, and his walk and talk were received with screams of applause. Raymond Hitchcock, as Bulwer Brady, made a hit by his attempt to recite "The Charge of the Light Brigade" without knowing the familiar lines. Albert Bruning played Professor Tranz with dignity and effect. The ladies, Bettina Gerard, Beatrice Moreland and Cora Macy, were pretty and wore attractive costumes. The greenroom scene, in the last Act, was excellently designed. Altogether, we have to congratulate author, manager and company upon a genuine Bijou success—and the Bijou has been for years a theatre of successes.

Nov 1894

MR. EDWARD J. HENLEY.

CASTLE SQUARE THEATRE.

HENLEY HADN'T THE CASH. The Actor Couldn't Fulfill His Contract and So Herrmann's Theatre Closed.

Herrmann's Theatre was closed last night and will remain closed, it is said, until April 3, when Professor Herrmann will open there.

Mr. E. J. Henley contracted for the theatre for a period of six weeks, beginning February 27 and closing April 1. He guaranteed Mr. Herrmann a certain sum as his share of the weekly receipts, and agreed to deposit a certified check for \$2,500 for the faithful performance of his contract.

"Mr. Henley was to deposit this check three weeks before the opening of the engagement," said Mr. Bloom, the manager of the theatre, last night. "At his request I allowed the matter to run along from day to day, but at last, on Wednesday night, I notified Mr. Henley that by the terms of his own agreement his engagement would terminate to-morrow night. On Thursday night Mr. Connolly, Mr. Henley's manager, told me that unless I would allow them to play until the end of next week they would close after that performance. I telegraphed to Professor Herrmann, in Chicago, asking what I should do, and he replied that the original contract must be carried out."

Mr. Frank Connolly, Mr. Henley's manager, said last night that Mr. Henley's backer had failed to come up with the required cash and no other arrangement could be made.

"We offered," said he, "to allow Mr. Herrmann to take all the money that came into the box office if he would allow us to run until the end of next week. He refused and so we closed."

Mr. Henley, he said, would rest for a couple of weeks and then resume his tour.

Dec 11th 1897

E. J. HENLEY.

In This Picture at the Palace Theatre

EDWARD J. HENLEY, THE ACTOR, DEAD. Dec 4. (Franklin) Oct 17/1898

End Came at Lake Placid,
Adirondacks, from
Tuberculosis.

HAD NOT EATEN FOR A WEEK.

Went to the Mountains Early in
July, and for a Time His
Health Improved.

MADE PLANS FOR THE WINTER.

(Special to The World.)

LAKE PLACID, N. Y., Oct. 16.—E. J. Henley, the actor, died here at 3 o'clock P. M. to-day of tuberculosis. The end was expected, as Mr. Henley had been unable to eat for more than a week.

Mr. Henley came to Lake Placid direct from London in the early part of July upon the advice of eminent English specialists. He was accompanied by his wife, Helen Bertram, the prima donna of the Bostonians. The journey was undertaken as a forlorn hope, and when Mrs. Henley left this place, to open with the Bostonians at Manhattan Beach, she had little hope of seeing her husband again.

The Henleys occupied a cottage on the shore of Mirror Lake, with a fine view of the Adirondacks. For a time Henley seemed to improve in health. He ate well and slept soundly for a sick man. Mr. and Mrs. Henley could be seen daily on the lake rowing in their guide

EDWARD J. HENLEY.

boat, and the actor recovered sufficiently to take short walks in the woods. He even made plans for the winter, and decided to have his guns sent up to him that he might get some shooting.

It was thought for a while that his brother, W. E. Henley, the English poet, would visit Lake Placid during the winter, and plans were discussed for the establishment of a small private theatre. The actor, however, grew gradually weaker, and it was only a question of how long he could hold out. He died in the last his independent, strong-willed personality.

N. Y. SPIRIT OF THE TIMES

STAGE FIVE

Section C

'Modern Instances'

Modern times came with the new twentieth century and with it came the death of Queen Victoria and the end of an era. The summer of 1901 arrived, and with it an eclipse of the sun on May 18, the appointment of Lord Kitchener to supreme command in South Africa against the Boers, Parisian public outrage over Rodin's statue of Victor Hugo and the new, official, biography of Robert Louis Stevenson. It was politely received by everyone except William Henley. It was not that he felt he had been eclipsed by Douglas Balfour, Stevenson's cousin, in the writing of it or had been out-manoeuvred by 'the South Sea Islanders' as he disparagingly called the former Osbournes, or even that he had been upstaged by Colvin, who had organised the return of the family to London for the launching of the book. No, let Colvin play Kitchener. He, Henley would remain as stubborn as Kruger. He had his own reasons for indignation, and would make them plain in time. Stevenson had found his Boswell and there the matter of his public image might rest. Meantime, he had his own thoughts as he made clear to Marriott Watson who had sent him a New Year Card for 1901:

'Yes, the old landmarks are disappearing one by one... and there is none to say "To your tents, O Israel!"... I think that my part in this New Century will be of the smallest...'

He was only fifty-one yet he felt himself already an old man.

The Morning Post had printed his long poem on the death of the Queen - Reginae Dilectissimae Victoriae which prompted a congratulatory letter from Colvin, with some suggestions for improvement of course. It is a long and imperial and verbose ode but it is Henley and if it is high-flown and high-Tory it still catches in odd lines the whiff of poetry which few similar outpourings of the time and the event did. As usual, it was written in a hurry, immediately after reading Austin's poor effort, but then everything Henley did was in a hurry, except to forgive perhaps. Or forget.

It was seven years since his Margaret died. And seven since Stevenson. Now dear, wild Bob Stevenson was gone too and Henley worked hard to secure Louisa Stevenson a small pension. Death could not shock him further. The threnody was becoming his most practised literary form.

Brother Anthony came down to Worthing to watch William Nicholson paint his older brother's portrait, for he was 'back on paint' as William put it. It was Anthony who was sent to Worthing Railway Station to warn Lloyd Osbourne not to come up to the house as Will 'under no circumstances' would see him. Osbourne returned to London on the next train. Henley made no bones about his dislike of the 'Samoa crowd'. Ill and over-worked he moved again in October, this time to a small flat in Battersea and it was from there he wrote his final words on Robert Louis Stevenson. The editor of the Pall Mall Magazine, Frederick Greenwood, was so taken aback by certain passages and phrases that he returned it with a request that Henley tone these down. Henley immediately sent it back unchanged. The article appeared in the first week of December exactly as he had written it.

Even seven years after the event, his words seemed ambivalent to some, and outrageous to all Stevensonians but this is unfair to his genuine intention which was to debunk the Stevenson cult and jettison the 'hangers-on' of the Stevenson London circle and those members of the family whom he thought of as little more than leeches. It was supposedly a review of Balfour's two volumes of Stevenson biography, but in reality it was a cry from a wounded heart that had known so much pain and loss in its time. The death of Stevenson was merely another cut of the lash. But of the Stevenson he knew best and loved most, he would not say, nor would he be drawn.

'I take a view of Stevenson that is my own and decline to be concerned with this seraph in chocolate, this barley-sugar edifice of a real man;... the best and most interesting part of Stevenson's life will never be written - even by me.'²

Posterity can only regret this. Here was a man who had known Stevenson in the Edinburgh years, in the London times, in the European travels, in his anonymity and in his fame. In sickness and in health, in penury and wealth - theirs was, in its time, literally - a kind of marriage. The fact that it produced inferior progeny is no reflection on the respective quality of the 'parentage'. Subconsciously, Henley may have felt piqued that he himself had not been asked to write the official Stevenson biography which Sydney Colvin had refused to do after making over-lengthy preparations, but Henley had dreaded that men he had considered as hacks, like Gosse and Lang, might be given the job, so he was only relieved when it passed to Louis's cousin on his mother's side.

The Life was brought out in two volumes by Methuen and Company. It was nearer hagiography in Henley's eyes who, when he read the books, figuratively 'saw red' as he made clear in his review:

'For me there were two Stevensons; the Stevenson who went to America in '87 and the Stevenson who never came back. The first I knew and loved; and the other, I lost touch with and, though I admired him, did not greatly esteem... This however, is not to say that Mr Balfour's view of his famous cousin is not warranted to the letter, so far as he saw and knew. I mean no more than that the Stevenson he knew was not the Stevenson who came to me... in the old Edinburgh Infirmary, nor the Stevenson I nursed in secret, hard by the old Bristo Port, till he could make shift to paddle the Arethusa; nor the Stevenson who stayed with me at Acton after selling Modestine, nor even the Stevenson who booked a steerage berth to New York, and thence trained it "across the plains" and ended up... a married man and a Silverado Squatter...'

It is hard to understand why he took such a disparaging stand, even given his choleric disposition on occasions. The reaction to it was the sensation of literary London and the review was itself reviewed by all the London and most of the provincial press. He was as blunt as ever, but his words deserve to be considered as the sincere testament of a man who now saw no need to mince his words:

'At bottom, Stevenson was an excellent fellow. But he was of his essence what the French call personnel. He was, that is, incessantly and passionately interested in Stevenson. He could not be in the same room with a mirror but he must invite its confidences every time he passed it... he was never so much in earnest, never so well pleased... never so irresistible, as when he wrote about himself. Withal, if he wanted a thing, he went after it with an entire contempt for consequences...
No better histrion ever lived.

(The emphasis is the present writer's.)

But in the South Seas, the mask got set, the "lines" became a little stereotyped. Plainly the Shorter Catechist was what he wanted. And here we are; with Stevenson's later letters and Mr. Graham Balfour's estimate. 'Tis as that of an angel clean from Heaven, and I for my part, flatly refuse to recognise it. Not if I can help it, shall this faultless... monster go down to after years as the Lewis I knew and loved, and laboured with, and for, with all my heart and strength and understanding...'

The article goes on - and on - and in doing so tells us much about Henley as Stevenson. 'Vital, vivid, masterful, magnetic' Henley may have been to his friends but now 'vile, vengeful, mordant and mordacious' were the epithets applied by his enemies. He was basically, a hurt, afflicted, unhappy man who for a time in his life knew Stevenson as well as anyone but at other times seemed not to know him at all.

'In days to come I may write as much as can be told of him. Till those days come, this protest must suffice.'

It may have been that he harboured the hope that one day, time, health, wealth and opportunity would allow him to write the definitive Stevenson biography but how could he when he only knew and understood half a life?

'I remember rather, the unmarried Lewis (sic) the friend, the comrade, the charmeur. Truly, that last word, French as it is, is the only one worthy of him. I shall ever remember him as that. The impression of his writing disappears; the impression of himself and his talk is ever a possession. He had... all the gifts (he and his cousin Bob) that qualify the talker's temperament, as - voice and eye and laugh, look and gesture, humour and fantasy, audacity and agility of mind, a lively and most impudent invention, a copious vocabulary. a right gift of foolery, a just, inevitable sense of right and wrong - (this though I've blamed him for a sense of monologue...) Those who know him only by his books - (and I think our Fleeming Jenkin, were he alive, would back me here) - know but the poorest of him. Forasmuch as he was primarily a talker, his printed works, like those of others after his kind, are but a sop for posterity.'

'Voice and eye and laugh, look and gesture'...?

He might be describing an actor - or, if he prefers un histrion.

It is one of the main thrusts of this study that the man Stevenson was just that in his lifetime, a natural actor who was unable to convert the brilliance of his life-dialogue into stage-talk in anything like the way that his Victorian compatriot and fellow-talker, Oscar Wilde was able to do. The Scot eschewed the professional motley that the Irishman embraced and although the costume Stevenson chose to wear at this stage was the wig and gown of the advocate he was never to practice. He only played at it, if at all. The part he wanted to play most was the writer and in this he was well cast and performed it with some style.

But then he had trained that style by close observation and wide reading and perfected it by continual concentrated thought. He had made himself a writer the hard way but he had not been quite hard enough on himself to fully embrace the possibilities of Drama. Henley explained why:

'We were not men of substance; and our consideration of the Abstract Actor convinced us that, if he had anything to do with it, men of substance we should never be. "Et voila pourquoi votre fille est muette"; and that is why the Muse of Romantic Drama... stands where and as she did before we scrimmaged for her favours.'

'Truth is beauty' he had once told Stevenson. Good advice for a young writer but is it really the most desirable element in an obituary? If ever there was a time for the artistic lie, surely this was it?

The character in any book is merely an assortment of lines on a page, which by a combination of the author's skill and the reader's readiness to see the character as presented comes to life in the reader's imagination. The same is true of the play-script intended for the play-goer. It is strange that they did not readily accept the same process in terms of dramatic theory and thus work towards an equally believable dialogue with the audience in the theatre as he had with his readers in the books. It has only to appear to be real in order to be accepted as real on stage. What is totally real in the naturalistic, photographic sense is not always real on stage. This is where Henley erred and where Stevenson was wrong in not following his true voice. He failed to hear his own echoes. The Henley article touches partly on this but even now he is unsure. He knows they should have worked.

'But how to deal with the plays? Mr. Balfour gives us a list (of them). I find that list most interesting. It reads well even now. I fear that one of our first cares was to find a good name...

The Tragedy of Hester Noble - how is that for a play-bill? Ajax, I pass, though (coming after Sophocles) we never made so good a play... As to Madame Fate and Madame Destiny, I cannot recall a single particular; but I do remember that the first touch was mine... but to go back a little:

Honour and Arms is of its essence, English, Jacobitish, Romantic.

The hero is sorely tried, love is too much for duty; and if I remember aright, he emerges ill from his trial. But... 'the scene-a-faire' was, (in our strong conceit) as good as done... if I tell you that much, won't you be sorry... that you will never see that play?... If you aren't, may I, with or without offence, assert that you know nothing about plays...

I and Lewis knew nothing either.'

And there one has the whole problem of the plays in a sentence.

Had he been as succinct in dealing with his mercurial partner at the time of writing, and perhaps less voluble in his own overriding confidence of their success, he might have induced Stevenson to work - really work - and who knows the difference there might have been. Or should they have kept Fanny away from the table? Could it be as simple as that? John Connell, who described the Henley review as 'an essay on cant', makes a point about the two authors' later reluctance to talk about their drama output:

'The plays were an added grievance; but the dismissal of the plays by both of them is significant and pitiful. It also makes an attempt at critical comment upon them supererogatory.'³

Mr Connell forgets that at the time he mentions they were both emotionally involved in the unfortunate Nixie wrangle and hardly disposed to be concerned about a few unsuccessful dramas. The point in question is, given the two men involved, WHY were they unsuccessful?

The Henley article ended:

'A last word. I have everywhere read that we must praise him now and always for that, being a stricken man, he would live out his life. Are we not all stricken men...? And why, because he wrote better than anyone, should he have praise and fame for doing that which many a poor, consumptive semstress does?... Stevenson, for all his vocalizing, was a brave man, with a fine, buoyant spirit... But we are mortals all...

Writing his best was very life to him. Why then this crawling astonishment?... Let this be said of him, once for all:

He was a good man, good at many things, and this also he has attained to, to be at rest. That covers Sophocles and Shakespeare, Marlborough and Bonaparte. Let it serve for Stevenson; and, for ourselves, let us live and die uninsulted, as we lived and died before his books began to sell and his personality was a marketable thing.'

An immediate letter to the Editor of the World commented:

'That the genius of Stevenson has been over-estimated and the personality of the "exile of Samoa" elevated into a kind of fetish by certain fanatical admirers... it would be difficult to deny; but the fact affords poor excuse for Mr. Henley's war-dance upon the grave of the friend whose memory he has hitherto been supposed to cherish with peculiar relish and affection. Humour has never been Mr. Henley's strong point or he might have been spared the absurdity of gibbeting the remains of his friend and co-worker as those of a vain and selfish egoist in an article which presents as ludicrous an exhibition of splenetic vanity aggressive self-love and self-assertion as has ever been afforded by a considerable man of letters...'⁴

Max Beerbohm exhibited a cartoon at the Carfax Gallery in London showing a pygmy Henley on tiptoe trying to put out a giant candle bearing the effigy of R.L.S. The caption read:

"OUT! OUT! BRIEF CANDLE!"

Henley's voluble protest at the dehumanising of his friend in the official biography was recognised as a breach of the unwritten Victorian code - one might know certain things about certain persons but one must never tell. Sir Graham Balfour had merely conformed to the then fashion of 'whitewashing' in biography - never speak ill of the dead. Everyone who knew Stevenson knew the need for discretion and Colvin had been ruthless in editing the letters. Even Henry James felt 'the vague sense of omissions and truncations' - "however that doubtless had to be."⁵

Yet, as Malcolm Elwin also points out, Henry James described the Henley review as:

'the overflow of Henley's gall... really rather a striking and lurid -and so far interesting case - of long uncomfortable jealousy and ranklement turned at last to posthumous (as it were!) malignity, and making the man do, coram publico, his ugly act, risking the dishonour for the assuagement.'

Henley let the storm blow around his head. It hardly ruffled his beard. He was secure in the sense of his own motive and in any case he had weathered so many storms before. He would just wait until it blew itself out. Work went on as it always had, as it always would, either in his small Battersea flat or at his new house in Woking.

Meantime, the pseudo-Stevensonians danced around the issue like so many Redskins round their scalpee. Their whoops and yells of indignation troubled him not at all. He was suffering more from piles. He rarely mentioned the contentious article. He never mentioned Stevenson. He said nothing. Neither did Fanny - nor Colvin - nor Gosse, but the 'smell' would not go away. The air, instead of being cleared, was fouled as the controversy went on in the letter columns of almost every paper in the country. Every motive was ascribed to Henley for the writing of the piece. Nobody ever suggested that perhaps he was merely drunk at the time? Or at least in that state where recklessness seems like bravado and sober reticence is as restricting censorship. Henley would never say. It was if he were biding his time.

He had always enjoyed a bit of 'crackle and flash' and now he had it - and to spare. He had been loath to think of Stevenson as dead before the wrong that had estranged them had been put right. And now in trying only to make things right it seemed as if he had only succeeded in making yet another wrong.

Mea culpa. Mea maxima culpa.

On 22 January 1903, Mr and Mrs William Henley celebrated their Silver Wedding. Henley's love affair with Anna Boyle was lifelong and credited both. Stevenson, for his part, knew only highs and lows with Fanny and what is seldom realised is that she was often as ill as he was. In point of fact, she suffered a very severe breakdown in Samoa (it was diagnosed as Bright's Disease) and had to be nursed by Belle and even Stevenson himself, who, ironically, at that time was enjoying the best health of sickness-strewn life. Ironies abounded with R.L.S.

Unlike the orthodox matrimonial bond suggested by the Henleys, and the conventional, deeply sincere love that was between Thomas and Margaret Stevenson, the marriage of Louis and Fanny Osbourne was atypical to say the least. He often ambiguously referred to her as 'my dear fellow' and 'my little man'. She brought out the woman in Louis as he brought out the man in her. Henley had long ago noticed this feminine trait in his friend as Stevenson had always known it in himself. This is confirmed by William Veeder in his notes to Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde. After One Hundred Years (1988)

'Stevenson was conscious of this feminine component...He recognises in Alexander's portrait of him "a mixture of Aztec idol, a lion, an Indian Rajah, and a woman"... and certainly represents a mighty comic figure.'⁷

Stevenson's capacity to envision various roles for himself... are for me marks of his exceptional interest as a human being and the source(s) of his psychological penetration as a writer.'⁸

This role-playing propensity of Stevenson's has been of course one of the main tenets of this study. Henley was always aware of this aspect of his friend (the histrion) but he saw another Stevenson. His own version. But one was to bear in mind that he was a critic by profession and one's attitude to what he writes in that capacity is determined by how seriously one takes critics. For Henley one can only believe that he considered it just another job of work. It was while working for Views and Reviews that he met with the accident that was to prove the final, and fatal, shock. As he wrote to his publisher:

'A fool guard (on the L. and S.W.) started his train before I could board it; and Views and Reviews 11 came mighty near to being a posthumous work. As it was, I got off with a severe shaking and a shock to⁹ the system which made me useless and worse for five weeks...'

But the Henley bad luck still held for 'the shock to the system' activated the old tubercular pains. He endured it as before but then on 11 July the agony suddenly left him, and with Anna by his side he died. EXIT HENLEY..

Connell reports:

'On Sunday July 12th Charles Whibley was staying with Lady Granby at Wavendon Manor, Woburn Sands... So was George Wyndham. Just after breakfast a telegram, which had been sent off from Woking the night before, was handed to Whibley. It said simply - "All over 9.30." Whibley went to find Wyndham to tell him...'¹⁰

A certain dramatic irony pervaded his death. Not only did he pass away in an untypical peace by his wife's side, but he had only just published his Song of Speed, extolling Man's mechanical invention, when he fell from a moving train. How apt that it was a train - the very emblem of Victorian progress. He had gone through his own life like a locomotive, spitting sparks and smoke, picking up speed all the time and hurtling towards his end. Stevenson, on the other hand, looked for the sparks of drama wherever he could find them, but never risked a fatal fall. A friend of both men, Sir Walter Alexander Raleigh (1861-1922), a professor of English Literature at several famous universities, had this to say of the pair:

'Henley was a much richer, greater, more generous nature than R.L.S. And Henley violated all the proprieties, and spoke ill of his friend, and R.L.S. wrote nothing that was not seemly and edifying. So the public has its opinions and is wrong. You couldn't quarrel with Henley - not to last - because the minute you showed a touch of magnanimity or affection, he ran at you, and gave you everything, and abased himself like a child. But R.L.S. kept aloof for ten years and chose his ground with all a Pharisee's skill in selecting sites. He had not a good heart. He said many beautiful and true things, but he was not humble. There is nothing falser than the shop-window work called literature.'

Which is why, when words are put into the living beings called actors in the living moment called theatre, their 'lies' quickly reveal any falsity in the text. This may have been a problem with the Stevenson scripts that often read better than they play. Professor Raleigh ends with a comment on Stevenson that is more impatient with the man than true of the legend:

'He was offered a little godship by a doting public, and he took it, and cut away all ties that might hamper him in his new profession.'

This is just not so. Stevenson was, at all times and in all places, conscious of Henley and his relationship to him. It may have been other preoccupations and other influences that drew him away from an earlier close contact, and consequently gave the impression of cynical detachment. Stevenson was incapable of this as witness his distress at the time of the breach. It may have been that the tragical-comedy of William Ernest Henley was that his undoubted genius was a capacity for giving pains. Yet, such was the vast innocence and enthusiastic honesty of the man, every wound he, wittingly or unwittingly gave, was blessed.

'Life is bitter. All the faces of the years,
 Young and old, are grey with travail and tears,
 Must we only wake to toil, to tire, to weep?
 In the sun, among the leaves, upon the flowers,
 Slumber stills, to dreamy death the heavy hours...
 Let me sleep.'¹³

One feels he was almost glad to go.

'So let me hence as one
 Whose part in the world has been dreamed out and done.'¹⁴

He was buried beside his beloved daughter in the churchyard of Cockayne Hatley. But it was not of her, he had written - so many years before...

'When we that were dear are all too near
 With the thick of the world between us...(we may)
 Lie in the peace of the great release
 As once in the grass together.'¹⁵

This is not only Stevenson and Henley, this is David and Jonathan, Damon and Pythias, Byron and Shelley. This was Stevenson. Not the gregarious Stevenson of Paris and Grez, the 'clubbable' Stevenson of Edinburgh and London, not the play-actor and night street-walker of both capitals and certainly not the Prospero/Tusitala of the South Seas. This was the young Swanston Stevenson, who might have been the playwright. This was the irresponsible, irrepressible Stevenson that Henley, like a true friend, took gravewards.

'I love you, Henley, from my soul...' Stevenson had written, and he had meant it in his Victorian way in writing to a close male friend. Furnas has warned us - 'Let no fool try to read perversion into the above...' and Jenni Calder has pointed out that the male appreciation of Stevenson himself was often intensely physical.

The theme of Jekyll and Hyde is characterised by what seem homoerotic bonds among the virtually, all-male cast. Among his own intellectual-aesthetic circle in London, Henry James and Edmund Gosse were either latently or actively homosexual just as Henley and Colvin were not, but Henley was often jealous of Fanny's hold over Stevenson just as Fanny was jealous of Colvin's influence over her husband as has been already mentioned in these pages. Stevenson's relationship with his handsome cousin, Bob, could be misconstrued were it not considered in the Victorian sense of deep friendship. They were 'blood-brothers' as much as cousins. Henley loved Bob almost as much. He certainly revered the mercurial Bob as an artist on the page as much as on canvas.

When Bob died in 1900, Henley had remembered that it was Bob 'who made Lewis a professor of drink and the shilling whore'. This was the other Louis perhaps? Was it of this personna that Henley was thinking when he undertook to help Leslie Cope Cornford write his *Life of Stevenson* in September 1899? The doughty old editor contributed a telling footnote which argued that there was a benefit in the apparently disreputable:

'It took our author out of himself, it brought him face to face with life and character, it taught him to be something other than "the sedulous ape" of someone else, and (for his intimates were all talkers and moralists) it initiated and developed a practice of discussion and debate which left no theme of speculation unattempted nor many unexhausted...'¹⁶

Cornford wrote in the Preface:

'That Mr. Sidney Colvin has in preparation the authorised biography of Stevenson, is a matter of common knowledge; and this consideration naturally prevented me from recording aught of the main facts of Stevenson's career, that has not been made public property already; and for the same reason, I have abstained from making any use of the series of Stevenson's Letters which have recently been published in a monthly magazine. With the name of Robert Louis Stevenson is indissolubly connected the name of William Ernest Henley: and I delight to acknowledge, with the liveliest gratitude, the help which Mr. Henley has given me in the making of¹⁷ this essay towards a just appreciation of his old comrade.'

Would that Henley had made himself so readily available to Sir Graham Balfour. But as Stevenson himself said in Later Essays -

'Life is not designed to minister to a man's vanity'. Nor, it would seem is a biography. And now the man who perhaps ought to have written the *Life* had himself departed it.

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

W.E.H.
1899

Section C (i)

A HENLEY CODA

On the fourth anniversary of his death, a Memorial tablet was unveiled in the crypt of St Paul's and a bust of the essayist and editor by Auguste Rodin (1840-1917), whom he had vigorously promoted in England, was presented by the artist as a gift. Once again, George Meredith had written the tribute but on this occasion he was unable to attend. Lord Plymouth, who had unveiled the bust, read it out:

'As critic, he had the rare combination of enthusiasm and wakeful judgement. Pretentiousness felt his whip smartly. The accepted imbecile had to bear the weight of his epigram. But Merit, under a cloud or just emerging, he sparkled on or lifted to the public view. He was one of the main supports of good literature in our time.'¹⁸

The assembled group included Thomas Hardy, H.G.Wells, George Saintsbury, Austin Dobson and George Wyndham, who delivered an eloque which Rodin had enclosed with the bust:

'It is the monument of a brave man and a true poet...
He sang ever from his own heart rather than to listeners...
Caring little for praise and nothing for censure...
As the old Jacobite said of William the Third -
"Brave, brave. By heaven, he deserves a crown..."'¹⁹

'Surely,' his ghost would protest, 'I'm worth more than that. A guinea at least?' And the bellow of his loud laughter would ring down the nave. Echoed no doubt by the spectral companion of their earthy days, chuckling wistfully as he returns the Englishman's own words -

'Ah, my dear lad - are not we all stricken men?'

A benediction was pronounced by the Archdeacon of London.

No mention was made of his playwriting.

One cannot help thinking sympathetically of poor Henley, so full of so many roaring talents and yet at the end his value was put at no more than a 'crown'. What is the real worth of such a man, whose first priority at all times was to make a living rather than make a point? He hitched himself to Stevenson's coat-tails and then tried to lead from the front. Small wonder that both stumbled over each other. Not even the sum of their veritable treasury of letters was alchemy enough to turn their dramatic efforts into coin of the realm. The reason being that not enough of them rang true.

In this respect, Henley's own comments on the French writer and critic, Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, (1804-1869) are illuminating and may offer some light on Henley's own personality:

'Sainte-Beuve failed in verse, failed in fiction, yet he was an incomparable critic of the arts in which he failed; and we are as like to see another Hugo, another Alfred de Vigny even, as another Sainte-Beuve.'²⁰

Or another Henley?

As this study will indicate, there were many Stevensons in Stevenson, and often they were at war with each other, but there was only one Henley and he was the same peremptory, belligerent Henley through and through. He had made a lot of noise in his time but the perceptive Stevenson saw the music in the man.

To W.E.Henley:

'The year runs through her phases; rain and sun,
Springtime and summer pass; winter succeeds;
But one pale season rules the house of death.
Cold falls the imprisoned daylight; fell disease
By each lean pallet squats, and pain and sleep
Toss gaping on the pillows.

But O thou!

Uprise and take thy pipe. Bid music flow,
Strains by good thoughts attended, like the spring
That swallows follow over land and sea.
Pain sleeps at once, at once open eyes,
Dozing despair awakes. The shepherd sees
His flock come bleating home; the seaman hears
Once more the cordage rattle. Airs of home!
Youth, love and roses blossom; the gaunt ward
Dislimns and disappears, and, opening out,
Shows brooks and forests, and the blue beyond
Of mountains.

Small the pipe: but Oh! do thou,
Peak-faced and suffering piper, blow therein
The dirge of heroes dead; and to these sick,
These dying, sound the triumph over death.
Behold! each greatly breathes; each tastes a joy
Unknown before, in dying; for each knows
A hero dies with him - though unfulfilled
Yet conquering truly - and not dies in vain.

So is pain cheered, death comforted; the house
Of sorrow smiles to listen. Once again-
O thou, Orpheus and Heracles, the bard
And the deliverer, touch the stops again!²¹

Both men loved music and loved to make it in their different ways, Stevenson with the flageolet and Henley on the piano. But it is also true that this high musical enthusiasm was no advantage to them as dramatists, and yet it ought to have been. It depended on each 'hearing' the other, as it were, if they were ever to realize a duet, or a harmonising synthesis of their respective talents. Typically, they refused to listen to the other's voice. Each could only hear his own. And they were singing different songs.

Had they tried to 'keep in tune', as it were, it might have made all the difference to their mutual composition. Stevenson after all, could notate and Henley was a good sight reader, although he was inclined to ignore the music in favour of getting the exact, right note. Stevenson, on the other hand, went directly for the the music and as a result a lot of notes were missed.

The musical analogy is not inapt in terms of their co-writing for had they been singers, it might have sounded like a vocal duet which occasionally hit a high note but for the most part was ruined by unwitting discords. The whole dramatic interlude proved that the singers were more than the song they sang.

'Sing me a song of a lad that is gone.
Say could that lad be I?
Merry of soul, he sailed in a day -
Over the sea to Skye.
Mull was astern -
Rhum on the port -
Eigg on the starboard bow.
Glory of youth glowed in his soul,
Where is that GLORY now?'²²

One remembers Henley's reaction after reading a fragment of Weir of Hermiston in the letter he wrote to Colvin:

'I have found MY Lewis again in all his GLORY in this the last work of his hand.'²³

On Stevenson's death, Henley had written to William Archer:

'And now...there is nothing for us but, as I wrote of and to him langsyne, to..."Lie in the Peace of the great Release
As once in the grass together."²⁴

Amen.

Requiescat in pace...

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

STAGE SIX
A Scotch Tusitala

'You can no longer hang back,
but must stride out into life
- and act'.
(Letters, 11, 82/3.)

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

STAGE SIX

Section A

'The sixth age shifts'

The sixth age, and the sixth stage, not only shifts across the Equator into the Southern hemisphere but back beyond the decade to September 1890 when Robert Louis Stevenson wrote to his New York friend, Mrs Charles Fairchild, from the Union Club, Sydney:

'Let me tell you this: in '74 or 5 there came to stay with my father and mother in Edinburgh, a certain Mr. Seed, a prime minister or something in New Zealand. He spotted what my complaint was; told me that I had no business to stay in Europe; that I should find all I cared for, all that was good for me, in the Navigator Islands; sat up till four in the morning persuading me, demolishing all my scruples. And I resisted: I refused to go so far from my father and mother. O, it was virtuous, and O, wasn't it silly!... Now in 1890, I, or what is left of me, go to the Navigator Islands... I go there only to grow old and die; but when you come you will see that it is a fair place for the purpose.'

Mr Seed came to Edinburgh in June 1875. He called on the Stevensons at Heriot Row. Stevenson reported the visit at the time to Mrs Sitwell:

'Awfully nice man here tonight. Public servant - New Zealand. Telling us all about the South Sea Islands till I was sick with desire to go there; beautiful places, green forever; perfect climate; perfect shapes of men and women, with red flowers in their hair; and nothing to do but to study oratory and etiquette, sit in the sun and pick up the fruits as they fall. Navigator's Island is the place; absolute balm for the weary.'

Balfour has recorded that a year later -

'A party of friends meeting at Cambridge proposes to form a colony, which is to be established in The Navigator's Island - Samoa, of all places - of which the author had heard only the year before from his connection, the Hon.J.Seed, formerly secretary to the Customs and Marine Departments of New Zealand who had been sent to report on the islands by the New Zealand government.'

The connection mentioned is that Mr Seed's second daughter, Katherine, married Lewis Henry Balfour Wilson (1848-1896), a cousin of Stevenson's in New Zealand, who was also related to the family of Graham Greene through the Balfours. Stevenson's uncle, James Melville Balfour (1831-69), was the Engineer to the Crown Colony of New Zealand, and was drowned there in a boating accident at Timaru. The Hon.J.Seed,

mentioned above, was in fact, William Seed (1827-1890), Secretary of the Marine and Customs Department, in Wellington from 1870 to 1887. It was in this capacity that he visited Edinburgh in 1875 to obtain advice from Thomas and Alan Stevenson regarding the building of lighthouses around the New Zealand coast. Seed again met Stevenson on each of the author's subsequent visits to New Zealand, travelling especially from Wellington to Auckland to do so.

Stevenson thought he had come to the Pacific to die but from the moment when he and his entourage made his first Pacific landfall, rather than die, he came to life for the first time in his forty years. The sickly consumptive Edinburgh child who became a professional invalid as well as a professional writer had spent his entire life expecting every day to die from the collapse of his lungs or from a fatal loss of blood. He almost did, several times, in London, in Switzerland, in New York and in San Francisco, but here he was, fifteen years later, taking Seed's advice and aiming to set up his first permanent home on a faraway South Pacific Island. It was a big decision for a successful British writer to move so far from Charing Cross and from the comfort and reassurance of a close-knit coterie of influential friends but it was one he had to make if he were to live. He had nothing to lose but his life. Besides, he could now afford it.

Scribner and Sons, the publishers in New York, had given him a handsome advance against a book about his South Seas travels, McClure's Magazine had similarly paid for a series of syndicated articles, with photographs. The New York World had offered \$10,000 for a year of weekly articles but Stevenson found it hard to take such an offer seriously - 'A very little American appreciation goes a long way'. Money mattered to him but for him wealth was only useful for two things, he said - 'A yacht and a string quartet'. The latter would always be a dream of his but the former was nearer than he thought.

His father had left him a comfortable annuity and virtually two homes, Heriot Row (nominally his mother's) and 'Skerryvore' (which was in Fanny's name). He was in effect a wealthy man. By selling the properties in Scotland and England he could really do what he liked, and what he liked to do best was to write. So he would buy an estate in the sun and write happily ever after, especially if his books continued to sell like Treasure Island and The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.

Besides, he could always visit home in style whenever he wanted to and call in at his London club. Lloyd Osbourne remembered Stevenson's

'desire to walk into the Saville Club and electrify his old friends as the returned seafarer from the South Seas Islands. At least, he was constantly dwelling on this phase of his return, and choosing the exact hour when he could make the most dramatic entrance.'⁴

The actor in him could not resist contemplating such a scenario.

In a bantering correspondence with Henley many years before Stevenson had referred to the multiple talents of Ben Jonson but in this next and final stage of his life and work we were to see the multiple Stevenson - a man of many parts - and one who played each up to the hilt. When the Sailor 'came home from sea' he became the Patriarch who in turn became the Politician who then became the 'Tame Celebrity' before at last, reverting to the expatriate Scot, which at heart he had always been. These five castings will now be considered within the scenes wherein they were portrayed. Tusitala was to be his last performance but it was to be the one for which he is remembered most. It was not only an acceptance of his fate, but almost a deliberate choice of role. Yet it had all started quite simply.

A chance remark to Mark Twain while sitting on a bench in Washington Square, New York in the spring of 1888 led Stevenson to the South Seas. Twain had been to New Zealand and had sailed in the Pacific. RLS remembered Seed's remarks about the Islands and his visit to Samoa in 1870. Stevenson had also met R.M. Ballantyne, the author of The Coral Island, and Stoddard, the South Seas trader, and William Churchill, the former U.S. consul in Samoa, now in San Francisco and all these voices seemed to rise now like sirens and beckon him into the Pacific. It was as if it were meant to be.

His great idea - to charter a yacht and sail into the Pacific. He would pay for it by writing a journal of their travels. Stepson, Lloyd Osbourne, would take the photographs and they would all return to England via Sydney, Ceylon and Suez. Thus decided, Fanny was despatched to San Francisco with a banker's order for £2000 to find a suitable vessel. She wired back - 'Have found the Casco under Captain Otis at \$500 monthly.' Stevenson replied at once, while the messenger waited - 'Blessed girl, take the yacht and expect us in ten days.'⁵ It was a spontaneous, fateful decision that was to change all their lives.

He wrote to Henry James on 28 May 1888:

'On June 15, the schooner yacht Casco will (jealous Providence permitting) steam through the Golden Gates for Honolulu, the Galapagos, Guayquil, and - I hope not the bottom of the Pacific. It will contain your obedient 'umble servant and party. It seems too good to be true and is a very good way of getting through the green-sickness of maturity, which, with all its accompanying ills, is now declaring itself upon my mind and life.'⁶

He was being hopeful as ever although he was to write later to Colvin -

'I have no more hope in anything than a dead frog; I go into everything with a composed despair, and don't mind - just as I always go to sea with the conviction that I am to be drowned, and (yet) like it before all other pleasures...'⁷

At Hawaii, the 'party' (Stevenson, his wife, his mother, her Swiss maid, Valentine Roch, and stepson, Lloyd) met up with stepdaughter, Belle, and her artist-husband, Joe Strong. The cast was assembled and the odyssey-performance could now begin.:

'Day after day in the sun-gilded cabin. The air had an indescribable sweetness, soft and nimble as the cheek of health. All day long the sun flamed and at night the stars came out in regiments. Even the sea itself became desirable.'⁸

Exactly a year from his arrival in Hawaii, a news item in the Honolulu Pacific Advertiser declared:

'Robert Louis Stevenson and party leave today by the trading schooner Equator at Honolulu bound for the Gilbert Islands... it is to be hoped that Mr. Stevenson will not fall victim to native spears; but in his present state of bodily health, perhaps the temptation to kill him may not be very strong.'⁹

But the truth was, Stevenson was growing stronger all the time.

And the family was surviving even though Fanny hated every hour they were at sea. But she was only too glad to see the change it was having on her husband and the frequent landfalls meant that they were getting very practised at disembarking. As she wrote to Sydney Colvin:

'Within forty-eight hours we shall pack up our possessions... our hand organ, magic lantern, fiddle, guitar, a native instrument something like a banjo called a taro-patch fiddle, Lou's flageolet and a lot of songbooks.'¹⁰

The cigarette-smoking Pied Piper led his little band from island to island and harbour to harbour. The time of wanderings had begun - by ship, under sail and steam, and to almost every harbour in the South Seas. He had come into his own and his kingdom was a schooner's deck.

If Henley was the captain of his soul, Stevenson was the showman of the Casco. Figuratively speaking, he now had need to steer a sure course, even if he were the only one who knew where he was going. He was free at last to be himself. Meantime, Lloyd was to be the photographer and he, Louis, would be the observer of the action. His pen was now to be as busy as Lloyd's camera. Pen portraits abounded. As for instance, the larger-than-life Tembinok of Apemama. The king almost speaks out of the page. It is character-drawing of the first order - drawn from life and begging for a place on the stage. Stevenson at sea was Stevenson on form. He was now much given to socialising and even enjoyed dressing up for the special occasion. There had always been something of the dandy about him and if he had a strong vanity at all it was for his hands and feet - which were perhaps his best features. He was always glad of any opportunity to show them off.

'Tonight I go to the Governor's; such a lark - no dress clothes - twenty-fours notice - able-bodied Polish tailor - suit made for a man with a figure of a puncheon - same hastily altered for self with the figure of a bodkin - sight inconceivable... PS: Just returned from trying on the dress clothes. Lord, you should see the coat! It stands out at the waist like a bustle, the flaps cross in front, the sleeves are like bags.'

There was no doubt he was a changed man. Lloyd Osbourne confirms this:

'The seven months' cruise had a marvellous effect on R.L.S. He had become almost well... His fine complexion had regained its ruddy tint; his hair, now cut short, was no longer lank, but glossy and of a lighter brown; his eyes, always his most salient feature and always brilliant, had no longer that strange fire of disease; he walked with a firm, light step, and though to others he must have appeared thin and fragile, to us, the transformation in him was astounding. In his soft white shirt, blue serge coat, white flannel trousers, white shoes and white yachting cap (such caps were his favourites...) he looked to perfection the famous author who had arrived in a yacht and who 'dressed the role' as the actors say...'¹²

It was time to doff the yachting cap of the Sailor and take up the staff of the Patriarch. It was more than a costume change in the wings. He was about to make his first entrance in the last Act...

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

J. M. Benie
from Tusi Taku
(Robert Louis Stevenson)

STAGE SIX

Section B

'The lean and slipper'd pantaloon'

The Reverend W.E. Clarke gave an explicit description of Stevenson and his party when they disembarked from the 'Equator' but the lean and slipper'd pantaloon walked barefoot into Apia on 7 December 1889:

'I met a little group of three European strangers - two men and a woman. The latter wore a print gown, large gold crescent earrings, a Gilbert-Island hat of plaited straw, encircled by a wreath of small shells, a scarlet silk scarf round her neck, and a brilliant plaid shawl across her shoulders; her bare feet were encased in white canvas shoes, and across her back was slung a guitar... The younger of her two companions was dressed in a striped pyjama suit - the undress costume of most European traders in these seas - a slouch hat of native make, dark blue sun-spectacles, and over his shoulders a banjo. The other man was dressed in a shabby suit of white flannels that had seen many better days, a white drill yachting cap with a prominent peak, cigarette in his mouth, a photographic camera in his hand. Both the men were bare-footed. They had, evidently, just landed from the little schooner now lying placidly at anchor, and my first thought was that, probably, they were wandering players en route to New Zealand, compelled by their poverty to take the cheap conveyance of a trading vessel.'

He was most certainly lean but it could hardly be said that in this sixth age he had shifted into slippers. On the contrary, he was more often barefoot than not, and was to become more a man of action in Samoa than he had ever dreamed of being in his life. All the energy dammed up in him because of choked lungs suddenly found an outlet.

H.J. Moors remembers that -

'A young-looking man came forward to meet me... of fair and somewhat sallow complexion and about five feet ten inches in height. He wore a slight scraggy moustache and his hair hung down about his neck after the fashion of artists... He was not a handsome man, and yet there was something irresistibly attractive about him... keen enquiring eyes, brown in colour, strangely bright and seemed to penetrate like the eyes of a mesmerist... intensely nervous, highly strung, easily excited... bubbled over with delight as one enchanted... 'It's grand!' he exclaimed... hardly had he got onto the street when he began to walk up and down in most lively, not to say, eccentric manner. He could not stand still... in my house he walked about the room plying me with questions, darting up and down, with no continuity in conversation, darting questions... He had worn no shoes on the schooner, and it seemed to go very much against his will to put on any after his arrival in Apia. But before long I became aware of other eccentricities, and ceased to be surprised by anything he did... Entertained with anecdotes...'

Talk was an essential part of R.L.S. Like Oscar Wilde, sentences fell from his lips, fully and finely formed and uttered with a relish that was the mark of the wordsmith. He never lost his Scottish, or more precisely, his Lothian accent, but as he grew older he pronounced on anything and anyone with a growing confidence and verve. His spoken word was as meticulously considered as his prose. The Samoan people had an enormous respect for language, especially for oratory, and in naming him Tusitala, they not only acknowledged his gift for story telling but recognised his skill in oral communication. This was emphasised by their investing him as a 'speaking chief'.

This was a high honour for a non-Samoan and it indicated the standing he had with the local people almost from the beginning. It was a status he enjoyed. Certainly, R.L.S. the actor responded. Even if the velvet coat of Edinburgh had given way to the Inverness cape of Paris, and the fur jackets of the Saranac Valley were succeeded by the pyjama suits of the South Seas, he still had a keenness to cut a dash. Witness his fondness for contrary details such as the cheap yachting cap and the expensive tied-up boots, not forgetting the sash around the waist and the careful moustache.

He was still the strolling player, making up his script as he went along, improvising like mad, performing extempore as he had done in Scotland, England, France, America, Australia and now Samoa. Theatricality hung around Stevenson like a cloak whatever the place and however the dress. Even if he occasionally wore a shabby white suit, the faded velvet jacket was never to be discarded. It was his motley, and as he said, 'Motley, I count the only wear.'³

As Dr Kelman reminds us -

'Tusitala, in his various capacities of patriarch,⁴ demigod, missionary and bard, is a charmingly theatrical figure.'

He played his part always sure of his audience and always confident of his effect - even if it meant playing only the penny whistle for the family. But he never played second fiddle. He was always the star of the production that was his life and times. As John Hampden notes:

'As always, he was still the actor-manager in the thrilling drama of Robert Louis Stevenson, but no longer⁵ "on the road" and cast now for his final role as laird of Vailima.'

He had his own phrase for Vailima - 'the egg of the future palace...'⁶

Vailima would last for a hundred years but how long would he? In the new year of 1890 the question was would he survive into old age, despite everything, like the gentle Balfour side of him, or go suddenly, like the hard-headed Stevensons, in a puff of his own smoke? He himself had no doubts. He had got to forty without walking on eggs. That was a miracle in itself. Whatever disadvantages it may have had to what his London friends may have considered a fruitful literary life, here he was and here he would stay until 'that Unknown Steersman, whom we call God brings the boat round and safely into the last harbour'. The first to know was Lady Taylor:

'I am now the owner of an estate upon Upolu, some two or three miles behind and above Apia. Three streams, two waterfalls, a great cliff, an ancient native fort, a view of the sea and lowlands, or, (to be more precise) several views of them in various directions, are now mine. It would be affectation to omit a good many head of cattle; above all as it required much diplomacy to have them thrown in, for the gentleman who sold to me was staunch. Besides all this, there is a great deal more forest than I have any need for; or to be plain the whole estate is one impassable jungle which must be cut down and through, at considerable expense. Then the house has to be built...'

While the building was going on, he took the opportunity to visit Sydney. His mother, meantime, had arrived from Edinburgh, but finding her quarters not yet finished she took off to visit her Balfour/Seed relatives in New Zealand. While in Sydney, Louis was made an honorary member of the Thistle Club. The Reverend Will Burnett was an interested listener to his speech of acceptance:

'Able to study R.L.S. when he rose to speak. Height over medium, increased by exceeding thinness, a magician who drew him to your heart as well as your eyes. Your eyes sought joy in his. No portrait or photograph conveys these eyes. Some make them flat and far apart, others make them 'sleekit'. The charm of them dispelled all critical faculty. Not dressed for the part, in lounge suit, soft neck-wear and a velvet jacket. Placed two hands in respective pockets, took himself in charge and gradually tightened his grip, appeared almost to reach breaking point. He was very thin and yet so full of life and energy. In the happiest vein himself, he spread happiness all around.'

Burnett was particularly interested in how Stevenson spoke:

'It was delightful in that place to hear a man speak with a good Scots accent. If he and I had met in the capital of Scotland we should have agreed that all Edinburgh men speak the best of English. without any accent at all.'

While staying at the Union Club, Stevenson wrote to Henry James:

'I must tell you plainly - I can't tell Colvin - I do not think I shall come to England... Health I enjoy in the tropics; even here, which they call the sub- or semi-tropical, I come only to catch cold (but) I read books, and letters from Henry James, and send out to get his Tragic Muse ... But I can't go out! The thermometer was down to 50° the other day - no temperature for me, Mr. James; how should I do in England? I fear not at all. Am I very sorry? I am sorry about seven or eight people there and one or two in the States. And outside of that, I simply prefer Samoa. These are the words of honesty and soberness. I am fasting from all but sin... These last two years I have been much at sea and I have never wearied... and never once did I lose my fidelity to blue water and a ship. It is plain, then, that for me my exile to a place of schooners and islands can be in no sense regarded as a calamity. Goodbye just now: I must take a turn at my proofs.'

And in a letter to Marcel Schwob a few days later -

'Alas, I shall not have the pleasure to see you yet awhile, if ever. You must be content to take me as a wandering voice, and in the form of occasional letters from recondite islands; and address me if you will be good enough to write, to Apia, Samoa.'

He had already begun on his constant request for letters. Letters from anyone about anything. Letters to be perused eagerly, answered at length and saved to later fill a whole book in themselves. The foundations of the Tusitala legend were being laid as painstakingly as the foundations of the house that was to be his first and last home. By finding his sea legs he had found his way to Samoa and by doing so he had won back full possession of his own body. As a result, he had found his real self. Although even as late as 1891, the histrion still demanded a pose. Writing to Craibe Angus about Robert Burns, he added something about the other Poet Robert, Robert Fergusson (1850-74):

'When your hand is in, you will remember our own Edinburgh Robin. Burns alone has been just to his promise; follow Burns, he knew best, he knew whence he drew fire - from the poor, white-faced, drunken vicious boy that raved himself to death in the Edinburgh madhouse. Surely there is more to be gleaned about Fergusson, and surely it is high time the task was set about...

We are three Robins who have touched the Scots lyre...

Well, one is the world's; he did it, he came off, he is forever; But I am the other - ah, what bonds we have - born in the same city; both sickly, both pestered, one nearly to madness, one to the madhouse, with a damnable creed; both seeing the stars and the dawn, and wearing shoe-leather on the same ancient stones, under the same pends, down the same closes...

I believe Fergusson lives in me. I do, but tell it not in Gath.'

The notion of his twin-ship with Fergusson persisted all his life and only a few months before his death he was to tell Charles Baxter:

'I had always a great sense of kinship with poor Robert Fergusson - so clever a boy, so wild, of such a mixed strain, so unfortunate, born in the same town with me, and, as I always felt, rather by express intimation than from evidence, so like myself.'¹²

Yet at this time in the South Pacific he could hardly have known himself. He knew better health and was in better spirits than at any time in his life as his many letters showed. Letter-writing was a vital part of his professional life while cruising and now, that he was landed gentry, it was almost his first way of life. Of course, thanks to the publishing and syndicate interests already shown, there would be a book in it or at least a series of rewarding articles. Nothing would be wasted. A corner of the new house had been found for him, a table set up, an inkwell and a blotter laid out and a chair drawn up. From now on his pen was never to be dry. The letters flowed from him.

Edmund Gosse was next to hear of progress in April 1891:

'We are in our house, after a fashion; without furniture 'tis true, camping there like a family after the sale. But the bailiff has not yet appeared; he will probably come after. The place is beautiful beyond dreams; some fifty miles of the Pacific spread in front; deep woods all round, a mountain making in the sky a profile of huge trees upon our left; about us the little island of our clearing... It is a good place to be in; night and morning we have Theodore Rousseaus (always a new one) hung to amuse us on the walls of the world; and the moon... makes the night a piece of heaven...'¹³

Three years later, he could record:

'I am living patriarchally six hundred feet above the sea on the shoulder of a mountain. Behind me the bush slopes up to the backbone of the island... with no inhabitants save wild doves and flying foxes, many particoloured birds, many black and many white; a very eerie, dim, strange place and hard to travel. I am head of the household, to all of whom I am chief and father.'¹⁴

Not that such a responsibility really weighed very heavily.

Robert Louis Stevenson was always better taken care of than he took care. Not that he did not care for others - he did - theoretically - but at all times there were people whose lives were as totally bound up in him and his affairs. In reality, he was his own home industry.

He was dedicated to the continual output of sellable words in order to maintain a wife, a stepson and daughter, a stepgrandson, intermittent recalcitrant husbands, house boys and girls and their relations, unending visitors, officials of the state as well as officers of the crown. Patriarch he may be but he was still the professional penman.

'I did not dream there were such places or such races. My health has stood me splendidly; I am in (the sea) for hours wading over the knees for shells; I have been five hours on horseback... This climate, these voyages; these landfalls at dawn; new islands peeping from the morning bank; new forested harbours; new passing alarms of squalls and surf - the whole tale of my life is better to me than any poem...' ¹⁵

One by one he cut all the ties that had bound him to his old life and by 1894, he was writing to George Meredith:

'I suppose we shall never see each other again. I shall never see whether you have grown older and you shall never deplore... that (I) should have declined into a pantalooned Tusitala. Perhaps it is better so.' ¹⁶

The Patriarch was about to become the politician.

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

THE R.L.S. BUILDING IN THE ALLEGATIONS.

STAGE SIX

Section C

'A world too wide'

The world was never too wide for Robert Louis Stevenson. He was now where he wanted to be - in the South Seas. He loved the place from the very beginning and said as much in the second page of An Island Landfall:

'Samoa - that first sunrise, that first day, that first island, awoke a virginity of sense in both of us. Balm for the weary. Few who come to the islands ever leave them. They grow grey where they alight and the palms shade them till they die...'

Dr Drummond had told Fanny that Louis could live till he was seventy, - 'If only he'll stop this damned travelling about.' But Stevenson had no wish yet to see himself as an old man and a 'sit-by-the-fire'.

'I have endured some two and forty years without public shame and had a good time as I did it. If only I could secure a violent death what a fine success. I wish to die in my boots, no more land of counterpane for me - to be drowned, to be shot, to be thrown from a horse - even to be hanged, rather than pace again through a slow dissolution by disease.'

Meantime there was work to be done, and for him that did not mean building with wood and nails but with words. Harry Moors comments:

'Stevenson told me that when he set about writing a story he had to do it as a carpenter sets about a building. First of all, he would map out a plan, with a sketch of the plot and main incidents and lay out the chapters. Then, when he was satisfied that he had made a solid foundation, he would proceed with the superstructure. Such side issues as suggested themselves he would develop as he went on. He would often depart from his original plans... No man, he said, could faithfully adhere to his original intentions in the writing of a work of fiction.'

This last sentence is more in line with Stevenson's own comment:

'Nothing is more pleasing to the writer than to let his pen move ad libitum over the page, careless where he shall pass by or whither, if anywhere, he shall arrive...'

Moors continued:

'Somehow, in conversation he seemed a different man, remarkably fluent, never at a loss for a word or setting... getting quite excited over matters of the most trivial moment trivial moment... and get quite theatrical over it... There were occasions when the man was eloquent, but it was the eloquence of the actor, shown in the looks as much as in the words.'

His face carried absolute conviction; and when he was burning with indignation the fire in his eyes showed it more clearly than any words could do. Henley was right; he was a born actor; and it seems strange that his efforts as a dramatist should have proved a dismal failure.'

This is hardly strange when one considers that had he did not approach the drama as a carpenter. Had he done so another kind of building would undoubtedly have been built - the theatre equivalent of Vailima perhaps?

'As long as I can write I am happy. As long as the pen will scratch and the words will come I see no reason to blame God or the solar system for any little irritation I may cause myself... Here are, indeed, labours for a Hercules in a dress coat, armed with a pen and a dictionary... to paint the portrait of the insufferable sun...'⁴

Part of his relentless drive was due of course to his quite groundless fear that he would die in a moment and leave his family destitute. He was a relatively rich man, but at the time of the building work every word he sold had a price tag on it which was converted at once into wood or nails. But this would not go on forever. As long as his imagination could outpace the local carpenter's hand they would survive - providing of course that he too survived. Then he could enjoy his dream of writing without pressure. He did not regard what he wrote as high art, far from it. It was, as far as he could see, his job in life. It was the work he did to earn his daily bread.

He was a professional man trying to work to a professional routine while living the life of a gentleman in exotic surroundings. It was not easy. Yet if he had not built Vailima he need not have written another word. He could have lived the life of of leisure in the sun. Stevenson was not always at ease about this. He was often ashamed of his comfortable circumstance when he considered the hardship of others but he could offer no solutions or suggest a remedy. And not by politics - 'Politics leave me extraordinarily cold,' he said.

On this point, Fanny wrote of him, that he -

'sympathised with the socialist but saw no royal road for others by his own path. He believed he had no rights, only undeserved indulgences, but he must not eat unearned bread. He must pay the world in some fashion for what it gave him - first materially, then in kindness, then in love. Too much ease frightened him. He occasionally insisted on some sharp discomfort to awaken him to realities. He never succeeded in subduing the old Adam within him. He had an understanding for street musicians and wandering performers.'

260

"We're in the same boat," he said, "trying to amuse a fickle public. I always divide with a brother artist."⁵

This was the socialism of the artist. It was the artist in him that drove him on. This was no self-imposed role, no part to play like so many of the others, nor yet another casting credit in the catalogue he had fashioned out of his forty-two years so far. This was the life he wanted to live, needed to live, this was the man himself.

It might be said that Stevenson, because of his romantic instincts and early reading had had an early ideal presented to him as far as life in the South Pacific was concerned. This may have made it all the harder to adjust to the realities of carving a home out of the bush. He may have regretted that after 'a cruel, rough passage to Auckland' he spent so little time in New Zealand. That country may have held many answers for him in terms of 'bookstores, white tablecloths and special wines'. The Tusitala of Samoa might well have been the Rangatira Pakeha of the Bay of Islands? However this is pure speculation. In the ordinary sense, it mattered little to Stevenson where he lived. He was cared for wherever he went. Climate dictated environment. For the most part, as far as he was concerned, the higher and drier the better.

The calender of his life, like the log-books of the Casco, the Equator and the Janet Nicoll, was an ongoing record of his daily health. More often than not, the decision to remain in one place or set out for another was made for him by other factors arising, not the least of which was an impulse to adventure, which goes some way to explain the number and variety of his many excursions. Something in him wanted to live all his lives at once and at full pitch. He wanted to play ALL the parts in the play he had made of his own life - and at the same time. His was that kind of one-man-show. And while the actor in him may have enjoyed the acclaim that now accrued to him, the artist in him had an equal horror of such eclat. He even disliked ordinary noise.

He explained to Colvin:

'I do not love noise; I am like my grandfather in that; and so many years in these still islands have ingrained the sentiment perhaps. Here are no trains, only men passing barefoot. No carts or carriages; at worst, the rattle of a horse's shoes among the rocks; beautiful silence; and (as) soon as this robustious rain takes off, I am to drink of it again by oceanfuls.'⁶

In a previous, very long letter of nearly three years before to the same correspondent he had said almost the same thing about silences:

'My long silent contests in the forest have had a strange effect on me. The unconcealed vitality of these vegetables, their exuberant number and strength, the attempts - I can use no other word - of lianas to enwrap and capture the intruder, the awful silence, the knowledge that all my efforts are only like the performance of the actor - a thing of the moment...'

It is an apt comment from one who was always distancing himself from himself, like an actor on stage, always striving objectively for the subjective, trying to bring into a balanced focus the twin effect of one upon the another within the character being portrayed at that moment. Catching the NOW as actors know it was also important to Stevenson. He had to know where he was with who he was because he was so many different persons to so many different people.

Here one is given a rare and tantalising glimpse into that still centre of Stevenson from which all else emanates. This is his source, not only as a writer, but as a human being. For him, everything begins and ends in a silence no matter the loud cry put up in the course of the action. His was a different kind of action - a roaring adventure of the mind which would have exhausted anyone less vividly alive. Nothing daunted the man. Having been through so much, he was ready for anything. Besides, everything was grist to that relentless mill that ground out the written word in page after page after page. The very urgency of his need for material gave a dramatic impetus to nearly everything he did, and what he did was done with an unashamed theatrical dash. His plots were simple because he was nearly always in a hurry to get the thing finished but in his best novels, his characters were complex because he too was as complicated as they.

Not all of his old London circle understood, particularly his mentor, Colvin. He, for his part, felt the loss to literature of the essayist supreme. Henry James, on the other hand, thought Stevenson might have made a historian of the great military campaigns knowing his fascination with men like Napoleon, Wellington and General Gordon. Gosse was convinced his friend could yet be the great Victorian novelist; Andrew Lang that he could even be a poet. They all had their own Stevensons as it were. Henley was the only one who wanted Stevenson to be himself - as he was in the beginning. But what he was in their eyes now was an unnecessary exile. It was hard for them to appreciate, that a man should impose exile on himself - and especially from London. He had tried to explain to Lady Taylor:

'I do feel as if I was a coward and a traitor to desert my friends; only, my dear lady, you know what a miserable corrhylal (is that how it is spelt?) creature I was at home; and here I have some real health, I can walk, I can ride, I can stand some exposure, I am up with the sun, I have a real enjoyment of the world and of myself; it would be hard to back again to England and to bed...I think it would be silly. I am sure it would and yet I feel shame...'⁸

His old feeling for his friends pulled against his new feeling of well-being but one cannot blame him for snatching at this sudden chance of new life. People had forgotten that sickness for him also meant pain

34. Government House, 'Vailima', which incorporates the original home of Robert Louis Stevenson (By permission of the New Zealand Government)

Two years passed and matters only got worse. Stevenson never understood why politicians and statesmen behaved in a way in public that they would never do at home. A way that made honest men cunning and devious and clever men appear like dolts. He held politics to be a 'vile and a bungling business and that where he used to think meanly of the plumber, he now 'shines beside the politician.' What had drawn him into Samoan politics and its complications was a simple concern for the people themselves and a liking for their native leaders. From his mountain eyrie, he had watched the menacing clouds gather, helpless to do anything but impatient with his own frustration and angry about the waste and needlessness of even a local war.

It was being played out as a game among the foreign few at the expense of the native peoples and he knew he could only be a spectator, a looker-on at the action, as he had been all his life. Perhaps this time, he could do something, he had thought. This had been his opportunity to become a soldier at last, like General Gordon or a martyr-hero like the missionary, Chalmers, killed by native spears in New Guinea. He set out his political position cogently in a long letter to Rev S.J. Whitmee on 24 April 1892 but eventually he realized he would have to leave it to the politicians to further complicate things by their bungling and obstinacy. He wrote to Andrew Lang in August of the same year:

I'm in a deuce of a flutter with politics, which I hate, and in which I certainly do not shine; but a fellow cannot stand aside... 'tain't decent... but it's a grind to be interrupted by midnight messengers, and pass your days writing proclamations (which are never proclaimed) and petitions (which ain't petited) and letters to the Times which it makes my jaws yawn to read...'¹⁰

The comedy had become a tragedy. His own part had been played out and he was limited to being a compassionate observer of the peoples' plight but he could do little about it. He found the situation baffling and frustrating. It was with some relief he quit the political stage in February 1893 and took a trip with Fanny who was taking Belle to the dentist in Sydney. He wrote to Colvin from the S.S. Mariposa:

'The extracts from the Times I really can't trust myself to comment on - they were infernally satisfactory; so, and perhaps still more so, was a letter I had from Lord Pembroke. If I have time as I go through Auckland, I am going to see Sir George Grey...'¹¹

'What a wonderful old historic figure to be walking on your arm... It makes a man small, and yet the extent to which he approved of what I had done, - or rather, have tried to do - encouraged me. Sir George is an expert. At least he knows these races. He is not a small employé with an ink pot and a Whittaker.'¹²

Sir George had told Stevenson when they met -

'I thought you were an invalid. When I see the fire in your eyes, your age, your energy, I feel no more anxiety for Samoa... never despair.'¹³

But at the same time, he advised Stevenson to act cautiously. Many lives were at risk, including Stevenson's and, at the least, he might yet face deportation. This sufficiently alarmed R.L.S. to telegraph Colvin immediately. Even from more than ten thousand miles away, the astute Scot could pull some very long strings. Questions were asked in the House of Commons and the Colonial Secretary was instructed to leave Mr Stevenson alone. After all, Mr Arthur Balfour was the Prime Minister and he had the ear of Lord Rosebery at the Foreign Office, and Mr Stevenson was a Balfour. Celebrity had triumphed over political expediency but the celebrity himself had been tamed. He would revert to Letters - but not to the Times.

On his return from Auckland, he wrote to Colvin, ending his letter - 'Now I really think that's all the business.' The second scene fades... The Politician retreats under the umbrella of Tusitala who now re-enters as the Tame Celebrity.

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

STAGE SIX

Section D

'Pipes and Whistles'

Shakespeare in As You Like It (in the same speech which serves as the armature for this study), has Jacques speak of 'his big, manly voice turning again towards childish treble, pipes and whistles in his sound.'¹ But if anything, Stevenson's 'voice' grew stronger. From this time on was 'no more the melancholy Jacques seeking the lost Forest of Arden' as Saposnik put it. He had a forest of his own at the back door. Terence said, 'Homo sum; humani nil a me alienum puto' and everything was possible for Stevenson now. He was human certainly, and humane to a fault. Of which he had many as he freely admitted in this word-picture:

'Exceedingly lean, rather ruddy, black eyes, crows-footed, beginning to be grizzled, general appearance of a blasted boy - or blighted youth... Past eccentric... present industrious and fatuously contented... Really knows a great deal... but you could talk a week to him and never guess it... Name in family, The Tame Celebrity. Cigarettes without intermission except when coughing or kissing. Hopelessly entangled in apron-strings. Drinks plenty. Curses some. Temper unstable. Manners purple in an emergency... Has been an invalid for years, but can boldly claim you can't tell... Given to explaining the Universe - Scotch, sir, Scotch.'²

He was only forty-three but he had done so many things already and been to so many places and had faced death so often that nothing was impossible to him at this stage - except any surety about his day-to-day health, a state necessary for his ambitious work rate.:

'Why the work I've been doing during the last twelve months, in one continuous spate, mostly with annoying interruptions, and without any collapse to mention, would be incredulous in Norway.'^{*}

However, he well knew the dangers of his own ambivalence. He was -

"a particularly brave boy" (who) plunged into adventures and experiments... but it was different indeed when I was yet girt with the priceless robes of inexperience; then the fear (of life) was exquisite and infinite. And so when you see all these little Ibsens, who seem at once so dry and so excitable, and faint in swathes over a play (I suppose for a wager) that would seem to me merely tedious, smile behind your hand, and remember the little dears are all in a blue funk... But never get desperate. Human nature is human nature...'³

* An allusion to the birthplace of playwright Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906).

What is also remarkable about Stevenson in Samoa was how he kept in touch with the theatrical scene given that he was supposed to have eschewed the drama completely. Yet as early as October 1891, he had written to Burlingame, his editor at Scribner's, asking him to send in the next 'book-box' all the plays of Pinero - and to send any others as they come out. This was hardly the request of a man disenchanted with the drama. He had also written to Henry James (in December 1891):

'I was delighted to hear of the success of your piece (Guy Domville). As you know, I am a damn failure (on the stage) and might have dined with the dinner club that Daudet and those parties frequented.'⁴

And as late as 27 March 1894 he would be writing to William Archer thanking him for sending a copy of his (Archer's) Theatrical World. So it can be seen, that even 12,000 miles away in the Pacific, he was very much up with the play. He could afford to be. At all times he had a swarming household attending his every need, hanging on his every word. The charm was still there to be used. Fortunately, Fanny was wise enough to let him believe he was organising everyone when, in fact, he himself was actually being adroitly managed.

Their relationship was almost symbiotic in its closeness. There was only one part for him to play here, the willing subject of her care. He tried to be patient because he recognised that -

'She runs the show. Infinitely little, extraordinary wig of grey curls, handsome waxen face like Napoleon's, insane black eyes, boy's hands, tiny bare fare, a cigarette, wild blue native dress, usually spotted with garden mould. In company manners present the appearance of a little timid and precise old maid of the days of prunes and prisms - you look for the reticule. Hellish energy relieved by fortnights of entire hibernation. Can make anything from a house to a row, all fine and large of their kind. Doctors everything... cannot be doctored herself... a violent fiend, a brimstone enemy... either loathed or slavishly adored... dreams dreams and sees visions.'⁵

They had come a long way together since 1878 but the fact was that he was now, in a sense, free of her. It was never expected that he should ever become healthy. She felt left out. Her life-role had been undermined by this unilateral upsurge of her husband's whom she had married as a stick and who now promised to become a virtual fir tree. She experienced a violent emotional reaction, which, given her age and temperament, often made her a difficult companion in the Samoan years. As he had waxed under the sun, she had waned.

The husband had become a more difficult part for him to play, but she was still 'trusty, dusky, vivid, true, with eyes of gold and bramble hue' but though she might not 'bloom like a tiger lily in the snowdrift of the bed' as once she did and even if he had little time now 'to make her brooches or toys for her delight', she was still his wife. His view had been that to marry was to domesticate the recording angel, and that what had been begun in love was merely endured by habit. Fanny retreated into even more hectic housekeeping and thorough gardening. She too recognised that their marriage was just like their life, more a field of battle than a bed of roses, chequered daily by disputes. Marriage, according to Stevenson, might only be a kind of friendship recognised by the police but he knew that it had also saved his life.

'Mine was a sort of marriage in extremis, but if I am what I am it is thanks to the care of that lady⁶ who married me when I was a mere complication of cough and bone...'

However, in an earlier letter to Henley he had put it another way:

'I got my little finger into a steam press called the Vandergrifter (Patent) and my whole body and soul had to go through after it. I came out as limp as a lady's novel.'

He had always said that his marriage was the best thing he had ever done and the longer it went on the more he seemed to protest this fact but there was no doubt he had also learned that -

'The body is a house of many windows; ther we all sit, showing ourselves and crying on the passers-by to come and love us But this fellow has filled his windows with opaque glass, elegantly coloured.' His house may be admired for its design, the crowd may pause before the stained windows, but meanwhile the poor proprietor must lie languishing within, uncomforted, unchangeably alone.'⁸

As always, he fell back on that great sustainer - work.

The words poured out of him - 700,000 of them. This was due to Belle, who had now come to live at Vailima with her son, Austin. Stevenson had been increasingly troubled by what he called his 'scrivener's palsy' (cramp in his right hand) and had even resorted to writing with his left, but a solution was right at hand, so to speak. Belle could take dictation. There was an element of serendipity in this as he found he could work even faster. Or rather, the work seemed to go faster as he could merely decribe the 'pictures in his mind' so the Belle could set them down. His handwriting had never been his strongest point as anyone who has read some of the original letters in manuscript can testify.

Belle's hand was as clear as the pictures in his head.

'He had hardly more than a line or two of notes to keep him on track; but he never falters for a word, giving me sentences with capital letters and all the stops, as easily and as steadily as though he were reading from an unseen book. He walks up and down the room as I write and his voice is so beautiful and the story so interesting that I forget to rest.'⁹

He himself seemed to enjoy the 'performance' it required. He dictated with great earnestness but at the same time he appeared to enjoy playing out the characters as he did so. The writer had given the histrion a real part to play at last and both were at ease with each other.

'I really think this dictation is an art I can acquire. The relief from actually having to write it out is beyond description. It's just like a school treat... I'm a lucky man to have such an amanuensis. She bears up extraordinar'.¹⁰

His work had never arrived on the page with such ease and assurance from that great 'somewhere else' of his imagination and it arrived, made-up and ready to enter, as the actors would have it.

As an 19th-century American critic put it -

'His characters were brought on and off the stage with a precise adjustment to the story's development.'¹¹

Significantly, St Ives and Weir of Hermiston were largely dictated.

More and more, he liked to speak his text aloud, to act it out. Doggedly and relentlessly, yet with an unconstrained enthusiasm and excitement, the pages were covered. As his 'performance' improved so did the quality of his daily output. He was comfortable in his environment now. He saw the resemblance between the Samoan way and the Scottish clan sytem, based as both were on the family. He accommodated easily to his role as a chief because he was a natural clan chief himself. This was his one of his most effective roles because it was genuinely felt, totally understood and exactly within his range.

In other words, he was well-cast.

Cicero, in his De Officiis (1.XX.), states -

'Some of them too, lived in the country, and found their pleasures in the management of their private estates. Such men have had the same aims as kings - to suffer no want, to be subject to no authority, to enjoy their liberty, that is, in its essence, to live just as they please.'¹²

He might have been speaking of R.L.S. - gentleman landowner and author. An author who now called himself Tusitala.

Stevenson was introduced to the Samoans, and to the world, by this name through one of his own stories, The Bottle Imp, which was translated into the Samoan language by a local missionary, the Rev J.E.Newall, and printed in the mission newspaper as O Le Fagu Aitu. Mr Newall remembers Stevenson's reading the story aloud to him -

'I never had such an entertaining hour in my life,' he said.

Harry Jay Moors confirms Stevenson's reading skill:

'I doubt if he was surpassed by Dickens in the success with which he could tell a story by word of mouth as well as by his pen.'¹³

It could be said then that Tusitala began as a public recitalist. Even the The Bottle Imp has a theatrical provenance. The idea came from a play by Richard Brinsley Peake, although Fanny Stevenson always considered that the playwright was the equally prolific Fitzball mentioned by Pinero. This version was made popular as a melodrama by the actor O. Smith, who played the leading part. Stevenson acquired the piece as part of the papers left to him by his Bournemouth neighbour, Sir Percy Shelley, who collected such dramatic absurdities for his amateur theatricals.

When the story was first published in the Black and White magazine, 24 March and 4 April 1891, the subtitle was - A Cue From An Old Melodrama. What gave the tale a further irony in Samoa, given the trouble Stevenson was in with the German authorities at the time, was that it was thought that he had lifted the entire plot from an old German folk-tale. All the German Stevenson ever knew, he had learned from reading the works of Burns in translation -

'Mein hertz ist im Hochland, mein hert ist nicht hier...'

But that had been almost twenty years before. He had now exchanged the northern European street-lamps for stars, telegraph poles for forest trees and Apia for his beloved Edinburgh. The total evacuation from hemisphere to hemisphere had been accomplished and he now had his now-completed Vailima to show for it:

'My house is a great place; we have a hall 50 feet long with a great redwood stair ascending from it, where we dine in state - on fish usually, if we're lucky; myself usually dressed in a singlet and a pair of trousers - attended by servants in their lavalavas, -a kind of kilt, also with flowers and leaves in their hair, or powdered with lime. The Europeans who come think it is a kind of dream.'¹⁴

It was. And it was his.

One European, obviously enchanted, was one gushing lady:

'Here we are at Vailima, and the master himself is looking out from that charming balcony in his mother's room in that part of the villa latest built. He returns the shout of greeting with which Mrs Strong and Mr Osbourne announced (our) approach. This is no 'interview' but a friendly call... You are soon under the spell of his fascinating earnestness and clear-cut sincerity of thought and speech... You feel that he stands revealed before you as a man of wide and generous sympathies, and you shall say to yourself... "This man is fighting a good fight... in a world of disguises and shams."¹⁵

But the man in question had meantime fled inside to his mother's room. Shams and disguises were things Stevenson knew only too well.

Perhaps because she was an actress, Stevenson was much more relaxed with another of his lady visitors, Marie Fraser. She was also a very attractive woman, and for her, Stevenson reverted to his 'great writer' mode. The result was a copiously illustrated article for the English Illustrated Magazine from the following is an extract:

'Opening a glass door, my host ushered me into the library, a delightful room full of curios, pictures, arms and books. Not only were the walls lined with well-stocked shelves, but all the chairs and tables were covered with books, and piles were lying everywhere on the floor. Mr Stevenson explained the disorder by saying: "Things are more easily found when they are left lying about." Mr Stevenson's own room, a barely-furnished apartment where he does most of his writing. "I can't write in the library," continues the novelist, "it's all so suitable for the literary man - it puts every idea out of my head. I like a little den like this with nothing in it to distract me... I have lived in every sort of place and find that a mat on the ground is as comfortable as anything, as long as we have our own brand of tobacco - we are slaves to that; we have allowed Three Castles to insinuate itself into our lives."¹⁶

Stevenson, the smoker, is someone not always in the public's image of him, yet the full-length done by John Singer Sargent (1856-1925) in 1885 was not afraid to show him, cigarette in hand, as did the bronze medallion executed by Augustus St. Gaudens in 1888.

Fanny thought this the best likeness. R.L.S. would only comment:

'The pictures they publish of me vary considerably... from the most God-like to the criminal... from the 'man with noble bearing' to the "bloated boy"... I don't mind what they say.'¹⁷

This is hardly the man, who, in Henley's opinion, could never pass a mirror. But with the press, as many have found since, if in the beginning is the word, it is likely to be a misquote.

He had always believed there are always 'high and brave and amusing lives to be lived' and he knew too that 'a change of key, however exotic, does not exclude melody'. As has been mentioned, Stevenson loved music and the making of it but he was essentially a writer of note who was always first a man of his own words. His scenarios were always personal. He saw himself clearly in every situation he devised:

'To confess plainly... I can still, looking back, see myself in many favourite attitudes; signalling for a boat from my pirate ship with a pocket handkerchief, I at the jetty end, and one or two of my bold blades keeping the crowd at bay; or else turning in the saddle to look back at my whole command (some five thousand strong) following me at the hand-gallop up the road out of the burning valley... Et point du tout. I am a poor scribe... and have recently dined on veal... with neither health nor vice for anything more spirited than procrastination,¹⁸ which I may well call the Consolation Stakes of Wickedness...'

This was the true voice of the frustrated hero, the stuff that his own romantic heroes were made of. He was in fact a romantic hero himself as Lady Jersey observed. But when the romantic opportunity offered itself for adventure in the wider sense, (as for instance with the same Lady Jersey during the recent troubles on the island), the Stevenson good sense outweighed the Balfour elan.

As his celebrity increased so did the stream of visitors, many of them, like Marie Fraser, beautiful women from Europe. Fanny gave them all short shrift. Nonetheless, it was to Fanny, he would dedicate his last great work, Weir of Hermiston -

'Take thou the writing, thine it is...'¹⁹

The truth might be, however, that as far as their marriage was concerned, the writing was on the wall as much as on the page. They had changed roles. Fanny had now become the patient, he, the nurse. This gruff, grizzled little American, so long the tender was now the tended. She had been wife, mother, nurse, protector, sister, travel companion and colleague to him. It was a lot to ask of any one woman even the 'unique woman in the world' who was his wife. He had asked much of her and she had answered with all of herself. In 'running the show' she had run herself into the ground. It was as if she knew the end was near. Untypically, she kept her fears to herself.

For him, as the final scene approached, Tusitala would now give place more and more to the Zany Scot.

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

STAGE SIX

Section E

'Last scene of all'

The old saw says that there never came a fool out of Scotland but the Hermit of Vailima knew he did not have all the answers.

'As I go on in life, day by day, I become more of a bewildered child; I cannot get used to this world, to procreation, heredity, to sight, to hearing; the commonest things are a burden. The prim, obliterated, polite face of life, and the broad, bawdy and orgiastic - or maenadic¹ - foundations, form a spectacle to which no habit reconciles me...'

Fleeming Jenkin had once remarked that 'We are not here to be happy - but to be good.' Stevenson, in recording the statement, amended it slightly, but tellingly, by saying 'We are not here to be happy but to TRY to be good.'² It must be said then that at the time now under review, 1894, at the onset of his final year of living, Robert Louis Stevenson was as happy as he had ever been. He wrote to H.B. Baildon:

'Yes, if I could die just now, or say in half a year, I should have had a splendid time of it on the whole. But it gets a little stale, and my work will begin to senesce; and parties to shy bricks at me; and now it begins to look as if I should survive to see myself impotent and forgotten. It's a pity suicide is not thought the ticket in the best circles... All of which goes to show that nobody is quite sane in judging himself... Well, the gods know best.'³

Their first decree was that he should die in less than a year but they had also determined he be born in Scotland.

'I do not even know that I desire to live there; but let me hear, in some far land, a kindred voice sing out, 'O why left I my hame? and it seem at once as if no beauty under the kind heavens... can repay me for my absence from my country.'⁴

It has been said that the one thing NOT to be learned in Scotland is the way to be happy but Stevenson insisted that -

'The happiest lot on earth is to be born a Scotchman. You must pay for it in so many ways, as for all other advantages on earth. You have to learn the paraphrases and the shorter catechism. You generally take to drink. Your youth, as far as I can make out, is a time of loud war against society, of more outcry and tears and turmoil than if you had been born for instance, in England. But somehow life is warmer and closer; the hearth burns more redly; the lights of home shine softer in the rainy street; the very games enshrined in verse and music cling nearer round our hearts...'⁵

Professor George Gordon remarked in his study of famous writers, that Stevenson's written English had 'all the niceties of a foreigner'. This is a nicety which Stevenson might have debated but it must be borne in mind that Professor Gordon boasted the same 'daft Gordon blood'. Stevenson also tells of one Robert Hunter, sometime Sheriff of Dumbarton and Commissioner of Lighthouses, but now 'all fallen away and fallen in' who, Stevenson recounts,

'cautioned me, with entire gravity, to be punctilious in writing English; never to forget that I was a Scotchman, that English was a foreign tongue, and that if I attempted the colloquial, I should certainly be shamed; the remark was apposite, I suppose, in the days of David Hume... He had the old, serious love of the play; had even, as he was proud to tell, played a certain part in the history of Shakespearian revivals, for he had successfully pressed on Murray, of the old Edinburgh Theatre, the idea of producing Shakespeare's fairy pieces with great scenic display... We were both Roberts, and as we took our places at table, he addressed me with a twinkle: "We are just what you would call two bob."⁶

And as dinner table guests, cheap at the price one would think.

This, his sixth age, found Robert Louis Stevenson at his most assured. His was entirely the expression of a man who knew exactly who he was - a Scotsman. It was as if, suddenly sensing his end was near, he had returned to his beginnings. The sailor had given way to the patriarch who had then become the reluctant politician who in turn gave way to the celebrity who at the last yielded to the Scot from Edinburgh. It was hard to believe how far he had come.

'It is a singular thing that I should live in the South Seas under conditions so striking yet my imagination continually inhabits that old, cold huddle of grey hills from which we come.'

He could always see the Pentland Hills, and the Lammermuirs, and further still that Border country where his Elliot ancestors had 'shaken a spear in the debatable lands', and old ballads had recorded the tragic deeds of fighting men, and the women who loved them, and whom they loved, all those years ago. He had come so far, yet the sights and sounds of his youth still pursued him. He would always think of Edinburgh as home and yet he knew he would never see that 'venerable city' again. The word was out, the doom was written, and as he said - 'I bow my head to my destiny.' He began to look deeper into himself as if trying to untangle all the strands that tied him now to Samoa yet still to Scotland and to finally understand who he was under all the 'shams and disguises'.

'Though now past forty, I have dwelt in delicious vagueness since boyhood. It's the best way to get through the green sickness of maturity. The individual is never altogether quit of his youth, even when he is already old and full of honours. We advance in years somewhat in the manner of an invading army. The age we reach, we hold but as an outpost; we still keep open our communications with the rear, and the first beginnings of our march. There is our true base, not only the beginning but the perennial spring of all our faculties, where familiar things become the shadow-shapes of memory, and we can return, upon occasions, to the still enchanted forests of our childhood...'⁸

His was a Scottish childhood and he unashamedly reached back into it.

'From the dim sheiling and the misty island,
Mountains divide us and a waste of seas,
Yet still our hearts are true, our hearts are Highland
And we, in dreams, behold the Hebrides.'⁹
And, Highland or Lowland, all our hearts are Scottish.'

Even if he does come from Edinburgh. But it was not the Edinburgh of which he had written before. This was almost a Blake-like ideal, the mystical city of his imagination seen through the heat-haze of the South Pacific but it is an assured writer who is speaking:

'I was born within the bounds of an earthly city illustrious for her beauty, her tragic and picturesque associations, and for the credit of some of her brave sons. Writing as I do in a strange quarter of the world and a late day of my age, I can still behold the profile of her towers and chimneys and the long trail of her smoke against the sunset; I can still hear those strains of martial music that she goes to bed with, ending each day like the act of an opera... It is the beautiful that I thus actively recall; the august airs of the castle on its rock, nocturnal passages of lights and trees, the sudden song of a blackbird in a suburban lane, rosy and dusky winter sunsets, the uninhabited splendours of the early dawn, the building up of the city on a misty day, house above house, spire above spire, until it was received into a sky of softly glowing clouds and seemed to pass on and upward, by fresh grades and rises, city beyond city, a new Jerusalem, bodily scaling heaven.'¹⁰

While recognising the nostalgic base for such expatriate writing, it must be seen nevertheless that there is a quality here that 'bodily scales' the merely sentimental even though at other times he can be as chauvinistic as the rest, as the following will show:

* The line should read - 'Yet still the blood is strong, the heart is Highland'. The poem is called Canadian Boat Song, ostensibly a translation from the Gaelic and sung by St. Lawrence boatmen. It was printed in Blackwood's (1829) and variously attributed to 'Christopher North', J.G. Lockhart and John Galt.

'Yes, I am a Scotchman. Touch me and you will find a thistle. I am a Briton, and have my being in the greatness of our national achievement - but I often feel unable to continue with this horseplay we call human life, and I yearn for the great solitude of four-and-twenty mountain hours. But am I to forget the long hospitality of beautiful France, and has not America done me favours to compound my gratitude? No, they are all my relatives! Wherever it is, a place doesn't exist in our imagination till we have moved elsewhere.'¹¹

There is no doubt that Scotland, for all its faults and drawbacks, and hard, unflattering history, had a constant place in his heart:

'Be it granted to me to behold you again on dying - hills of home...'

But if his ghost walks at all it is more probable that it does so down Lothian Road on a wet, windy night than under any Samoan stars, or on a dowie Sabbath morning after the kirk at Swanston rather than by a white Pacific beach. He wrote as much to the Rev.S.R.Crockett:

'Do you know where the road crosses the burn at Glencorse? Go there and say a prayer¹² for me... shut your eyes... and see if I don't appear to you?'

It was to the same correspondent in 1888 that he added a pointed rebuke:

'Don't put 'N.B.' on your paper; put Scotland and be done with it... The name of my native land is not North Britain whatever may be the name of yours.'¹³

On his 44th birthday. November 13, 1894, carriages came up the new 'Road of the Loving Heart' to the house to bring forty-four couples from Apia to attend the first Vailima ball. 'The Beach' and everyone who thought they were anyone in Samoan society was there - friends and former enemies all - to pay respect to Stevenson, the lord of the manor, at home to his guests, the complete host in white dress shirt, new black trousers and black pumps. He was a changed man - literally.

'I am now very dandy; I announced two years ago that I should change. Slovenly youth, all right - not slovenly age. So really now I'm pretty spruce; always a white shirt, white neck-tie, fresh shave, silk socks - O, a great sight!'¹⁴

An earlier letter to Henry James had a less laundered view:

'It is likely however, by my judgement, that this epoch of gaiety in Samoa will soon cease; and the fierce white light of history will beat no longer on Yours Sincerely and his fellows here on the beach... For say what you please it has been a deeply interesting time... And anxious friends beg me to stay at home and study human nature in Brompton drawing-rooms! Farceurs! And anyway you know that such is not my talent...'¹⁵

Stevenson was 'putting on a show'. At his birthday ball he danced till two in the morning, the music from the band of 'HMS Katoomba' being so good, and he was on his toes till the last. Not for the first time he confounded guests and family alike by his energy and zest. It was if he had been told he was to live forever. He had been waiting for death so long that it had become to him, one of life's companions - another partner in the dance, and he linked arms as naturally with it as he did with Fanny or Belle or any of the Apia wives. He had been expecting death almost daily since he was seven, but when it did come, it came as a surprise - like a bolt from the blue Pacific sky.

It might have been according to the script he had written for himself. Like the soldier he had always wanted to be, he wished to die in action, so to speak, to die with his boots on and not in a bed as he had dreaded. As a boy, he had held a home-made sword, as a youth, a pen, as a man, a cigarette and now, in the early evening of December 3, 1894, he was standing beside Fanny holding a bottle of vinegar.

He had had a good morning with Belle on Chapter 9 of Weir of Hermiston, dictating it to her on to the new Calligraphic typewriter in the now-finished library. At lunch, Lloyd had returned from Apia with the mail and Louis took his usual pile to his room. He was in high spirits as he went. Letters were life-blood to him. Who would it be this time - Colvin, Gosse, Lang, James - the beloved London circle - or Will Low, the painter - or fellow-writers like Meredith, Barrie, Conrad, Conan Doyle? It could be any one or all of them - or neither and the entire correspondence could be nothing more than dreary business matters and invoices - publishers and tradesmen, printers and suppliers, lawyers and the like. The thing was to get letters - from critics, from admirers, from very distant acquaintances - but letters nonetheless.

This was the R.L.S. the whole world knew, the celebrity figure in absentia, the romantic writer in exile, the mystic on the mountain-top, his fame acknowledged by the vast amount of letters he received by the regular steamer. Sadly, there would be nothing from Henley - poor, jaunty, crippled, irrepressible Henley, whom Fanny would never forgive and Stevenson could not forget. Only two days before, he had written what was to prove his last letter. It was to Edmund Gosse in answer to that gentleman's dedication of his book of poems, - 'To Tusitala'. Stevenson had been much touched and replied at once.

27

Perhaps it is only hindsight that gives some of the phrases an eerie premonition in keeping with Fanny's declared uneasiness throughout the final, fateful day. She was very quiet and said she was worried about something but then Fanny was always worried about something. Stevenson had said in the letter to Gosse:

'I was not born for age... Come to think of it, Gosse, I believe the main distinction (between us) is that you have a family growing up around you, and I am a childless, rather bitter, very clear-eyed, blighted youth. I have, in fact, lost the path that makes it easy and natural for you to descend the hill. I am going at it straight and where I have to go down it is a precipice...'

The letter was signed - 'The Vanished Tusitala'.

Now he was standing at the sideboard happily discussing an idea he had for a new salad dressing with Fanny who was still unusually quiet. He was trying to cheer her up, telling her all about the new contracts and the offer he had received to lecture in the United States, when suddenly he slumped to his knees with both hands to his head - and went into the coma from which he never recovered...

Robert Louis Stevenson

A copy of his last photograph taken
in Sydney, Australia, in 1894,
a few months before his death.

IN MEMORIAM R.L.S.

Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-94), essayist, novelist, dramatist, optimist and fatalist, was dead. He was now ready to become the legend known as 'RLS of the South Seas', the focus of a romantic cult which was to harm his status as a serious writer as much it obscured the serious and brave man who was its source. A signal was flashed to Auckland and a telegraph from there stunned London. Robert Louis Stevenson dead? At first, no one believed it.

'You believe in unbelief; don't, it's not worthwhile. The world has been going on long enough for us to know we are wrong... Something is meant by everything. Everything is true, only the opposite¹⁷ is true too; You must believe both equally or be damned.'

In this apparent paradox is the kernel of his theatricality, the essential contradiction inherent in accepting the artistic lie as truth. It was also at the centre of his own ambivalent dimension. Playfully, but meaningfully, he signed himself -

'Andrew Crossmyloof-Gallio-Julius Ceasar-Archbishop Sharpe-My Uncle Toby and The Man in the Moon.'¹⁸

He always knew exactly who he was but he knew too the parts he had to play in the charade that he recognised as life as he had lived it. Now that life had been taken from him he was free now to become the legend to be known as R.L.S. In some degree, he would play an even greater part in his own story by the fact that he was off-stage. His early death in exile in exotic Samoa was just to the taste of the late Victorians. They had another dead hero to romanticise. As Gosse indicated, not since Byron died in Greece had there been such public lamenting.

The servants watched all night by the body, singing Catholic hymns, an irony he would have been the first to appreciate. In a typically Scottish protestant household it was Stevensonian at the least to have most of the servants Catholics. At dawn, the same chiefs who had so recently made the 'Road of the Loving Heart' now set to work, without any orders or request from anyone, to clear a path from the house to the top of the Mount Vaea where they knew that their Tusitala had wanted to be buried. By noon it was finished. Shortly after one o'clock, the Reverend W.E. Clarke of the London Missionary Society, the same clergyman

who thought that Stevenson was the leader of a New Zealand theatrical troupe, said the final prayers over the body. The corpse wore a fine white shirt (with the Thistle Club pin attached) black trousers and his best shoes. He had always liked good shoes on his feet, or better still boots - tie-up riding boots, as befitted a man who saw himself a soldier. Taallolo, the cook, with much kissing of Tusitala's hands, folded them across the chest and then what remained of Robert Louis Stevenson was covered in a red ensign from the Casco, and carried up to the top of Mount Vaea. Several hard hours later, the body was placed in the level grave, freshly dug in a clearing on the summit under a plain slab of stone as befitted a chief. At the approach of night, they left him there under the wide and starry sky.

He had already written his own requiem in a letter to Colvin fourteen years before from San Francisco:

'When I die of consumption ...you can put upon my tomb:-
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON born 1850, of a family of engineers,
died'Nitor aquis'
Home is the sailor, home from sea,
And the hunter home from the hill.
(I may write it better some day...)'

'Under the wide and starry sky,
Dig the grave and let me lie
Glad did I live and gladly die
And I laid me down with a will.
Here may the winds about me blow;
Here the clouds may come and go;
Here shall be rest for evermo,
And the heart for aye shall be still.
This be the verse you grave for me,
Here he lies where he longs to be
Home is the sailor, home from sea,¹⁹
And the hunter home from the hill.'

'Here lies one who meant well, tried a little, failed much.
Surely that may be his epitaph, of which he need not be ashamed.'²⁰
But perhaps one even more fitting would be his reply to William Archer when he queried Stevenson's attitude of suppressio veri to the sheer boredom of existence - 'I was never bored in my life.'²¹

'You, who pass this grave, put aside hatred; love kindness; be all services remembered in your heart and all offences pardoned; and as you go down again among the living, let this be your question; can I make someone happier this day before I lie down to sleep? Thus the dead man, speaks to you from the dust; you will hear no more from him...'²²

Jenni Calder writes:

'The literary world, the reading public in general, and particularly his close friends, felt his loss like the sudden dimming of a light. "This ghastly extinction of the beloved R.L.S." as Henry James put it... It was not only the loss of an inspiring writer that was mourned. It was the loss of a sparkling and sympathetic personality, a man of wit, of kindness, of warmth and humour, who made an impact, usually favourable on everyone he met... Edmund Gosse spoke of him as - "the most entrancing personality he had come across." And E.F.Benson... described how he (R.L.S.) - "cast over his friends a glamour which they confessed entirely dazzled them... part of the dazzle arose from the brilliance of his conversation. He loved to talk, and as he talked he would move about the room, gesturing expressively, smoking almost continuously, fluid and restless." And P.G.Hammerton wrote... "There was a positive radiance about him."²³

Was it the last flare of the spotlight - or the first lustre of a halo?

Was the theatrical Stevenson about to become the ethereal R.L.S.?

Twenty years before he had foreseen in Aes Triplex his own ideal exit:

'In the hot fit of life, a-tiptoe on the highest point of being, he passes at a bound on to the other side. The noise of the mallet and chisel is scarcely quenched, the trumpets are hardly done blowing, when, trailing with him clouds of glory, this happy-starred, full-bloodied spirit shoots into the spiritual land.'²⁴

Among the papers found after his death, were eleven pages comprising Act One, Scenes One to Four of an untitled play -

'A young Englishman who was sent by his rich uncle to find and bring back to England a girl whom the uncle had adopted many years before...'

Roger Swearingen considers this to be the dramatic treatment of a story The Sleeper Awakened which dated from June 1893 - only two months before his refusal to write a play for Irving. Swearingen also notes that the scrap may be part of a scenario entitled Less Than Kith And More Than Kind which was really Fanny's work although it contained two preliminary pages by Stevenson. It may of course also be the fragment of a dramatic piece for home performance at Vailima referred to by Balfour. Who knows? What is intriguing is that it offers proof that the theatre form continued to tantalise Stevenson right up to the last year of his life. Had he lived he might even have written the stage play that was unquestionably in him. But that is to speculate. What is undeniable is that the multi-coloured Skelt left a stain in him that was indelible.

'So I might go on for ever, through my abortive novels, and down to my later plays, of which I think more tenderly, for they were not only conceived at first under the bracing influence of old Dumas but have met with resurrections. One, strangely bettered by another hand, came on the stage itself and was played by bodily actors...' ²⁵

In his final letter to Mrs Albert Sitwell, in April 1894, Stevenson had enclosed a photograph of himself with the following note:

'A portait of Tusitala. He is a strange person; not so lean, say experts, but infinitely battered; mighty active again, on the whole... Quite a political personage - God save the mark! But at heart very conscious of the inevitable flat failure that awaits everyone... but not a hope of my dying soon and cleanly and winning off the stage...' ²⁶

This letter continues:

'I was meant to die young... This is very like an epitaph, bar the handwriting, which is anything but monumental, and I daresay I had better stop.'

After his death, it was found that the actual burial site was the property of the British vice-consul, Mr Thomas Trood. He immediately donated the section to the Vailima estate in return for some memento of Stevenson. Fanny gave him a portrait of the author inscribed on the back in her handwriting:

'To T.Trood Esq, whose kindness will never be forgotten
by Fanny V. de G. Stevenson.' ²⁷

A further flutter was caused by the error discovered on the plinth of Stevenson's tomb. Where Stevenson had written in his Requiem -

'Home is the sailor, home from sea' was now chiselled out as:

'Home is the sailor, home from THE sea'.

Nobody noticed it until sixty year later.

Stevenson's own wishes for his tomb were quite explicit:

'On my tomb, if I ever have one, I mean to get these words inscribed - 'He clung to his paddle'.' ²⁸

Jack London (1876-1916), accompanied by his wife, made his own R.L.S. pilgrimage in 1907:

'On the 9th, they travelled three miles up the slope from Apia to Stevenson's Vailima. After examining the closed house through every available window, they hiked to the writer's tomb at the summit of the mountain. Jack turned to Charmian and said: "I wouldn't have gone out of my way to visit the grave of any other man in the world."' ²⁹

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

Robert Louis Stevenson's tomb on top of Mt. Vaea, as shown on a modern postage stamp of the Trusteeship of Western Samoa

The Theatrical R.L.S.

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Listener

AUGUST 7-13 1993

Who said governors-general were about as much use in a democracy as room spray in a student flat? Historical evidence has just been advanced to the contrary. The revelation comes in a letter to the London *Times* from Sir Edward Ford, who writes: "Some 30 years ago, making the customary visit by governors-general of New Zealand to Western Samoa, *Lord Cobham* noticed an error in the words from 'Requiem' inscribed on the plinth of [Robert Louis] Stevenson's tomb and arranged for them to be re-engraved." That's incredible. Most people think Stevenson wrote "Home is the sailor, home from the sea/ And the hunter home from the hill", and certainly it would have saved heaps of bother if he had. In fact, the line should be "home from sea", and posterity has a governor-general to thank for pointing it out and removing a ghastly blot from the cultural landscape of the South Pacific. Match that, Dame Cath.

POSTSCRIPT

Vailima itself had a somewhat chequered history from this time. Gustav Kimst bought it from Fanny in 1898 and made some additions. It was severely damaged in the war of 1899. The German Governor, Dr Self restored it in 1903 before the British annexed the property in 1914. It was transferred to New Zealand jurisdiction in 1918 and returned to the Samoan people in 1962. Since then cyclones and hurricanes have devastated the site but at the time of writing moves are in hand to restore the house as a Robert Louis Stevenson Museum.

During 1994 the Stevenson Centenary will be marked by appropriate happenings in every part of the Stevenson world - beginning in Edinburgh, going on to Fontainbleau and Paris and across the United States. Theatres, concert halls, galleries and museums all over the world are exploring Stevenson connections and special radio, film and television programmes are being projected in every language. What could be more appropriate for a writer who considered himself a true man of the world? As Dr John Kelman has observed:

'Stevenson has a Hebrew conscience and a Greek imagination, a Scottish sense of sin and a French delight in beauty.'³⁰

What could be more international?

To conclude this stage, it must be mentioned that two playwrights did emerge in the family - on the step side, as it were. The first, who has already been mentioned, was Austin Strong, Belle's son by Joe Strong, and therefore Stevenson's grandson by marriage. After schooling first by Margaret Stevenson at Vailima, then in New Zealand, Strong returned with his mother and grandmother to California. He trained as a landscape artist, having inherited the latter's green fingers, but he then turned to playwriting. His first play was The Toymaker of Nuremberg, and after the First Great War, it was followed by Three Wise Fools and Seventh Heaven, the last-named being the most successful. It was adapted as a film in 1927. Benjamin Glazer wrote the screenplay which was directed by Frank Borzage for Fox Films and starred Janet Gaynor and Charles Farrell. All except Farrell won Academy Awards for their work on the film which was also nominated as best picture. It was re-made in 1937 with an impressive cast directed by Henry King, but despite the presence of James Stewart and Simone Simon, this adaptation by Melville Baker did not have the success enjoyed by the original.³¹

A BIRTHDAY GREETING

By ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

THE following verses were written by the late R. L. Stevenson for Austin Strong to recite before Mrs. Stevenson (senior) on the evening of her birthday, at Vailima, in 1890 or 1891. There were present, the assembled family and Mr. Bazzett Haggard, Land Commissioner. Through the courtesy of Strong, we are enabled to publish the verses, which now appear for the first time, and will, we are sure, be of great interest to all Stevensonians in particular, and the large public in general that devour "Kidnapped" and "Treasure Island."

Sole scholar of your college, I appear
Plenipotential for the party here
Assembled; elegantly to present
Their salutations and my compliment.

Awhile ago, when to your hands I came,
I tripped on commas, stumbled at a name:
Browsed like the sheep of some ungenerous breeder
On that lean pasture land—a child's First Reader.

Since when, by you presented, early and late
I sit and feast with all the good and great;
And pass the flagon round, and praise my lot
With Burns and Byron, Addison and Scott.

Since when, a practised knight, fear laid aside,
Through verbal Alps unfaltering I ride;
With polysyllables prove a passed practitioner,
And need not blush before a Land Commissioner.

For which good gifts they chose me (choosing right),
To grace with speech the ritual of the night;
Deliver this rough verse with easy mien,
And make my bow before our Lady Dean.

Austin Strong

The second playwright with a Stevenson connection was Edward S. Field, secretary to Fanny Stevenson after Louis's death. Although he was even more her junior than Stevenson himself was to Fanny, there were rumours of a relationship between Field and Mrs Stevenson. After her death (18 February 1914) he married her daughter, Belle Strong, and soon after began to win a name for himself as a writer of lightweight dramas such as Good Intentions, Twin Beds, The Rented Earl and the very successful Wedding Bells. This last was made into a motion picture and led to the author's being invited to Hollywood to write for the fast-developing 'talkies'.

According to Edward Rice,³² Ned Field wrote the screenplay for RKO's 1933 film, Little Women which starred Katherine Hepburn, but the records credit the adaptation of Louisa May Alcott's novel to Sarah Y. Mason and Victor Heerman, who each won Academy Awards for the result. George Cukor was also nominated for his direction. The picture was re-made in 1949 by MGM with June Allyson, and with the adaptation by Sarah Y. Mason, this time with Andrew Holt, but once again without the original's success.

This tenuous connection with two modern playwrights is yet another Stevensonian irony in his relation to theatre but it is an appropriate note with which to introduce consideration of his work in adaptation for the performing media.

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

STAGE SEVEN
Adaptations

'What was the best yesterday, is still the best
in this changed theatre of a tomorrow.'

Lay Morals
Chatto and Windus, 1915, p12.

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

STAGE SEVEN

Section A

'Second Childishness'

The Pinero lecture at Edinburgh did much to explain why the plays failed but made little of the fact that Stevenson saw none of them performed and not till its conclusion did it acknowledge that this could be the single most important factor in Stevenson's not being 'acclaimed among the masters of the modern stage'. Plays have to be seen and not read and it also helps when they have been well cast and produced on stage with some skill. Writers who become playwrights quickly learn that while they may begin as the 'be all' in terms of original creativity they are by no means the 'end all' in the complicated process that brings their page alive on the stage. This is why they accept that their plays are only blueprints towards the finished design. They are not the design itself. The evolution of the play from an idea to a theatrical concept and then to a realised product set before an audience is an involved, multi-collaborative process that requires many hands if light work is to be made of it.

Irving's organisation at the Lyceum, and to a lesser extent, Tree's at Her Majesty's, is evidence of this. Each presented the public face but was supported by a body of theatre craftsmen that saw the ideas through every practical stage from pre-production accounts to box-office takings. Victorian theatre had become a business undertaking and had to be run on business lines. The busker had long left the fairground, the stroller travelled by steam train and the vagabond strutted in silk top hat and frock coat. Although their eye was still on the main chance, this was viewed distantly, but no less acutely, through a monocle. The search was always for writers, and the actor-managers would have seized on Stevenson had he elected to remain in London. He would have learned that the play is not finished once the manuscript leaves his hands. On the contrary, it has only begun. The producer or director, the designer, the lighting and sound technicians, not to mention the actor - and friends - have yet to contribute their parts and the finished whole is no better than the sum of these parts. A play is a play only when it is acted out before an audience.

Stevenson never saw this. Had he been aware of it he would surely have written accordingly. He would have given the performers the benefit of his best lines, let them develop his interesting character detail and give the director the full sweep of his good story invention. He would have left room for improvisation and allowed the producer the directorial stamp Tree had asked for in Beau Austin but was refused (by Henley no doubt). As it is, it was only in Macaire (not discussed in the Pinero lecture) that he began to add the stage direction 'business' in the dialogue. So it may be said that he was learning. Had he gone on doing so, he would have written a good play, for he had grown into a good time for theatre in Britain and ought to have profited by the new drama happening all around him.

Towards the end of the century, theatre was rich in talent of every kind, a marked contrast to its paucity in mid-century and its superficiality in the pre-Victorian decades. This fin-de-siecle wealth included actors already mentioned like Irving, Tree, Phelps, Bancroft, added to which were now the emerging actor-managers like Sir John Hare (1844-1921), Sir Charles Wyndham (1837-191) and Sir George Alexander (1858-1918) who owned the theatres they ran and virtually owned the company of men and women who serviced these theatres. Alexander at the St James Theatre had followed Tree's lead in seeking to find new English writers and it was he who gave the first theatrical opportunity to Oscar Wilde, whose quatrain of comedies marked him out as a superb playwright.

This output, however, was the result of hard application under Alexander's practical tutelage and of course, was achieved with the extra spark that was the genius of Wilde as a writer. This might have been the same for Stevenson had he not been burdened by Henley. Theatrically speaking, the well-intentioned Henley could now be seen as being no more than a fussing midwife at a still birth rather than the natural parent of a healthy off-spring. Stevenson, to continue the metaphor, had no relish for the labour involved. Now it would be done for him by foster-parents as it were. His own plays were soon set aside and the theatre professionals would move in from this time on to ransack his fiction for the stories that would allow them to write his plays for him, for they knew that the stories had already found their audience. It will be seen that, posthumously, Stevenson has been well served by adaptations of his work for the theatre.

Even in his lifetime, he was aware of the success Richard Mansfield had in the United States with Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Henry James, too, has been similarly justified dramatically by retrospective adaptations of his novels for the theatre but his direct exposure to the full theatrical impact of an audience on a play was, to say the least, salutary. It is worth recalling here if only for the parallels it has in Stevenson's case. James was of the same family of writer, although perhaps even more fastidious and ever at the mercy of his own digressions, in what he said in life as much as in his writing. Hugh Walpole (1884-1941) found him strict about the rules of artistic arrangement and deplored rather than appreciated Bernard Shaw because, according to James, plays like Getting Married were 'practically formless.' James had a similar dislike of Wilde's Importance of Being Earnest in 1895.

Stevenson had been dead for just over a year when James's first play, Guy Domville was presented by (Sir) George Alexander (1858-1918) at the St. James's Theatre on 5 January of that year. Alexander consistently encouraged English writers from the time he entered into management in 1889 and constantly sought new plays from established names. Henry James was a case in point. James was only too delighted to have been asked. He had already written a novel, The Tragic Muse, which showed his feeling for the theatre; he had dramatised his own book The American for the stage and the Compton Company had given it 76 performances at the Opera Comique but to be presented by George Alexander at the St James's was both a compliment and an accolade. Unfortunately, Guy Domville had been subject to so many cuts and revisions and suffered from some miscasting (not the least being Alexander himself in the name-part) that James could not recognise it as his work. It had taken him almost a year to write, but now he confided to his friend, the actress, Elizabeth Robins, (who was to speak the Prologue to Admiral Guinea at the Avenue Theatre in 1897) that it seemed to him that his carefully-considered play had been taken apart by the professionals in weeks. Latterly, he could not even bear to look and asked a friend, and fellow-Stevensonian, Edmund Gosse to take his place in the stalls at the first night. He himself went to see The Ideal Husband by Oscar Wilde, ('A new and original play about modern life') which had opened the night before at the Haymarket Theatre.

James was not impressed and thought the thing 'crude, so bad, so clumsy, feeble, and vulgar' yet he heard the delighted applause it drew. He had worked so hard and so long on his own play and thought it good enough but if a bad play like Wilde's could succeed then what chance has quality in such a rowdy market-place? (Shades of Henley and Stevenson?) James returned to the St. James's to be greeted by cries of 'Author!' and in a daze was led forward on to the stage by Alexander. They were greeted by a savage booing from pit and gallery which utterly dumfounded the poor writer. Not since Covent Garden's reaction to Charles Lamb's farce Mr H in 1806 had there been such a show of total hostility to a piece. H.G.Wells had been drama critic for the Pall Mall magazine for just three days when he reviewed the play:

'It was an extremely weak drama... wrapped about in elaborations of gesture and speech, James regarded his fellow-creatures with a face of distress and a remote effort at intercourse... His life was unbelievably correct... He was an unspotted bachelor... He had experienced no tragedy and he shunned the hoarse laughter of comedy, and yet he was consumed by a gnawing hunger for dramatic success. In this performance, he had his first, and last, actual encounter with the theatre...'¹

This then, was the experience Stevenson never knew but which James never survived. He returned to the freedom of his own, careful, fastidious writing, having exorcised the demon theatre from the body of his work. He talked about 'the piously, simplified purposes of the English stage' and of 'the foul fiend, Excision' but the truth was he had found popular theatre brutal and vulgar. He suspected that there may have been some 'pre-determined mischief' but it was all too base and ugly and obscure to discuss.

Yet Clement Scott in the Daily Telegraph described the first act as 'one of the most beautiful human documents that has been committed to the care of the stage for some time'. William Archer in the World found the same act 'expertly ordered' and A.B.Walkley in the Star spoke of 'a defeat out of which it is possible for many victories to spring'.²

This is the Stevenson relevance. Like James, he was a man of letters who aspired to be a man of theatre but both were refined artists in words rather than theatre tradesman like Pinero and Jones who, in J.C. Trewin's words (had) 'the gift of building a play swiftly and stoutly for the theatre and making each hammer-stroke ring'.³

And George Bernard Shaw put it neatly in the Saturday Review:

'Mr. Alexander, having been treated little better than a tailor's dummy by Mr. Wilde, Mr. Pinero and Mr. Henry Arthur Jones successively, found himself treated as an artist by Henry James.'⁴

Stevenson would have understood. He was with James in not having the instinct to write for theatrical immediacy but with him too in possessing a high relish for words and their sound in the head and effect on the page. Henley would also have appreciated James's reaction in reading the proof-sheets of Ibsen's Little Eyolf -

'Is there absolutely no one in London with a theatre and a mind?'⁵ Neither James nor Stevenson understood 'the odious process of practical dramatic construction' and the latter would certainly echo the former's honest, self-revealing comment - 'I feel more and more that I may be made for the Drama... but am not made for the theatre.'⁶

Guy Domville lasted five weeks (longer than any Stevenson play) before being taken off and was replaced by a new work of Oscar Wilde's, The Importance of Being Earnest, with the results that made theatre history. Despite his disappointment, and again like Stevenson, James never quite lost his fascination for theatre and after his death other writers made plays from his work and gained the success so cruelly denied him in the theatre in his lifetime. The parallels to Stevenson are many and it was only a pity that the friendship, which grew warmer year by year, did not yield a greater mutual benefit in theatrical terms. Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson were first and foremost highly-stylised story-tellers as their readiness in modern adaptation shows, but Stevenson was also 'Tusitala' - a teller of tales. He was a good reader of his own work, as Coleridge was, and Dickens, and Dylan Thomas in recent times. James did not have this 'theatre voice'.

John Bailey (1864-1931) recounts:

'H.J. was complaining to us that Ellen Terry had asked him to write a play for her, and now that he had done so... she had refused it. My wife, desiring to placate, asked "Perhaps she did not think the part suited to her?" H.J. turned upon both of us... "Think? Think? How should the poor, toothless, chattering hag think?"'

Henry James would never realize that Ellen Terry, whatever her age and state, would never need to think about theatre. The instinct is either there or it is not. That it was in Stevenson is recognised now by the number of writers for the stage who found something congenial in Stevenson's writing. As a result, adaptations abounded and have now in fact become something of a minor industry.

So many of his tales read so easily that it looks the easiest of tasks to lift them from the book and place them on stage. This is not so. So finely crafted are some of the stories that to try and remove one element it is necessary to disentangle it from its delicate surrounding structure, often so subtle as not to be noticed at first reading. He had always been faintly praised as a prose stylist but in the later writing one is increasingly aware of how much of a word craftsman Stevenson became. His structure is soundly based and the superstructure of character and incident, economically balanced and taut. This is what makes the dialogue in his fiction so playable. It was written to be uttered and it has been left to others to do what he failed to do himself - that is, to put his own good lines into actors' mouths.

A good writer is always in fashion, no matter his critical evaluation from time to time. Stevenson was perhaps overrated in his lifetime and underrated since his death, but a balance has been found and his stock is rising by the decade. Good writing is timeless and it is good because it was well worked and well considered. If only his plays had been. In all arts there is a primal practicality which has to be recognised. Too many writers have failed to write successfully for the stage because they have remained in their studies and have not risked themselves and their work in the dust and sweat of the painted arena. The glare of the spotlight is not always the kindest light in which to see one's self. Stevenson is not the only putative dramatist to have stumbled here. The literary stage is littered with famous names who failed to come out from behind their closets - Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth, Browning etc. Byron had a little more success because he was very involved with the Committee of Drury Lane in 1815 and like Stevenson, he had strong dramatic promise even though it was not fully realised. Nevertheless, his plays were presented after the poet's death by Phelps at Sadler's Wells, Macready at the Theatre Royal and Irving at the Lyceum, so they must have had something actable in them. Similarly, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, owed much to Irving for splendid productions of verse-plays such as Becket (1893) which owed more to its mis-en-scene by Hawes Craven and his colleagues, not to mention Irving's skill as a stage-manager, than to any intrinsic worth it may have had as a play. Pointedly, it is rarely performed today.

More and more, one realizes in considering the time of Stevenson's dramatic writing, how well he might have been served by Irving and how well Irving might have done had he convinced Stevenson that there is more to a play than the writing of it. It has to be acted upon. That is dramatic art. It has to be written with actors in mind. And that is the art of the drama.

Good writing is not the immediate answer. It is not the easiest thing to amalgamate fine poetry and good theatre. T.S.Eliot (1888-1965) with verse-plays such as Murder In the Cathedral (1935), The Family Reunion (1939) The Cocktail Party (1949) The Confidential Clerk (1953) and The Elder Statesman (1958) has achieved a Tennysonian success in modern times as a poet/playwright. To a lesser extent, so too has Christopher Fry (b1907) whose The Lady's Not for Burning (1949) and Venus Observed (1950) were great popular successes, although it is now his Sleep of Prisoners (1951) which is most frequently revived. W.B.Yeats (1865-1939) in Ireland and John Masefield (1878-1967) in England were other poets who flirted with theatre but neither made the full commitment that was needed to win an audience. This is the essential requirement, and not only in poetic theatre, commitment; that the writer give his full energy, his total imaginative force and the entire extent of his talent to the building business that is making a play. It is a professional job of work as any other and must be approached as such. The playwright is poet, architect and bricklayer. A good dramatist writes in terms of living theatre practice. This need not mean that he becomes so practically concerned that he eschews all poetry in his lines. American playwright, Maxwell Anderson (1888-1959) with his plays What Price Glory (1924), and especially Winterset (1935) showed that modern plays may still have poetry and yet speak to modern audiences. His view was that without great poetry there can be no great drama.

As far as Stevenson is concerned, it has been left to others to give him a proxy fame in the theatre; to realize, literally, the playing possibilities in the wide field of his known fiction. It might be that Stevenson's largest contribution to the performing media was to leave a residue of core material for future generations to work on in terms of their particular contemporary discipline.

It may be said that this was his true theatrical posterity.

Richard Mansfield as Jekyll/Hyde in his 1887–88 stage adaptation of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Photo, Library of Congress.

ADAPTATIONS FOR THE THEATRE

One must give first place to the work that has most seized the imagination from a theatrical point of view and that is, without doubt, the grisly horror that was Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. From its first appearance in 1885 it has been interpreted and misinterpreted by critics and scholars alike and because of its extraordinary acting opportunities it was the first of the Stevenson stories to be dramatised in 1887.

'On May 7th came another Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, perpetrator unheralded in the paper on which I rely for material...

Richard Mansfield, (1854-1907), the most promising young actor then on our stage, came in (February 13th) for a week of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, the strain of which he relieved, on Saturday evening...

No engagement of Richard Mansfield could fail to arouse our interest. He began easily, on December 19th, with Monsieur, his company including Beatrice Cameron, John Parry, Josephine Laurens (a trained actress who always bored me) Helen Glidden, Anne O'Neill, J.T. Sullivan, D.H. Harkins, J.B. Eversham and Harry Gwynette. Stronger fare came during the holiday week beginning on December 26th, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, which sent us out of the theatre afraid to go home in the dark. This terrifying play continued through January 11th, and, for the 12th, 13th and 14th, the gifted actor reverted to his other melodramatic specialty, A Parisian Romance. So he went his way...'⁸

Richard Mansfield (1854-1907) was the son of a prima donna and a London wine merchant. He was born in Berlin and educated in England but is regarded as one of the first American actors of stature. He first went to New York in 1882 and appeared at the Standard Theatre but it was at the Union Square Theatre he made his first success in A Parisian Romance which made his name. He wrote his own play Monsieur in 1887 and among his other outstanding parts were M. Beaucaire, Beau Brummel, Cyrano de Bergerac, Nero and Napoleon. He gave the first performance in English of Ibsen's Peer Gynt during his last season, 1906-07 but it was in the dual role in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde that he is remembered best.

The adapter, Thomas Russell Sullivan, was a writer of short stories and a professional adapter of novels for the stage and was employed by Mansfield to adapt Jekyll and Hyde. Now Sullivan greatly admired Stevenson and was nervous about the famous author's reaction so he made the trip to Newport to meet Stevenson in order to obtain the performance rights for the Mansfield production. Sullivan wrote about that meeting:

'I was taken to his chamber where he lay in bed, reading and smoking cigarettes. It seemed to me I had never seen so strange a figure. He was not only very thin and very pale, but had an uncanny look in his bead-like eyes; and his long brown hair hung about his face like strings... Our interview lasted, perhaps, a quarter of an hour, and I went away strongly impressed by his friendliness, his unaffected modesty, his wit, and his very marked individuality. But the lean, blanketed figure haunted me, and I felt he must be on the brink of the grave... (He) was too ill to go to the first performance but the box I sent him was occupied by his family, who gave me hearty congratulations. The play proved to be a financial triumph, making an enormous success in all the cities... (but) an old stager, Daniel Bandmann, early in 1888, brought out his own pretentiously absurd version (which) I saw at Niblo's. The play had no merit whatever and was coldly received by a very thin house...'

Nevertheless, Mansfield was sufficiently worried by this intrusion into his field that he despatched Sullivan to Saranac to meet Stevenson again and have him assign to Masfield sole rights in the 'authorised version'. He also gave Sullivan a remittance on account against future royalties as 'an earnest of good faith'. Sullivan continues:

'I arrived early one gray March morning... Mrs. Stevenson welcomed me warmly, "But I hope you haven't a cold... Louis never sees anyone who has a cold. His mother has been three days in quarantine." I was shown to Stevenson's chamber. He was sitting up in bed, smoking cigarettes... and at work..."I never write long at a time,"... "and when I stop work, I amuse myself with this," - pointing to a flageolet which lay on the bed beside him. I told him why I came. "Yes, I have heard from Bandmann... what's his play like?" I described it in detail and he laughed heartily. "Mrs. Stevenson liked yours you know." "Well then," I said, "Perhaps you'd like to hear it?"... "Of course... and the sooner the better." I then sat down at the bedside and read the play... which lasted nearly two hours. He listened most attentively... interrupting me but once... at the end of the third act... the transformation scene... much the strongest thing in the whole play. The scene is described in the story and my work upon it had consisted in extending the very brief dialogue, and in turning the narrative into action. "Good!" said Stevenson, "You have done precisely what that scene needed for stage effect. It is very strong." I went on... telling him frsnkly (at the end) that I had never in my life found anything more trying. He laughed..."Let's go to luncheon." We sat a long time over the meal... discussing stage effects a propos of the Jekyll and Hyde and of a dramatic effect of his own called The Hanging Judge which had been sent me to read... (He insisted) that there was fine material for a play in the life of Marcus Aurelius - also in that of George III... We talked of Dumas... Scott and Thackeray and Dickens... I asked about his own way of working. "Four hours a day are enough... One ought never to write after drinking, and it is better, I believe, to write without smoking - but I can't..." He broke off abruptly and went to his room... and presently we heard his flageolet...'

The sole rights were duly assigned to Mansfield.*

The play first saw the light in Boston on 9 May 1887 and was an undoubted hit from the start. Sullivan wrote to Stevenson giving him a full report at the time. Mansfield made the role (or roles) from that first Boston performance to its triumph in New York at the Madison Square Theatre on 10 September in the same year.

The New York Critic reported on 17 September:

'The cash receipts on the opening night of "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" were almost unprecedented in the history of first nights at the Madison Square. Yet the impression still prevails that literature and stage-literature have nothing in common.'

Notwithstanding, this was the only Stevenson-based stage enterprise which had any real success or from which Stevenson made any money. Whether this was due to the power of the original story, the skill of the adapter, Sullivan, or the magnetism of Mansfield, it can never be known but Clayton Hamilton had no doubts.

'Sullivan's dramatisation has stood almost alone as an example of what may be done with the Stevenson stories on the stage; and this play derived its public popularity less from the inherent interest of the subject matter than from the very remarkable acting of the late Richard Mansfield. Mr. Mansfield, who was accustomed to consider very highly his own performance of Beau Brummell and to speak with an entirely becoming pride of his best achievements on the stage, told the present writer, not once but many times, that his performance of Jekyll and Hyde was little more than a matter of theatric mechanism, and expressed surprise at the continued favour of the public for the play. "It's nothing but clap-trap," said Mr. Mansfield, "yet they seem to like it as much as Richard III, in which I give a performance that is worth considering."¹⁰

The American Stage reported in its 'Gossip about Plays and Actors':

"I am glad you have come in just at this moment," said Richard Mansfield to a reporter, "for I can show you something that has amused me very much. Here is a copy of the St Louis Republican of last Sunday which has about three columns concerning the trickery I am supposed to employ in making the change from 'Hyde' to 'Jekyll'. A reporter of that paper claims to have gone on the stage disguised as a super, and never to have taken his eyes off me while I was on the scene... what wonderful eyes his must be!

* Ferguson notes in the Baxter Letters (p183) that Margaret Stevenson's Diary for 1888 mentions that - "On April 2nd, Mr Bandmann, an Austrian actor who has brought out a new play of Jekyll and Hyde, comes all the way from New York to try and get Louis to accept some money from him, but as Louis has already authorised the other edition he does not see his way to do so."

They are capable of presenting material images of his most extraordinary fancies... He solemnly declares that I wear a thin rubber mask with holes cut for the eyes and mouth, and that he watched me pull it off when I passed my hands before my face while making the change. Not content with this assertion, he gives the readers a drawing of the mask. He goes on to say that I have a trick wig with a string attached to my collar-button, and that when I break that the wild locks of 'Hyde' instantly arrange themselves into the smooth coiffure of 'Jekyll'. Then too, he has marvellous things to tell about my use of powders while on the stage, and of the employment of calcium lights through green mediums which give my face a ghastly hue. Now, of course, all this is the most arrant nonsense. I do not employ any mechanical aids in making the change... I have no mask, no trick wig, or phosphorous paste, the last being another device attributed to me. "Have you at all changed your conception of 'Jekyll' since the first night?" No. There may be some nuances here and there but nothing material. I understand what you mean. You think my 'Jekyll' is not that of the book, and you would ask if I have come nearer to the original. I frankly admit that my Jekyll is not Stevenson's.'

A comment on this very point was made by William Rideing of the New York Critic who had seen the performance earlier run and described Mansfield in the play as:

'A lachrymose, long-visaged, strutting young gentleman, apparently not more than twenty-five, clean-shaven, raven-haired, sombre as Hamlet - a cross between Eugene Aram and Edgar Allan Poe - who dresses in black diagonals, loops his arms in front of him and moves by a series of Irvingesque dislocations; a coleporteur, a college tutor, an elocutionist, a tragedian out of employment - anything but the substantial, prosperous Dr. Jekyll we were first acquainted with.'

The Mansfield interview continues:

'It was after eight months of serious thought and study that I arrived at my conception, and I have no reason to doubt that it is the right one for dramatic purposes. The 'Jekyll' of the book is a hearty, jovial, middle-aged, unromantic person. Were he to be so presented before our eyes on the stage he would not satisfy the idea of a man whose studies were in so occult a direction. Besides, is it not probable that a good man as Jekyll was and must be in the play to obtain force of contrast, would have shown continually in his look and bearing remorse for the ascendancy the power of evil was gradually gaining over him, and for the crimes he committed as 'Hyde'? Were I to have shown him after the murder as a genial, jovial person, I believe the audience would have laughed at him and me. Moreover, I had to introduce a love interest, and for that alone I must make 'Jekyll' somewhat interesting and romantic." "Do you find the dual part a very hard-working one?"

Yes. To keep up the nervous intensity of 'Hyde' is a great strain. Not only have I to contort my features, body and limbs, but every part of me must be kept trembling with excitement. If I relax in the least, my hold upon the audience is gone.

"Was it your idea to play the part or did a dramatist bring you the piece?" It was my own notion. I mapped out a scenario and gave it to Mr. Sullivan, who wrote the play.'

The New York World reported on 31 December 1887:

'A physician who went to see Mansfield in "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," the other night, was astonished at Mr. Mansfield's wit, but professed himself unable to understand how the actor managed to keep up his stertorous breathing as Mr. Hyde. Said he: "It is a well-known fact that continued stertorous breathing generally produces anaesthesia. A patient who has breathed very heavily for some three minutes generally becomes unconscious. Yet Mr. Mansfield is certainly "all there". The play is drawing crowded houses.'

Not all American critics were so impressed by the Mansfield performance. Some had much preferred Edward Henley's performance as Deacon Brodie. Stevenson himself had his reservations about the actor's interpretation of Hyde as a sex fiend. In replying to a letter from John Paul Bockock, then editor of the New York Sun, he commented:

'You are right as to Mansfield: Hyde was the younger of the two. He was not... Great Gods! a mere voluptuary. There is no harm in a voluptuary; and none, with my hand on my heart and in the sight of God, none, no harm whatever in what prurient fools call 'immorality'. The harm was in Jekyll because he was a hypocrite - not because he was fond of women; he says so himself, but people are so filled full of folly and inverted lust, that they can think of nothing but sexuality.'

The actor, on his own admission, saw Hyde as -

'a manifestation of Jekyll's lust (who) "unable by reason of his hideous shape to indulge the dreams of his hideous imagination" proceeds to satisfy his cravings in violence.'¹²

The morality of the novel lies at the centre of the Victorian world which is why the setting is London and not Edinburgh. The topography of the book, however, can only be Edinburgh and is a study in symbolic location. The house itself is both a shelter and a screen and a physical manifestation of the contrast between interior and exterior. The actor knows by his very profession, the maintenance of the outside 'hide' protecting the personal other-self beneath. This is the self he is always 'seeking' in performance - hence the 'hide and seek' implicit in the theatre's actor-audience exchange. It is a kind of 'child's play' as Stevenson himself would know. G.K. Chesterton recognised that

'The real stab of the story is not in the discovery that the one man is two men but in the discovery that the two men are one man...'¹³

This is the histrionic appeal to actors and managers and why it fascinated the bravura actor and those unafraid of 'show'. They knew it would also draw the public. Stevenson found it impossible to stem the sexual connotations in Hyde and these have persisted ever since in whatever media the story has been presented and via whatever actor. Professor Saposnik describes Hyde as:

'a metaphor of uncontrolled appetites, an amoral abstraction driven by a compelling will unrestrained by a moral halter.'¹⁴

He and the respectable Jekyll are inextricably joined. One cannot function without the other. What an opportunity for the actor. Mansfield brought the play to England and presented it at Irving's Lyceum Theatre (4 August 1888) and while it was not the sensation it was in America, it found its audience. There is a story told that, dining with Sir Henry Irving in the famous Beefsteak Club at the rear of the Lyceum stage after one performance, Mansfield complained of the strain it was in playing the dual role.

'It is unendurable,' said the American.

'If it's so bad, why do it?' said Irving.

Professor George B. Bryan suggested, rather playfully one feels, in a letter to the present writer, that Mansfield, while in London became so obsessed with the character of Edward Hyde that he became possessed by it and was suspected by some of being Jack the Ripper, whose slaying of prostitutes was current at the time. Or was it that Jack the Ripper read his R.L.S.? That is as may be, but Clayton Hamilton contends that the play died with Mansfield's own death in 1907 despite a version by Luella Forepaugh and G.F.Fish in 1897. Its continuous vitality for so many years was, according to Hamilton, due more to Mansfield than to Sullivan or Stevenson. It is true that the adaptation was less performed on stage but Nelson Compston wrote a four-act version for the American theatre in 1910. The surprise is that so few leading actors have tried it and it is only in recent years that new adaptations have been attempted. Mansfield had made his mark.

The next notable stage presentation in the context of this survey however, was in fact this given by Henry Irving's elder son. How often the name of Irving has inserted itself one way or another into the story of Stevenson, the dramatist. Now it was his son who enters in a part his father might have revelled in.

[illegible]

MISS DOROTHEA BAIRD and MR. H. B. IRVING

H. B. Irving and Dorothea Baird as Dr. and Mrs. Henry Jekyll in the Queen's Theatre production of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, London, 1910. Photo, BBC Hulton Picture Library.

Henry Broadribb Irving (1870-1919), or 'H.B.' as he was called, (he was later to make a splendid Robert Macaire, but not Stevenson's) had his famous father's fondness for psychological melodrama and thought that he had found such a vehicle in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. He remembered Mansfield's success at the Lyceum and thought he might restore his own managerial fortunes at the Queen's emulating the American actor's success with a London audience. He therefore presented himself and his beautiful wife, Dorothea Baird (1875-1933), famous for her Trilby with Tree in 1895, in an adaptation of the story by Joseph Comyns Carr on 29 January 1910. Comyns Carr was a barrister turned playwright who was also a noted wit about town. His adaptation of the Stevenson story obtained a decent run of four months in the West End but the younger Irving's version however was not Richard Mansfield's. Irving was particularly explicit about this and wrote his own raison d'être for the interpretation, which Austin Brereton published in his biography of the actor in 1922:

'I saw that, of the two natures which contended in the field of my consciousness, even if I could rightly be said to be either, it was only because I was radically both... I learned to dwell with pleasure, as a beloved daydream, on the thought of the separation of these elements. If each could be housed in separate identities, life would be relieved of all that was unbearable... I not only recognised my natural body for the mere aura and effulgence of certain of the powers that made up my spirit, but managed to compound a drug by which these powers should be dethroned from their supremacy, and a second form and countenance substituted, nonetheless natural to me because they were the expression and bore the stamp of lower elements in my soul.'¹⁵

Austin Brereton, in the biography, tells us something of the contemporary reaction to H.B. as Jekyll and Hyde:

'The Doctor Jekyll of the Novelist is "a large, well-made, smooth-faced man of fifty, something of a sly cast perhaps, but with every mark of capacity and kindness". The Jekyll of H.B. Irving was pale, aesthetic, refined, the essence of gentility. From the first he bore the look of intense suffering. As the play progressed this expression... became almost unbearable to the spectator. It was infinitely pathetic... the soul of a good man longing, entreating for mercy.'¹⁶

The Irvings toured with the production as part of their repertoire in their very successful tours of England, America and Australia but they never again repeated the performance in London. This is hard to understand given its proved success with audiences elsewhere.

The subsequent fading of the piece from the public stage coincided with its rise as a screenplay from the very earliest days of the cinema. This aspect will be dealt with in detail in the appropriate later sections of this Stage but at this point it has to be acknowledged that the kind of melodramatic theatre as represented by Jekyll and Hyde fell out of fashion by the time of the First World War in 1914. By its end, the cinema had taken hold. There was, however, a revival of the Comyns Carr/Irving adaptation by William Senior at the Savoy Theatre on 14 July 1931 with Arthur Philips as Jekyll/Hyde and with special music by Philip Cathie. The production ran for a creditable forty-six performances.

Since that time, Richard Abbot produced another American Jekyll and Hyde in 1941 and Sullivan's version was revised by Anna Bird Stewart for a New York Production. She also wrote a one-act play The Jekyll and Hyde Women in April 1943 for Martha Mansfield who had appeared in the 1920 film version. All these were American productions and it was not until the Birmingham Repertory production in 1956 that Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde returned to their native shores so to speak in an adaptation by Lance Sieveking.

He had produced the first play in the world to be televised from Alexandra Palace before the Second World War and became famous for his later work on radio. Indeed it was a radio version of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde earlier in that year which had prompted Sir Barry Jackson, the founder and Governor-Director of Birmingham Repertory, to invite Sieveking to further adapt his radio script for the stage. The result was a play in three acts with three scenes in each. Bernard Hepton directed the piece in settings designed by Paul Shelving. Kenneth Mackintosh played the eponymous roles and many other characters were added but the production is now only notable for the fact that one of these new characters, Police Inspector Newcomen, was played by the young Albert Finney.

There is no record of any further professional adaptation or performance until 1974 when a solo version of the story was written by Arthur Scholey, but this remains unperformed to date. One has the feeling that Richard Mansfield may have relished this theatrical form and would have made an astounding tour-de-force given such a solo opportunity. After all, if the theme is two men in one then the one man show would appear to be a natural dramatic solution.

Arthur Phillips as Hyde in the Savoy Theatre production of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, London, 1931. Photo, BBC Hulton Picture Library.

Group scene from the Savoy production. Photo, BBC Hulton Picture Library.

Arthur Scholey, in his introduction to his solo play on Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, says:

'Stevenson's original story is told in two narratives by two characters. This structure provides an element of mystery and the framework is the last hour of Jekyll. Throughout the play he is under the influence of the crystals. The words are Stevenson's or develop out of them.'¹⁷

Yet the playwright posits a view in his script that is not Stevenson's. He has Jekyll say to Hastie Lanyon:

'I was in no sense a hypocrite: both sides of me were in dead earnest. And it chanced that the direction of my scientific studies, upon which you and others frowned so much, which tend wholly towards the mystic and the transcendental, reacted and shed a strong light on this perennial war within. With every day I drew steadily to that truth by whose partial discovery I have been doomed to such a dreadful shipwreck, the truth that that man is not truly one... but two.'¹⁸

This would appear to contradict Stevenson himself (and Chesterton) but Mr Scholey has his own consistent view and that is, that in the end, Jekyll becomes Hyde which in a sense corroborates Stevenson's original theme and is consistent too, with Vladimir Nabokov's theme as propounded in his Cornell Lecture on Jekyll and Hyde where he states that a part of one is always in the other only to a greater or less degree.

Nearer to the present day, Scottish playwright, Donald Campbell, prepared a very free version for Dundee Repertory in February, 1985, directed by Lorne Boswell. In the theatre programme, Campbell quotes:

'To write a story on the subject of that strong sense of man's double being which must at times come in and overwhelm the mind of every thinking creature.'¹⁹

Campbell returned to what he claims was Stevenson's original intention which was not to have Jekyll and Hyde played by the same actor despite the inherent theatrical possibilities in such 'theatric mechanics', as Mansfield called them. David Edgar, in his adaptation for the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Barbican in 1991, elected to have two actors in the parts of Jekyll and Hyde in the production by Peter Wood.

Stevenson was very clear about what he had presented:

'The soul demands that we should 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... The soul demands unity of purpose...'²⁰

And in the text of the novel itself:

'Even as good shone upon the countenance of the one, evil was written broadly and plainly on the face of the other. Evil besides (which I must still believe to be the lethal side of man) had left on that body an imprint of deformity and decay. And yet when I looked upon that ugly idol in the glass, I was conscious of no repugnance, rather of a leap of welcome. This, too, was myself.'

This would appear to be the last word on the matter and uttered with the voice of the ultimate authority. Lloyd Osbourne remembers that voice:

'I listened to it spellbound. Stevenson, who had a voice the greatest actor might have envied, read it with an intensity that made shivers run up and down my spine. When he came to the end, gazing at us in triumphant expectancy... he waited, as I waited for my mother's outburst of enthusiasm - I was thunderstruck at her backwardness... the words seemed to come with difficulty; then all at once she broke out... He had missed the point, she said, had missed the allegory; had made it merely a story - a magnificent bit of sensationalism - when it should have been a masterpiece... "You are right!" he said... (and) threw the manuscript in the fire...'

A dramatic gesture fit to end this consideration of Jekyll and Hyde but this first reading in the sitting-room at Skerryvore in 1885 could be said to have been the virtual first performance. Could anything have been more theatrical than the author's own reading as described? Even given all the resources of the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Barbican in 1991 or the ingenuity of the Empty Space Theatre at the Lyric, Hammersmith, in the same year, these fine companies lacked one vital ingredient - the man himself. The actor Stevenson who was both Jekyll and Hyde - 'the fellow who was two fellows' as he had said to Gosse.

Robin Brooks had adapted the tale for the Empty Space Theatre Company and their 1991 production was performed at the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre in October and November 1993, directed by Jon Pope and featuring Sandy Welch and Martin McCardie as Jekyll and Hyde. This Glasgow production featured actresses rather than actors in the parts of Lanyon and Utterson, giving an unexpected feminist thrust to what had been a very male preserve. Thus, it could be said that Stevenson's Victorian 'shilling shocker' is brought topically up to date.

Stevenson on the Stage

"TREASURE ISLAND," ACT I. PEW AND THE PIRATES OF FLINT'S OLD SHIP

Stevenson on the Stage

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON'S GRIM SUICIDE STORY, "THE HAMPTON CLUB," AT THE COLISEUM

This scene shows Forbes (Mr. Seymour Hicks, on the extreme right), when he has heard the decision of the club that he must commit suicide. The President (Mr. William Lugg) is standing next to Forbes. Mr. Hicks's brother is the figure with the tall hat. Picture by Foulsham and Banfield.

TREASURE ISLAND

Clayton Hamilton, opens his article Stevenson on the Stage (in New York):

'The recent great success of Treasure Island at the Punch and Judy Theatre, has made many people wonder why so few of the buoyant and bracing tales of R.L.S. have been transferred to the service of the stage, and has attracted the immediate attention of literary students to the entire subject of Stevenson's relations with the theatre.'

After dealing with a brief history of the Bournemouth plays, and merely mentioning The Hanging Judge as being worth neither the printing nor the perusal, he recapitulates the kernel of Pinero's lecture, and then goes on to quote Graham Balfour's erroneous comment that Stevenson had never visited a professional theatre before he was twenty-four years old. Hamilton continues:

'In view of these facts, it seems only fair that Henley, more than Stevenson, should be called to account for the manifest anachronism of their plays; for Henley was a magazine editor, and ought presumably to have kept himself in touch with the fashions of the theatre of his day... At any rate, the one thing which the two collaborators never understood was the fact that the technique of the theatre had advanced beyond remembrance of the period of those transpontine melodramatists that they so blithely imitated.'

This merely repeats Pinero. J.J.Buckley's point ought to be borne in mind that the two writers, while playing within a simplistic Skeltian format, had nonetheless as their avowed purpose - 'to recreate the Romantic Drama in terms of prose'. And they were more than capable of doing so. Hamilton, however, is convinced that Stevenson needed another kind of collaborator -

'not a man of letters like Henley, but a man of theatre, like (for instance) Mr. Henry Arthur Jones... He (Stevenson) needed a professional assistant to translate into terms of theatrical talent the keen dramatic talent he was born with. A collaboration of this type has at last been accorded to him, through the enterprise of Mr. Charles Hopkins, the director of the Punch and Judy Theatre. Treasure Island has been dramatised by Mr. Jules Ekhardt Goodman - a playwright whose sound theatrical talent has been developed to efficiency by hard study and by long practice. Mr Goodman has so successfully transferred the rapture and the thrill of Treasure Island to the stage that the delighted spectator comes away from the performance with a feeling that can only be expressed by quoting Andrew Lang's ejaculation - (to the original book) "This is the kind of stuff a fellow wants!"'

Fellows like Mr Gladstone who read it overnight from cover to cover.

Mr Hamilton then goes on to discuss in some detail the various technical difficulties in adapting the novel for the stage, naming three obstacles that attended the Stevenson originals:

- 1) The absence of women from the story (recognising that the public cares more for actresses than actors) but the play succeeds so well without a heroine that 'a necessary inference is forced that love is not, by any means, the only subject that can capture the attention of the theatre-going crowd'.
- 2) The necessity of shifting the action rapidly from place. 'Mr Goodman has (so) arranged the narrative in 10 chapters of time and 9 pigeon-holes of places (that) the spectator is never released from the enthrallment of the story.'
- 3) The particular requirement, in the case of a story known and loved... of clinging close to the original material and inventing nothing new.

Hamilton comments:

'Mr. Goodman's success is perhaps even more remarkable in respect to the third difficulty... He has made a coherent play without inventing anything that was not set down for him... in the novel; and he has not left out anything that even Andrew Lang would miss. The great bother about dramatising books for boys is that every boy in the audience will at once become a critic... The writer may perhaps be pardoned for pointing out that, though Stevenson's Hispaniola was a schooner, the ship disclosed upon the stage of the Punch and Judy Theatre is not a schooner but a square-rigged vessel. This variation is, however, easily forgivable; for Stevenson himself confessed that the Hispaniola ought really to have been a brig and that the only reason he had made her a schooner was that (in August 1874) he had cruised for a month on a schooner.'²³

This production ran for 205 performances in 1915 and proved early that Treasure Island as well as being one of Stevenson's most popular books, is also the most durable of the various stage adaptations. His own feelings about the book had been direct enough:

'If this don't fetch the kids, why, they've gone rotten since my day.'²⁴

It is difficult to realize that, given its immediate appeal to readers in every generation, it was not a success when it first appeared by instalments (commencing October 1881) in Young Folks, one of the better boy's weeklies. James Henderson, its editor, had been introduced to it by Dr. Alexander Japp who had heard Stevenson read the first chapters at Braemar. It ran in the magazine, in narrow columns of close type, for four months under the pseudonym 'Captain George North' which Stevenson used as an added assist to nautical authenticity.

He wrote to Henley:

'I am on another lay for the moment, purely owing to Lloyd, this one; but I believe there's more coin in it than in any amount of crawlers; now, see here, The Sea Cook, or Treasure Island; a Story for Boys.'²⁵

As a matter of fact, he accepted 50 shillings for each page of 4,500 words giving him £34-7-6 rather than the £50 he had hoped for.

'As a serial, it was a failure,' said one of the magazine's staff.

It might have been left at that but two years later, Henley persuaded Cassell and Company to take it up, or rather, he told them to.

According to Sir Newman Flower -

'Henley entered the room of the chief editor of Cassell and Company, (he was then working in the educational department of the firm) and threw the cuttings of The Sea Cook... on his desk and exclaimed in his usual, abrupt manner: "There's a book for you!" Then he walked out and climbed to his own office again.'²⁶

The book was an immediate success from its first publication

(14 November 1883). It was the day after his thirty-third birthday.

He wrote to his parents:

'A hundred pounds alive O! A hundred, jingling, tingling, golden, minted quid... it does look as if I should support myself without trouble in the future. If I have only health, I can, thank God. It is dreadful to be a great big man, and not be able to buy bread.'²⁷

And the 'great big man' dedicated his book to a boy:

'To S(amuel) L.O. - an American gentleman, in Accordance with Whose Classic Taste the Following Narrative Has Been Designed. It Is Now in Return for Numerous delightful Hours, And With the kindest Wishes, Dedicated, by His Affectionate Friend, the Author.'²⁸

Treasure Island has become a classic, as Henry James predicted, transcending time and as widely-read as ever but to almost as great an extent it has also become a recognised theatre piece in its own right.

The first British adapter was an Irishman, James Bernard Fagan (1873-1933), the Ulster-born playwright and producer. He had begun his career with Benson and then with Tree at Her Majesty's, before taking over the management of first, the Court Theatre, London and then the Festival Theatre, Cambridge in 1929. He also produced for the Irish Players, but in 1922 he made an excellent adaptation of Treasure Island which was produced regularly over the Christmas period throughout the Twenties and Thirties and is still produced in theatres today.

34

An early production at the Strand Theatre featured Robert Lorraine (Kit in Admiral Guinea in 1897) as both Silver and Blind Pew. Malcolm Keen was content to play Silver alone in the 1933 production produced at the Comedy Theatre by Nigel Playfair. In 1945, Tony Quinn played it at the Granville Theatre. Harry Welchman, from musical comedy, was the Silver at the Whitehall Theatre in 1946 and again when it was repeated at the St. James's under the auspices of the British Theatre Group in association with the Arts Council of Great Britain. The play was produced by Reginald Long for a series of matinee performances in the Tree tradition. Robert Atkins, a formidable director himself, played Long John at the Fortune in 1948 and (Sir) Donald Wolfit no less took it over in the following Christmas season. This version was also mounted at Maud Carpenter's Liverpool Playhouse as a pantomime directed by Gerald Cross, with settings by Paul Mayo. Cyril Luckham was the Long John Silver. In 1950, a new version was presented at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, and in the same year, Finlay J. Macdonald, a Gaelic-speaking producer for the BBC in Scotland, wrote a version for the famous Scottish actor Duncan Macrae to appear as Silver at the now-defunct Falcon Theatre in Glasgow. Malcolm Morgan was next with an adaptation in 1954, although Kenneth L. Anderson had worked the same material for his Admiral Benbow, an adventure play for boys, in 1953.

However, the most influential production of Treasure Island was that done at the Mermaid Theatre at Puddle Dock, Blackfriars, in 1959 when (Lord) Bernard Miles, the founder-director of the theatre, wrote a version with his own wife, Josephine Wilson, in which Miles himself played Silver. The production was directed by Peter Coe (who also contributed dialogue) and settings were by Sean Kenny. A feature of this presentation was the use of sea-shanties arranged by A.L. Lloyd.

This Treasure Island was enormously successful and set the pattern for all subsequent productions over the next two decades. It was repeated in 1961 with John Woodvine as Long John and Spike Milligan as Ben Gunn in a new production directed by Colin Ellis. Sally Miles produced on several occasions in the earlier years, as did Josephine Wilson and some famous Silvers at the Mermaid included Barry Humphries (1967) and Percy Herbert (1969) but the event belonged to Bernard Miles and his family - and rightly so. The ghost of J.B. Fagan had at last been laid but the shade of Stevenson had an added lustre at the Mermaid.

Robert Robertson directed his own adaptation at the Dundee Repertory Theatre in 1985 when John Forgeham played John Silver. Robertson meant it as a Christmas Family Show reflecting its beginnings as a family entertainment at Kinnaird, near Pitlochry in 1881. The map that started it all was now less than a pretend island and more a whole world in itself. This was underlined by Frank Dunlop's choice of the play to be the centrepiece of the 1990 Edinburgh International Festival. In the programme, he notes:

'Treasure Island is not only a rollicking adventure story, it is also one of the great 19th Century novels. Stevenson had much in common with that other wonder of the 19th Century, Charles Dickens. They were both fascinated by the theatre and their work is full of character and scenes which transfer almost directly to the stage, being conceived in a most theatrical way. The novels themselves have a dramatic construction. The theatre of melodrama and comic excess was adored by audiences then, just as it had been in the Jacobean period, and is now in the work of writers like Joe Orton. In fact, during rehearsals, it was the work of Joe Orton that came most readily to mind in recreating Stevenson's scenes of bloodthirsty macabre mixed with dry comedy and farce.'

Hywel Bennett was the Silver on this occasion with Scottish comedian Jimmy Logan featured as Billy Bones and Walter Carr doubled the roles of Blind Pew and Ben Gunn. Dunlop, who directed his own adaptation, took the opportunity to add a strong Mexican, as opposed to Spanish, presence but this was in keeping with the design of the production by Nadine Baylis. All's fair in love and theatre effectiveness, and Mr Dunlop is a director who always knows his own mind. But was it Stevenson's?

Yet even more than the wraith of the quicksilver Stevenson, it is the bulky shade of John Silver alias William Henley that hangs over the theatrical Treasure Island. It is no accident that he dominates every production and attracts every kind of leading player. Beneath the greasepaint, however, still lies the thrusting image of Henley, the author's first friend, the book's first champion and the incarnation of stage role itself writ larger than life. If Silver is considered a character then so was Henley. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930) wrote:

'Surely John Silver, with his face the size of a ham, and his little gleaming eyes like crums of glass in the centre of it, is the king of all seafaring desperadoes. Observe how the strong effect is produced in his case, seldom by direct assertion on the part of the storyteller, but usually by comparison, innuendo, or indirect reference.'

Sir Arthur continues:

"The objectionable Billy Bones is haunted by the dread of 'a seafaring man with one leg.' Captain Flint, we are told... "was afraid of none, not he, only Silver - Silver that was that genteel..." John himself says,

"There was some that was feared of Pew, and some that feared of Flint; but Flint his own self was afeared of me. Feared he was and proud. They was the roughest crew afloat, was Flint's. The devil himself would have been feared to go to sea with them. Well, now, I tell you, I'm not a boasting man, and you seen yourself how easy I keep company; but when I was quartermaster, lambs wasn't the word for Flint's old buccaneers."

So, by a touch here and a hint there, there grows upon us the individuality of this smooth-tongued, ruthless, masterful, one-legged devil. He is not to us a creation of fiction, but an organic living reality with whom we have come into contact...'²⁹

Henley looms large out of such descriptions and if he is vital to Treasure Island in the guise of John Silver he is as much so to Stevenson as himself. This very special relationship during what we might call the Henley Years (1875-1887) was a subject of a play by Jonathan Smith for the 1989 Edinburgh Festival. This was directed by Anthony Seldon at the Canongate Hall for Masque Productions and featured Martin Swinchatt as Henley, Mark Crosse as Stevenson and Sally Spurring as Fanny Osbourne. In a letter to the present writer, the author explained:

'I had to do a lot of research on RLS/WEH before I could begin to write it, and then had to take dramatic liberties with the facts to make it work as a play... The BBC script was changed a fair bit before it was quite right for the stage.'

Nevertheless, as a play, this work is important as the first dramatic reconstruction of a dramatic partnership that cried out for dramatisation. Mr Smith is to be congratulated in bringing into histrionic focus a relationship that has been derided where it has not been misunderstood, and even worse, ignored by literary and theatrical historians even though the pairing was a of vital psychological importance to both parties.

The critic of the Scotsman, reviewing the piece at the Canongate Hall on 22 August 1989, said that the use of the contrast in scenes between London's soirees and Edinburgh's Old Royal Infirmary -

'intimately reveals Henley's spirited will to survive an agonising leg amputation and Stevenson's conciliatory but devious persona, striking like an elegant barracuda to Henley's blundering shark...'

Understandably, he went on, the play being from an English author, it has a pronounced Southern bias in favour of -

'An overwhelming Henley (that) bitter English poet who staked all on friendship, losing everything in the process, except his integrity.'

(In contrast to -)

'A Stevenson (whose) boyish enthusiasm and appetite for life combined with a hard-nosed awareness of where his true interests lie...'

'The play is brimming over with psychological insight, for Henley comes across as Mr. Hyde to Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll.'

No matter, Henley lives on in Silver and will as long as there is a Treasure Island.

At the time of writing, yet another stage production of the story is in progress at the Court Theatre in Christchurch, New Zealand. This 1992 version of the 1959 Bernard Miles Mermaid Theatre adaptation is directed by Elric Hooper with Stewart Devenie as Long John Silver.

In his programme notes, Mr Hooper quotes Lloyd Osbourne, who spoke of his stepfather's involvement:

"He shared enthusiastically in all my games - tin soldiers, marbles, chess, draughts... we were partners in my little printing press; he wrote verses and engraved blocks for the miniature books I printed and sold. He painted scenery for my toy theatre and we gave performances with my mother as the only audience." On one of these occasions... Stevenson had made the map of an island.'

Stevenson declared:

'It was elaborately and (I thought) beautifully coloured; the shape of it took my fancy beyond expression; it contained harbours that pleased me like sonnets; and with the unconsciousness of the predestined, I ticketed my performance, TREASURE ISLAND... The next thing I knew I had some papers before me and was writing out a list of chapters... It was to be a story for boys, no need for psychology or fine writing; and I had a boy at hand to be a touchstone...'

He wrote the whole book in two bursts of fifteen days each, 'my quickest piece of work'. As so often with artistic creativity, the sooner the better. And it is still his most popular work. Mr Hooper continues:

'There are regions of childhood romance that no amount of historical or sociological wisdom can wipe out. The pirates, red indians and space adventurers of our awakening imaginations are fixed with colours unfading even when, in later life, our moral and factual education had created more sordid and realistic pictures. Being illogical and human, we can preserve the two seemingly contradictory images side by side and both are true.'

* The original was lost by Young Folks comic paper when the story first appeared in serial form in October 1881. The paper's editor, James Henderson, changed the original title The Sea Cook to Treasure Island.

Mr Hooper goes on:

'Treasure Island (is) the ultimate source for most English-speaking people's images of romantic and piratical wickedness. These have been filtered through films, comics and posters as much as our reading. We return to them at the mere mention of the Spanish Main and buried treasure. For a time we all become children again, and a sense of freedom, adventure and joy possesses us. It is by such magic our imaginations survive...'

Better evidence could not be found for the continuing 'coinage' this famous story has in its dramatised form. Thus has Stevenson's 'island' been made to yield its second treasure - a horde of gleaming eyes in a darkened theatre. In pursuit of this lucrative audience, adapters have not always been scrupulous with regard to the original author's intentions. Hack work prevails because lesser writers are always quick to leech on to the work of greater and suck from them substance enough to create lesser, but sellable product. Critics work in much the same way. Stevenson himself made the point that everybody lives by selling something.

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and Treasure Island are the twin peaks of Stevenson adaptation for the performing media but that is not to say that many of his other titles have not been successfully transferred from page to stage. A.E.W.Mason (1865-1948), a failed actor turned successful dramatist, is recognised, with T.R.Sullivan, as being among the earliest adapters of quality. Sire de Maletroit's Door (1878) was translated theatrically as Blanche de Maletroit and performed in 1894. The only direct approaches to Stevenson himself were made by Gerald Gurney who sought to dramatise Prince Otto in 1888. R.L.S. added:

'(that it was) originally a tragedy (Semiraminis or 'Our Duke and Duchess' 1879) and, by my sooth, in blank verse. I still think that it has much that is very suitable to the boards.'³⁰

Gurney worked with T.B.Thalberg on the subsequent playscript and the result was presented at the Spa Concert Room, Harrogate, in 1888 and at York in 1900. It was also performed at the Theatre Royal, Glasgow.

In the stage article quoted previously above, Clayton Hamilton makes the following comment:

'It is a curious fact that the tales of Stevenson, were, for the most part, left untouched throughout the period of the eighteen-nineties when there was a popular and insistent demand for dramatised novels - the period when the indefatigable Mr. E.E.Rose used to dramatise three or four novels a year.'³¹

Hamilton then tries to explain why were so few of Stevenson's titles were adapted theatrically during his lifetime:

'The reason for this fact...may be twofold -

In the first place, Stevenson usually neglected the interest of love and excluded women rigourously (sic) from his most exciting situations; and, in the second place, he was accustomed to allow his narratives to wander very freely in both space and time and to depend for his effect on a frequent change of setting. How, for instance, could one dramatise The Wrecker (1892), which keeps the reader travelling over more than half the habitable globe?; and how could one dramatise Kidnapped (1886) which leads the reader to a world in which there are no women?'^{32*}

One solution was to move away from the recognised novels and short stories and look for a stage platform in the life of the author himself. All the colour and romance of any fiction are in the plain facts of his chequered life and any adapter has no less an authority than Stevenson himself for considering him as a dramatised biography:

'I like biography far better than fiction myself. You have your little handful of facts, little bits of a puzzle, and you sit and think, and fit 'em together this way and that, and get up and throw them down and say 'damn' and go out for a walk, and it's real soothing; and when it's done it gives an idea of finish to the writer that is very peaceful. Of course, it's not really so finished as quite a rotten novel; it always has and always must have the incurable illogicalities of his life about it.... still that's where the fun comes in.'³³

What 'fun' there is in the business of writing a stage play, from whatever source, must be a matter of individual temperament. Even so, it had become apparent to some between the wars that an important theatrical resource lay in the man Stevenson himself.

As the present-day Edinburgh Festival has indicated in its annual programme, theatrical solo biography had become a virtual staple of the one-person-show and R.L.S. provided ideal solo material but Robert Louis Stevenson as subject matter is a lot older than the Edinburgh Festival. It was thought that the American, Harriet Hinsdale, had been the first to dramatise this biographical aspect of Stevenson when she wrote her Robert Louis Stevenson in 1947 but there had been a play called Tusitala in England as early as 1933.

* Keith Dewhurst successfully adapted Kidnapped as a play for Bill Bryden to direct at the Royal Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh, in 1972. In 1955, Christina Orr used its sister-novel Catriona as a basis for her dramatisation entitled Witness in Danger presented by the Gateway Company at that year's Edinburgh Festival.

TUSITALA
(The Teller of Tales)

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

BY

LEONARD J HINES

and

FRANK KING

LONDON

Chatto & Windus
1934

In that year, Leonard J. Hines and Frank King devised their own original playscript based on the facts of Stevenson's life. Tusitala was presented at the Hull Repertory Theatre, on 27 March 1933 for a season. Notable in the cast was John Laurie, a redoubtable Scottish actor, who was to have a long and varied career and had come straight to Hull from playing Hamlet at Stratford-on Avon. An even younger James Mason, long before his film star fame, doubled the parts of Alan Stevenson and Lloyd Osbourne. The full cast was as follows:

Margaret Stevenson	Deirdre Doyle
Walter Ferrier	Wilson Barrett
Alison Cunningham	Gwen Sibley
Robert Louis Stevenson	John Laurie
Thomas Stevenson	Owen Reynolds
Dr. Roger Campbell	George Larchet
Landlord	William S. Blakeney
Simpson	Gerald Savory
Fanny Osbourne	Enid Sass
Palmer	Philip Easton
Isobel Osbourne	Rosamond Burne
Robert Alan Mowbray Stevenson	James Mason
M. Berthelini	Leslie Kyle
Mme. Barthelini	Joan Kingdon
Marlin	Wilson Barrett
Virgil Williams	Michael MacOwan
Landlady	Gwen Sibley
Lloyd Osbourne	James Mason
Pola	Audrey Miller
Captain Smith	George Larchet
Sosimo	John McGuire
Laupepa Malietoa	Leslie Kyle

- Scenes are: Act I - 'The Northern Lights.'
The parlour at Number 17 Heriot Row, Edinburgh,
April 1871.
- Act II - 'A Night of Stars'
The dining-room of the Hotel Cheillon at
Greze-sur-Loing, in the summer of 1876.
- Act III 'The Grey Ferry'
Scene 1 - A bed-sitting room of a lodging house
in Bush Street, San Francisco, February 1880.
- Scene 2 - The drawing room at 'Skerryvore' Bournemouth,
in the summer of 1885.
- Act IV - 'The Ultimate Isles'
Scene 1 - The Great Hall at Vailima, Samoa
on a September morning in 1893.
- Scene 2 - The same, on the evening of December 3rd 1894.
- Scene 3 - The same at dawn of the following morning.

The play was produced by Michael MacOwan, (who was to play the Tinker in the 1959 film of Kidnapped - in which John Laurie would play Ebenezer.)

Wilson Barrett was actor son of an actor who was the son of a very famous actor father of the same name, Wilson Barret (1846-1904). The grandson played two roles in Tusitala. He was later to run his own very successful post-war theatre touring repertory company in Scotland for whom the present writer made his professional debut as 'Snake' in The School for Scandal at His Majesty's Theatre, Aberdeen, in 1953.

Gerald Savory, who played Simpson, became a noted West End playwright and would also adapt Jekyll and Hyde for BBC/TV in 1980. The BBC also screened a version of Tusitala in 1950 to mark the Stevenson Centenary Year. Alan Stevenson (1891-1971), the son of Louis's cousin, Charles, and also a lighthouse engineer, contributed a foreword to the text published by Chatto and Windus in 1934:

'As I belong to a younger generation of Stevensons than R.L.S., it is with some diffidence that I venture to write this foreword. Perhaps it would have been better had it been entrusted to a commentator more detached than I can be. My only excuse is a hope that something of his spirit has been handed down to me helping to influence my whole outlook on life. To attempt to reincarnate the complex personality of Robert Louis Stevenson must be acknowledged to be a very daring experiment...

In my opinion, the authors of Tusitala have, without doubt, succeeded in what they set out to do... As a play the best may be said for it.

From Auld Reekie with his parents, the well-chosen scenes move to Vailima and his death. This last, one of the most dramatic and moving ever depicted on any stage...³⁴

This of course is the view of a lighthouse engineer.

Nonetheless, Mr Stevenson's comment is a sincere compliment to a professional job of work done on all the known facts of Stevenson's life and there could be more strenuous ways of being introduced to the biography than from a comfortable seat in the theatre. The play is not ashamed to take full advantage of hindsight and even if it does so heavily-handedly at certain points, and may be a somewhat romantic view of the hero, the authors obviously know their theatre and their Stevenson and have tried at least, as Alan Stevenson says, to avoid 'killing him with kindness'. It is a difficult balance to achieve in a playing script that is to illustrate the factual events and yet at the same time to maintain the required tension of a dramatic entertainment. Significantly, no mention is made of the playwriting at Bournemouth and certainly none is made of Henley. This is surely remiss. Henley is an integral part of the Stevenson story in theatre.

It is perhaps germane to mention the dearth of Stevenson adaptations for the musical theatre. It is little known that Stevenson could notate music and even composed in a very rudimentary manner on the flageolet, what Lloyd Osbourne called 'that doleful whining little instrument'. Nonetheless, it gave R.L.S. 'an amazing amount of pleasure' and he 'played it persistently'. His musical experiences were deeply felt from the Edinburgh orchestral concerts he attended with Baxter to the account he gave to Sidney Colvin on 1 May 1892. On that night he was a guest of the native chief, Mataafa and he wrote:

'About four in the morning, I was awakened by the sound of a whistle pipe blown outside on the dark, very softly and to a pleasing simple air. I really think I have hit the first phrase -

It sounded very peaceful, sweet and strange in the dark; and I found this was part of the routine of my rebel's night, and it was done (he said) to give good dreams.³⁵

Contemporary British pianist and composer, Richard Stalker, regrets this and has sought the help of two Edinburgh writers, Gavin Bolus and Bill Dunlop, to fuse the two stories of Kidnapped and Catriona into an acceptable libretto to fit a modern score. Mr Stalker believes that in the character of Alan Breck, he has a natural singer (one of the songs is called The Sword of Alan) and Barbara Grant is a talented keyboard player. In addition, he asserts, there is no shortage in the original narrative of good villains - Uncle Ebenezer, Jame More, Grant of Prestongrange et al but as always with Stevenson in his adventure tales, there is a lack of romantic interest - vital for a musical, but the writers feel that by blending the two novels they may achieve this.

Mr Stalker writes:

'For some time I have been of the opinion Stevenson, as one of our great writers, had received little if indeed no attention in the musical theatre. Particularly, when compared to Dickens, Shaw and, from the other side of the Channel, Victor Hugo. This I felt to be a great mistake, as his novels, being so colourful, are very adaptable for dramatic purposes, as well as , at times, showing great social awareness...

I eventually decide on "Kidnapped" as my first choice, this being Stevenson's own favourite among his novels. Also it seems to have everything, adventure, spectacle and nationalism...

The one ingredient that it lacked, i.e. Romance (which I also firmly believe necessary for a musical) is made up in its sequel, "Catriona". Plus there are so many examples of music-making in the book, Alan Breck is constantly improvising songs...

The show is in two Acts and Catriona and James More have been woven into Act 1 by telling a parallel but plausible story about them based on material from the second novel. This of course builds up the feminine note...

We have however, not been neglectful about making a strong point about the miscarriage of justice with reference to James Stewart.

In this respect, as indeed we have done very much on the whole, we followed Stevenson's narrative.

Musically, I like to think of my score as being largely in the nature of a Scottish folk opera..³⁶

On the conventional operatic level, there have been two operas based on Stevenson's work and both were written and presented within a year of each other. The Beach of Falesa was adapted in 1974 with music by Alan Hoddinott and in 1975 Robin Orr wrote an opera for Scottish Opera out of Weir of Hermiston with a libretto by Bill Bryden. New Zealander Lyell Cresswell is currently working on an opera based on The Merry Men.

'The words themselves have music within them and this would shape the melodic line. It is deeply atmospheric, not only the sea³⁷ and waves but a tremendous feeling of guilt that haunts the work.'

One can only await a full-length operatic treatment of Stevenson's life. It has all the ingredients. As well as the romantic drama offered the scenic potential in the journey from Heriot Row to Vailima is infinite.

John Cairney and Alannah O'Sullivan

as MR & MRS R.L.S.

At the Edinburgh Festival of 1971, an adaptation by Dylan Thomas of The Body Snatcher (1881) was presented as The Doctor and the Devil.

This featured the eminent Scottish actor, Leonard Maguire, as the doctor. Maguire was later to play Stevenson himself in a first play by Alanna Knight, The Private Life of R.L.S., which was performed at the Edinburgh Festival of 1974.

Barbara Brill, the English script-writer and author of a Life of Stevenson for children (Ladybird Books), is a self-confessed Stevenson hero-worshipper and has been since her schooldays. In 1980, she devised a poetry recital programme from Stevenson's writings for the Stratford-on-Avon Poetry Festival to mark the centenary of his marriage to Fanny Osbourne in San Francisco. Writing in the programme, the director, John Carroll, quoted Janet Adam Smith:

'We enjoy Stevenson's poetry when we are young and full of emotion about situations we have not yet experienced in real life, but the readers who are enlarging their field tend to leave Stevenson behind with their adolescence.'

Not so Miss Brill. She went on from her schooldays to write a play based on the life of Stevenson, Valiant in Velvet, which was presented at the Byre Theatre, St. Andrews by the St. Andrew's Play Club from 8 to 10 December 1962. This theatre had been founded by local writer, Alex. B. Paterson who himself adapted Weir of Hermiston for the Byre in 1971. Barbara Brill also had a radio script entitled Where the Golden Apples Grow broadcast on BBC's Radio 4. This drew on Stevenson's letters to his mother. A further script has been accepted by the BBC and will be broadcast during 1994, the Stevenson centenary year.

Her compilation for the 1980 wedding anniversary featured Margaret Wolfitt and James Cairncross, both very distinguished performers. The latter particularly is well-known in Scotland for his many appearances at the Edinburgh Festival and for his work at the Royal Lyceum Theatre there - including his William Lawson, the Procurator-Fiscal in that company's production of Deacon Brodie in 1978. James was born in Fife, and given that kingdom's contribution to Stevenson on stage, it might be agreed that Fife had made amends for Stevenson's own unhappy experience of theatre in Fife when he attended that concert in Anstruther Town Hall in 1868. Miss Brill's device of compiling prose, poetry and anecdote was to become an established format for presentations of Robert Louis Stevenson as the subject of performed theatre biography.

A more recent interpretation of actual Stevenson events was that done by Jenni Calder, herself a Stevenson scholar and author, for the 1990 Edinburgh Festival. Presented by the Saltire Society, her treatment was entitled Island Landfalls and begins with Stevenson's voyage on the Casco and ends with his final years at Upolu. John Shedden played Stevenson. Like Leonard Maguire, he had been introduced to the part of Stevenson by Alanna Knight's 1974 production (in fact he took over from the present writer) and in this case he was helped by a strong physical resemblance to R.L.S. Alice Risemberg played Fanny and Matthew Clark, Lloyd Osbourne.

This presentation is a dramatic reading more than a conventional play but it is no worse for that in terms of Stevenson edification and general entertainment. Much use is made of the letters, and they are read as such. A heavy reliance is therefore placed on the performers' reading skills. Fortunately this is an area where Shedden is strong, particularly in the Scots dialect as in the letters to Baxter. Guitar links provided a pleasant punctuation and excerpts from other Stevenson tales such as The Beach of Falesa gave a much-needed dramatic variety.

The onus for success in productions such as this relies less on the accuracy or effectiveness of the script but on the personalities of the readers involved and their relationship to the audience. It is polite chamber music compared to the rumbustical symphony of a full length play but it is by now received Festival fare and provides an easy and interesting means of learning something about a time in the life of R.L.S. The very theatricality in his personality and the larger-than-life reality of his life in the South Seas are boons to the biographical adapter. The Edinburgh Gateway Theatre company was formed in 1953 to specialise in the work of Scottish dramatists and to form a centre in the capital of Scotland where Scottish actors can act in them. Its Chairman, playwright, Robert Kemp, made the following comments in the programme for their production of Weir of Hermiston in 1958:

'One likes to think that if we had existed over half a century ago (The Gateway Theatre that is) the young Robert Louis Stevenson might have written for the company, and it would have been better than the ventures he did make into the drama with W.E.Henley. This year, instead of a play by R.L.S., we offer a dramatisation of his great unfinished novel "Weir of Hermiston", skilfully made by an Edinburgh author of today and already in the repertory of our company.'

R.J.B.Sellar, the said Edinburgh author, was a very experienced playwright, particularly in radio, and was also to adapt The Master of Ballantrae for the same company in the following year. In the same programme page as Robert Kemp, Mr Sellar asks:

'Should a novel be turned into a play? There are conflicting opinions on such points. Having had, for many years, my own theories on such matters, I think... (that) the cardinal principles of the interesting work of adaptation are that one must try to reflect the spirit and carry out the intentions of the original work. But in turning a novel into a play one must also have equal regard for the the principles of the new medium. If there are any ardent Stevensonians in the audience... I ask them not to grieve overmuch about certain changes... A loss in atmosphere may have brought a gain in drama and compactness of theme. Stevensonians may put me on trial for such misdeeds. My defence is implicit in the play, and I ask, My Lord, and members of the jury, for an acquittal, or at least a recommendation for mercy.'

Spoken like a true professional. In this production, directed by Brian Carey, Weir was played by Tom Fleming, a leading Scottish actor who was later to repeat the role on BBC Television in 1973 (in a version by Tom Wright). Viewers would also recognise the late Bill Simpson, who played Frank Innes, as BBC's Doctor Finlay. Other Stevenson stalwarts such as Leonard Maguire and Paul Young were also in the cast

Weir of Hermiston was also adapted by Tom Wright in 1980 from his own television script as a stage performance by students of the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama directed by Peter Lincoln at the MacRobert Centre, Stirling. It would seem that a future generation might yet come to Stevenson by seeing him performed on a stage but it is more probable that the children of the video age will encounter him first via the many adaptations of his work for the screen. This aspect will be considered fully in the next stage of this study but the following comments may be noted meanwhile:

'It is the movies and not the regular stage that gets most of the "dramatised" stories today. Perhaps the present revelation of Stevenson's "Master of Ballantrae" is merely a way-station to this ultimate destination...'

Thus begins the uncredited introduction to Mr H.T. Parker's 1920 review of A.E.W.Mason's adaptation of The Master of Ballantrae which featured Mr Walker Whiteside as the 'many-sided adventurer, James D'urrie' and the production was created to accommodate Mr Whiteside's impersonation. The introduction continues:

'An actor-made play or a play made to order with an actor's idiosyncracies in mind bears witness, as Mr. Parker says, "to the inevitable shortcomings of the species". This one, apparently, does not escape:

Mr Parker's review opens:

'A novel is a novel; a play is a play; and never - or hardly ever - shall the twain meet. On the printed page, sentence by sentence, Stevenson, master of the illusory word, may weave the atmosphere of the wintry and isolated manor-house. From the stage comes only the illusion that setting and lights may compass.'

This takes little account of the powers of the actor to convey the scene in terms of his performance. This capacity of the performer is the essential dynamic of live theatre and has been since Shakespeare's wooden O. Miss Ruth Draper (1884-1956), was also quite capable of filling the stage with people in her celebrated solo recitals.

Mr Parker goes on:

'A piece of the theater, especially in these days of substantial backgrounds and few pauses, must not diffuse itself too widely. In fact, Mr. Mason and Mr. Whiteside compress an action, stretching through years and over quite half the world, into a single month within a single room. Necessarily it becomes momentary assertion - This is so because we say it so - rather than measured progress. So, too, with the personages... At the end of the play they remain what they were at the beginning... In wisdom to a feminised time - and still feminised - Stevenson affirmed life a boy's game and the sentimental adventure but one of man's experience within it. Now the American Theatre... is a storehouse and hothouse of sentiment. Hence the upbuilding of Alison Durie and the stressing of James's seduction of her... Richard Mansfield might plausibly have acted the Master but what is this but reminding the present generation of what it has lost? It is easy to imagine John Barrymore in the part but this is putting all of one's eggs in one basket... Upon the eye Mr. Whiteside as James Durie works an appreciable illusion... to the ear (he) conveys both the suavity and the sting of Durie's tongue... yet he does these things with an unconcealed artifice that thins illusion... The secondary and minor characters are merely contributory... Possibly, probably, "The Master of Ballantrae" is best acted upon the theater of the imagination.'

Possibly, probably, no one would have agreed more than Stevenson himself who lived for so long in his own theatre of dreams, seeing his own 'pictures of the mind'. His very manner of writing narrative anticipated the demands of the screen as will be shown in the following pages.

Clayton Hamilton, too, was aware of this particular accommodation of Stevenson's style and he concluded his article, Stevenson on the Stage, with the following comment:

The Master of Ballantrae might be made into a good play... but the concluding passage would afford the very best material for the moving picture craftsman. Kidnapped also might be shown in moving pictures but it could hardly be compressed into a play. Stevenson wrote mainly for the seeing eye; he was less concerned with character than with action and with setting; he exhibited events, harmoniously set in place and time, and he never disturbed the exhibition by psychological analysis.'

What about the psychological genesis of Deacon Brodie?

And did not Stevenson himself say, in a letter to H.B.Baildon, talking of Rahero:

'The Spectator said there was no psychology in it; that interested me very much... I am at bottom a psychcologist and ashamed of it; the tale seized my one-third because of its picturesque features, two-thirds because of its astonishing psychology, and the Spectator says there's none.'³⁸

So much for Mr Hamilton. However, he goes on:

'His literary style is perhaps his greatest glory; but, even if bereft of this, he would remain - to quote him - "a master of brute incident"... He failed in his efforts as a dramatist; but there seems no reason now why he should not³⁹ enjoy a posthumous success as a master of the moving picture play.'

This aspect will now be considered.

ADAPTATIONS

FILM

FILM

Section B

'Mere oblivion'

Clayton Hamilton was the first to make a very important point about Stevenson in adaptation:

'The fact that very few playwrights have attempted to transfer the tales of Stevenson to the service of the theatre, afford(s) no reason why they may not be successfully transferred to the service of the new and growing medium of moving pictures. Treasure Island, for example, would make a better moving picture than a play. It may sanely be conjectured, if Stevenson were living still (and it is a sad fact to remember that even now he would only be sixty-five years old), he would probably devote his mind enthusiastically to the new craft of making moving-pictures.'

This was written in 1916, by which time no less than seven adaptations had already been made for the screen even though the adapters received no credit. Possibly, in those buccaneering, pioneer times in silent picture-making, neither did Stevenson. The first recorded film adaptation was, not surprisingly, the same subject as the first stage adaptation, that of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Altogether, there have been sixty-nine films around the world made from or based on Stevenson's original story. Naturally there is a wide disparity in quality in such a range of adaptations but from the very beginning of film the strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde has attracted every kind of film maker. The very first film dates from 1908 and was directed by Otis Hunter for the Selig Polyscope Company with Hobart Bosworth and Betty Harte. In 1910 a second version was made by Nordisk featuring Alwyn Neuss. Thanhouser Films then invited Lucius Henderson to direct James Cruze as Jekyll and Harry Behnam as Hyde in 1912. This is a very rare instance of two actors playing the eponymous roles, a principle which was not followed generally in screen adaptations. Cruze became a director himself and only a year later directed a version of the same story for Universal Pictures with a cast headed by King Baggott. Other early adaptations are as obscure as Selig's pioneering effort, but mention may be made of Biograph's The Suicide Club in 1909, and also The Black Arrow (Edison 1912), The Wrong Box by Selig (1913) and a further The Suicide Club in 1914 by British and Colonial. All this was a vindication of Clayton Hamilton's surmise, that Stevenson's pen was to prove a boon to film-makers, especially with Jekyll and Hyde.

James Cruze and Harry Behnam as Jekyll and Hyde in the Thanhouser film of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 1912.

John Barrymore as Hyde in the Famous Players-Lasky film of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 1920. Photo, Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive.

This story, lending itself easily as it does to the required metamorphosis, is by far the most popular of Stevenson adaptations to the cinema - with no less than three adaptations in 1920 with three very different types of star actor in the main role(s). These were John Barrymore (Famous Players/Lasky/Paramount), Conrad Veidt (directed in Germany by F.W.Murnau) and Sheldon Lewis (Pioneer Film Corporation, USA). The 'Jekyll-Hyde' film genre was to prove a veritable showcase for actors. Mainstream narrative cinema lends itself easily to elaboration on the physical characteristic of the subjects portrayed and in both Jekyll and Hyde Stevenson has provided ideal grounds for a dual tour de force by the actor.

John Barrymore(1882-1942) was playing Richard III on stage while filming a Jekyll and Hyde for Canadian director, John Stuart Robertson, that was later described as having 'a haunting sense of unexpressed deformity'. In this Artcraft production for Paramount, Clara S. Beranger's screenplay presented the two men in one man theme balanced by two women - Nita Haldi and Martha Mansfield. This was repeated in the other main film version with Miriam Hopkins and Rose Hobart in 1931 and Ingrid Bergman with Lana Turner in 1943. Frederic March won an Academy Award as Best Actor in the role in the 1931 version written by Samuel Hoffenstein and Percy Heath, who were also nominated for Academy Awards in that year. Not nominated was the director, Reuben Mamoulian, and yet his is regarded as the best of the recognised versions of this story.

The present writer had the opportunity to study in the library of the Motion Pictures Academy the yellow-bound shooting script dated August 17 1931, which is headed - 'An adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson's celebrated story' - and almost the first line is an Americanism. When asked the time the butler replies - 'It's a quarter OF three, sir.' With lucid economy, Jekyll's first speech contains the exposition of the theme - 'My analysis leads me to believe that man is not truly one, but truly two' - thus establishing at the outset the central motive, the separation of the good from the bad in the self. It also gave opportunity for comedy touches as one student to another - 'I say old man, why don't you stay home and send your other self to lectures?' Although it must be said that it is difficult to accept Henry Jekyll as 'Harry'. Throughout the film, there is a heavy reliance on Frederic March's charm.

The language of the script is that of the addict ('I'll fight it - I'll conquer it') and one is reminded that Fanny gave Stevenson opium at the time of the original writing. There are echoes of Jane Austen in the references to Bath and Keat's Ode to a Nightingale is quoted. Altogether it is a thoroughly professional, clever film despite the fact tha Jekyll apologises for his 'remissness'. Mamoulian gave the whole thing an added, distinctive artistic style. As Virginia Wright Wexman points out in her 1988 article - Horrors of the Body: Hollywood's Discourse on Beauty:

'Mamoulian emphasises the representation of the human form even more than many other directors do... by stylistic devices, many of which - including mirrors, shadows, statuary, split-screen techniques, and lap disssolves - multiply images of the body...

The Time reviewer notes:

'The face of the handsome young British sawbones becomes by barely perceptible degrees of trick photography the visage of a sabre-toothed baboon with pig eyes and a tassel of primeval hair.'

Virginia Wexman goes on:

'Stevenson's story has, in all of its major cinematic incarnations, been altered in various ways to present the body as the focus of sexual attraction. Most obviously, women, although conspicuously absent from Stevenson's story... move to centre stage in all of the film versions, providing a focal point for the movies' emphasis on "love interest". Frederic March presents a particularly handsome Jekyll to anchor this centrality. Hyde's ugliness, by contrast, signals the historical contradiction that motivates the film and this is typically figured in the text through what Fredric Jameson sees as the "imagery of libidinal revolution and of bodily transformation"... each of which is figured in the film's narrative structure, its characterisation, and its style.'²

In 1989, Emma Tennant took up this question of woman's place (or lack of it) in the Jekyll and Hyde story by writing a novel that changed the gender of the eponymous leading characters so that we have a Ms Jekyll and Mrs Hyde. This is wittily worked out and has a kind of horror of its own but knowledge of the Stevenson theme makes the slim volume highly predictable even to the use of surnames from the original story. Instead of opium, Emma Tennant suggests her heroine is addicted to anxian drugs and her theme is concerned with St. Augustine's view that Original Sin is the cause of man's inherited lust as opposed to the view that we are all responsible for our own actions.³ Ms Tennant gives the woman's viewpoint of what had been very much a masculine world.

Mamouljian addressed the problem of Stevenson's lack of heroines by writing up Miriam Hopkins's part in his film. Future writers would follow the same course.* Leslie Halliwell considers this version 'the most exciting and cinematic version by far of the famous horror story' -

'the gas-lit London streets, the pace, the performances and clever camera and sounds tricks make it a film to enjoy over and over again... For the first transformation the actor wore various layers of make-up which were sensitive to different colour filters and thus produced instant change.'⁴

Halliwell was not so impressed by the 1941 version directed first by Victor Saville and then by Victor Fleming and starring Spencer Tracy, even though the finished product was banned in the Dutch East Indies and the lyrics of George Grossmith's See Me Dance the Polka were checked for scurrility. The writer, in this case John Lee Mahin, was able to write for two star actresses (Ingrid Bergman and Lana Turner) in the adaptation for MGM. In contrast to Frederic March's 'transformation' in the same part, Spencer Tracy's Jekyll was not dissimilar to his Hyde. The latter's was a deliberate and original attempt to stress the 'sameness' of the two sides of himself. This hardly made for the telling effect required, even given Tracy's intelligent and sympathetic screen personality and despite the addition of a Freudian dream sequence which at least won the lighting cameraman, Joseph Ruttenburg, an Academy Award nomination. The fact is that the film may have every technical trick in the book but the public response, and therefore its success, depends on the leading actor and particularly what he does as Hyde. John Barrymore, for instance, in director John Robertson's 1920 version, offered a Hyde that was like nothing on earth. 'More like a gigantic spider' - as Virginia Wexman puts. In her 1988 article she also makes the good point that the abomination represented by Hyde's sexual appetite is made palpable by his hideousness...

'Jekyll's graceful demeanour is offset by Hyde's stealthy ape-like movements, thus hinting at the racial overtones in such differences... In this film, as in the culture at large, to be beautiful is to be white.'⁵

One wonders if the myth of the black rapist was one which unduly employed Stevenson while writing his story in Victorian Bournemouth.

* The 1931 screenplay by Hoffenstein and Heath, and edited by Richard J. Anobile, was published by the Film Classics Library in 1976.

Jack Jekyll and Barrymore Hyde

Jack Barrymore has just completed a screen version of Robert Louis Stevenson's classic, "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," for Paramount-Artcraft. Here are contrasting studies of Barrymore in the dual character. Martha Mansfield is the Millicent

The story of its adaptation into film is largely an American one and their mores apply with a degree of justification. Their obsession is with sex and not sexuality and it shows in nearly every film they make. Mamoulian, however, was not American and he represents Hollywood's shrewd skill in borrowing the best of the cosmopolitan Europeans and assimilating them into their film production methods. This emigre process was calculated to give their local product an 'international' status and at the same time, extend their markets abroad. Film-making is first of all a selling business. The system worked so well that the American film is now accepted all over the world as being itself international. Notwithstanding, the film managed to cause riots in Stockholm and the producers had long discussions not only with the censors but with the Hayes office in Hollywood regarding almost every aspect of the script and its implication of sexual intent.

Writing in another century, Stevenson had no way of knowing how his work would be produced a hundred years later. Not only produced but traduced some might say. Here was a writer whose daily burden was his body and now, in the film medium, his work is used to create a paeon of praise for the body beautiful, as a hymn to youth and beauty, which in Hollywood's eyes, are the same thing. The body, however, as Stevenson well knew, is a complicated machine and likely to act out of all supposed order and expectation. Spencer Tracy was perhaps right in playing down the extreme contrast between the good-looking Jekyll and the repellent Hyde - two sides of the same coin. The coin being the mighty dollar.

The apparent contradiction of the two persons in one or the paradox offered by one man who is two and the consequent psychological, philosophical and emotional questions raised thereto is not the reason that the subject of Dr. Jekyll and his violent change has continued to fascinate the film makers. Rather it is the tale's proved propensity as a money-maker. This has been the excuse for just about every kind of adaptation of the theme from 1906 to date. These have included such bizarre interpretations as Laurel and Hardy's typical Dr. Pickle and Mr. Pride (1925) and Abbott and Costello Meet Doctor Jekyll and Mister Hyde (1953) as well as Jerry Lewis's much-praised 1963 comedy - The Nutty Professor which has now become something of a cult movie. Other variants which have emanated from the Hollywood conveyer belt are:

Son of Dr Jekyll (Louis Hayward 1951), Daughter of Dr Jekyll (Gloria Talbot 1957), The Ugly Duckling (1960) and I Monster with Christopher Lee for Hammer Films in 1970. Other permutations have been The Woman and the Beast from Mexico, and Dr.Jekyll et les Femmes and Le Testament de Dr.Cordelier from France. The latter starred Jean Louis Barrault and was directed by Jean Renoir no less. Britain contributed an animated version - Hyde, but it also offered the strangest twist to the basic story in the unique version given it by British screenwriter, Brian Clemens, in 1971 when he devised Dr Jekyll and Sister Hyde as a Hammer film directed by Roy Ward Baker and featuring Ralph Bates and Martine Beswick. In this the transformation caused Jekyll to reappear as a beautiful young woman who killed prostitutes in the interest of Jekyll's medical research. This uneasy marrying of the Stevenson story with the legend of Jack the Ripper was also taken up by Gerard Kincoine in Edge of Sanity, in his 1989 version made in Canada with Anthony Perkins. Neither film wholly succeeds but they show the lengths film-makers will go to tease the public into the cinema.

In 1972, the late Sammy Davis Junior, a black singer-comedian, talked with producer, Joe Harr, about making Dr.Jekyll and Mr. Hyde with boxer Muhammad Ali. Variety on August 1972 reported that Ali's only stipulation, was 'No sex in pic'.

Dr. Jekyll Junior was the title chosen by Castelano and Pipolo for their Medusa production which starred Paulo Villagio and Edwige Fenech on location in London during 1979. Columbia Pictures, according to the Hollywood Cinefile of 6 March 1992, have signed Tim Burton to direct the very latest version which is based on the best-selling novel Mary Reilly which sees the Jekyll and Hyde saga from the point of view of Dr Jekyll's maid. There appears to be no end to the permutations that can be rung from the story hence its on-going preoccupation by the film-makers.

This is no more than it should be. If, as Hollywood maintains, it is the world's dream factory, then what more appropriate that the result of one man's dream should perpetuate itself by means of celluloid and sound sprockets to divert an audience which seems as greedy for its thrills and horror as ever its Victorian forbears were. Nothing changes. Rather than going round and round, the world of the film plot appears merely to go on its rounds.

Fredric March in experimental makeup for Edward Hyde, for the Paramount film of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 1932. Photo by Jack Shalitt, Paramount Studio; from the collection of the American Museum of the Moving Image.

Fredric March as Jekyll contemplating himself as Hyde, composite press still. Photo, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research.

Every other version, including the 1960 adaptation with Paul Massie directed by Terence Fisher as well as that of 1967, when Jack Palance was directed for a television film by Charles Jarrott, followed the same theme with only minor modifications. It had become the standard formula. Michael Caine (Cannon/UK 1990) played Jekyll just as Stevenson himself stated him to be - a hypocrite. He wrote in 1887:

'The harm was in Jekyll because he was a hypocrite - not because he was fond of women; he says so himself...'⁶

But this is a rare reading on the screen. Irving Saposnik reports:

'The transfer from stage to screen only confirmed Mansfield's interpretation. John Barrymore (1920) played Hyde as the essence of a lust-ridden fiend, eying his victims with rapacious lubricity. A latter-day Dorian Gray, he is more Oscar Wilde's man than Stevenson's and his pleasure-seeking forays into the shadowy world of Soho are clearly echoes from Wilde's novel. Rouben Mamoulian's 1932 version with Frederic March in the dual role increased the sexual overtones. Not content with suggestive pleasure-haunts, Mamoulian inserted the character of Ivy, the attractive bar-maid whose charms so affect the pent-up Jekyll that he must indulge in sexual atrocities in order to satisfy his cravings.'⁷

Stevenson's allegorical crawler had become an exploitable film horror.

The novel comes up in every generation according to that age's style and mores and bears out Stevenson's fears that the character of Hyde would only be equated with sex and not with hypocrisy. The film adaptations have not only emphasised the sexual element they have made it the entire motive. Professor Saposnik continues:

'What emerges from all this is a portrait of Hyde with a decidedly modern veneer: released by the intemperate tastes of Jekyll, he exists in order to allow his double to gratify his wanton lusts.'⁸

As Edwin Eigner remarks:

'It is perhaps unfortunate... that all four of the important stage and screen productions of Jekyll and Hyde were made in America, where the popular mind is especially apt to regard sex and evil as synonymous terms.'⁹

Eigner also points out that the redeemable trait is there in Jekyll as it is in all of Stevenson's villains.

'Just as Deacon Brodie, in the revised version, chooses death as a deliberate sacrifice, so John Barrymore as Hyde commits suicide to save his fiancée which is, in effect, Jekyll's failure to accept his own nature. To Stevenson, the renunciation of evil is itself a virtue.'¹⁰

No such renunciation was evident in the Hollywood advertisement which appeared in film town's Drama-Logue issued on 31 October 1991:

DR. JEKYLL & MR. HYDE comedy feature about a man who accidentally drinks a lab experiment, produced by Miklen Prods. & John Lewis, directed by Mike Sedan, for a three-week shoot beginning early Dec., casting: **Heidi**, Caucasian, 30-35, nice figure, nudity required;

Robert, Caucasian, 30-35, scientist; **Max**, 30-38, cute, fun-loving; **Donna**, 20-29, well-built, innocent, nudity required;

Zelda, 30-35, exotic; **Jaime**, Hispanic male, 20-25, conniving;

Carl, 30-35, muscular; **Mom**, Caucasian, 60-68; **Maggie**, 40-45, secretary;

Dr. Montoger, Hispanic, 42-50, businessman; **Mickey**, 30-35, male, scientist; **Minnie Bess** 50-55, black female, jovial; **Sandra**, 20-25, cute. Copy, Meals and Pay provided. Send Photo and Resume to: Miklen Productions, 60 East Magnolia Boulevard, Burbank, CA 91502.

Kristine Kreuger of the Margaret Herrick Library in Beverley Hills reports that -

'there are no less than 14 Files beginning 'Dr. Jekyll'...Some are straight adaptations, others parodies and works "inspired by" R.L.S.'¹¹

It bears out exactly what Henley wrote to Stevenson in 1883 -

'...presently we shall get to our tertiaries.'¹²

Spencer Tracy as Hyde in the MGM film of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 1941.
Photo, National Film Archive, London.

Ralph Bates and Martine Brunswick as Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde in the Hammer film of *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde*, 1971. Photo, Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive.

TREASURE ISLAND

This is arguably the most successful Stevenson adaptation for film, it is certainly the most popular and yet it has no sex interest, love affair and if there is romance it is of a boyish variety as the only woman in it is the mother of the hero. It has ten versions on screen and no less than sixteen files in the Margaret Herrick Library, Beverley Hills. Stevenson had guessed rightly about its likely popularity. The story itself and the character of Long John Silver would draw audiences to the cinema just as it drew patrons to the theatre and readers to the library. In addition, the part of John Silver himself, whatever the version produced attracted actors like a magnet. It had the same bravura appeal to performers as Jekyll/Hyde. Consequently, the adaptations of Treasure Island afford a roll-call of the leading screen actors of the time. It might be said that there has been no shortage of Long Johns on the Silver Screen.

Adison Rothermel was the first to play the part in the Edison production of 1912 but no director was named. Chester M. Franklyn directed a version for the Fox Film Corporation in 1918 but no cast was named and in a 1920 adaptation for Paramount Pictures, Charles Ogle was the Silver and Shirley Wilson was the female Jim. This last casting was not an uncommon practice in the early film versions.

John Lee Mahin, in his adaptation for MGM's meticulous 1934 production, provided Wallace Beery with a sinister interpretation which won much praise. Jackie Cooper played Jim Hawkins and a character called 'Cora Sue' (Sue Collins) was introduced to provide him with love interest. John Barrymore's brother, Lionel, played Billy Bones. The director was Victor Fleming (who would also direct the Spencer Tracy 1943 Jekyll and Hyde) and the film was produced by Hunt Stromburg. The latter had some trouble with the authorities in Bohemia and Moravia who questioned the lyrics of the sea-shanties used. On the grounds that they were suggestive, the film was rejected by both countries. The Illustrated London News reported:

'Robert Louis Stevenson's famous adventure story has been singularly fortunate in the manner of its treatment in the new film recently produced in London at the Empire Theatre. The Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer picture, directed by Victor Fleming, has the great, and not too common merit of keeping faithfully to the original tale and not taking liberties with the author's plot...'¹³

The resources of the screen have made it possible to present the objective background of the story in a concrete form more vivid and picturesque - at any rate to the unimaginative eye - than any written description. Stevenson, like Grahame Greene, would have applauded. Both writers regarded the use of setting as entirely utilitarian and the usual visual description as a waste of time. They preferred cinematic 'brute action'. Stevenson himself admitted - 'We want interest, incident, action, to the devil with your philosophy.'¹⁴

Orson Welles made his attempt in 1971 in a script by Wolf Mankiewicz assisted by another a writer calling himself O.W. Jeeves(?). Not even his contribution or the presence on screen of one of cinema's few true geniuses could prevent this multi-national mammoth from floundering among its many masters. Harry Alan Towers had arranged an international combine involving Britain, France, Germany and Spain in order to make a simple adventure yarn set in the mythical Spanish Main - the result was a mish-mash that not even an Orson Welles could survive. Film is very much a team game but the players in this film fixture are often playing different games.

Michael E. Briant directed Alfred Burke in a 1977 British version with a strong cast including Patrick Troughton, who had been a notable Alan Breck for BBC television. Lord Bernard Miles's 'Silver' was a comic creation for Brent Walker at Shepperton in 1982 but in all this the actor who still remains fixed and firm in the public memory in this role is undeniably Robert Newton. His robust interpretation of Lawrence Edward Wadkin's script under the direction of Byron Haskin in the 1949 production by the Walt Disney Organisation was both comical and evil. So much did the actor's personal mannerisms and manic energy permeate the role that no other actor could attempt the part without risk of comparison. Not that his excesses pleased everyone but Leslie Halliwell summed up Newton's impact in a brief comment on the film:

'(A) cheerful Disney remake, poor in detail but transfixed by a swaggeringly overplayed and unforgettable leading performance.'¹⁵

The British Film Institute had another opinion however and in expressing it, their critic, 'L.G.A.' revealed a hitherto unstated professional view regarding the quality of Stevenson's contribution to the pot-pourri that was the average film script then and which is still something of a committee minute today. 'L.G.A.' says:

'It is perhaps unfortunate for the capable if not outstanding craftsmen who have executed this version of Treasure Island that their material should be so exceptionally distinguished. In other words, we expect something more from a film of this book than a competently told adventure, coloured and characterised with jovial crudity...'

(Not only must one bear in mind the almost casual, playtime circumstances in which the original writing of Treasure Island was first done in Scotland, but 'jovial crudity' just as aptly sums up the Skelt toy-theatre influences which never entirely left Stevenson.)

The film critic continues:

'Stevenson's story has been quite faithfully adhered to, with the exception of an ending, typically, though not excusably sentimentalised... Long John Silver, as played by Robert Newton, becomes a leering, barnstorming rascal, first cousin to Lionel Barrymore and his own true brother to Tod Slaughter...'¹⁶

Newton made something of a career out of the role. Firstly, in a 26-part TV series for television in Australia called The Adventures of Long John Silver made in 1955 and then a television film John Silver's Return to Treasure Island for HTV nearly 30 years later. This says something of the durability of the player as much as the part. The truth is that it is the part rather than the picture that continues to intrigue and it is often the actor not the script that makes the film. In this regard, one wishes one could have seen Boris Andrejev in the Russian version made in 1971.

As recently as 1991, Marlon Brando, was being wooed by producer Elliott Kastner, for whom he has made three films, to portray Silver in a new musical version. It is still to be made. Threshold films had also announced a musical version in 1979 but nothing came of it. Many film projects are happily unrealised. Similarly, Walt Disney announced a remake in 1985 and signed Gene Scott to direct locations on the Costa del Sol in Spain but nothing further has been heard of Mr. Scott or the film. As long ago as 1972, Japan produced Dobutsu Takarajima, an animated Treasure Island and in 1973, Hanna-Barbera Productions signed Jack Mendelsohn to write the script for a similar animation. Format Productions also planned their first animated feature film. They had only been known hitherto as the producers of The Lone Ranger. A version was made in Japanese in 1971 and in Italian in 1986 and in 1991 it was made in French as L'Ile au Tresor directed by Raul Ruiz for Films du Passage. This is apposite, remembering how much R.L.S. loved France.

For the most part, cinematically, Treasure Island has been the domain of British and American film-makers and they have fought for its spoils as assiduously as ever did John Silver or Captain Smollett. And the fight continues. Even as this is being written, there is no doubt that somewhere in the world someone has his lens-finder fixed on his own idea of Treasure Island.

Swearingen notes:

'Stevenson himself never visited the Caribbean, and when asked by an interviewer (Sydney Morning Herald 14 February 1893) whether the real island was in the Pacific - "Smiled humorously." "Treasure Island", he said, "is not in the Pacific. In fact, I only wish myself that I knew where it was. When I wrote the book I gave no indication as to its whereabouts for fear there might be an undue rush towards it. However, it is generally supposed to be in the West Indies."

Swearingen continues:

'Pursuing Stevenson's own hint, Goerge R. Stewart, "The Real Treasure Island" University of California Chronicle, 28 (April 1926), 207-13, argues that the scenery is in fact chiefly Californian, derived from Stevenson's stay in Monterey and the Napa Valley in 1879-80'¹⁷

Is it merely coincidental that both of these locations are also within easy reach of what is now Hollywood? Was Treasure Island in fact, a cinematic mirage seen through a Scotch mist?

Some film makers would have us think so.

* This press cutting from Margaret Stevenson's Scrapbook was made available from the Monterey State Historical Monument Stevenson House Collection in California from whom the present writer also gained the American newspaper quotations used in this study.

Walt Disney Pictures

TREASURE ISLAND

All the excitement of Robert Louis Stevenson's classic adventure comes to life in Disney's ***Treasure Island***. Young Jim Hawkins (Bobby Driscoll) faces unimagined danger when he takes a job as a cabin boy on a search for buried treasure. In his journeys aboard the square rigger Hispaniola, he meets some of the boldest and wickedest pirates ever to sail the seas—including the infamous one-legged swash-buckler, Long John Silver (Robert Newton). Dark deeds, murder and mutiny ensue—and finally good is pitted against evil in a battle over the buried loot on ***Treasure Island!***

Cast

BOBBY DRISCOLL

ROBERT NEWTON

BASIL SIDNEY

WALTER FITZGERALD

**Buena Vista
International**

350 South Buena Vista Street • Burbank, California 91521
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KIDNAPPED

The ten files at the Motion Picture Academy indicate that not all the films under this title will be based on the R.L.S. novel. However, five certainly were, beginning from the first Edison version in 1917 and including a Serial version by Pathe in the same year and going through to other versions in 1938, 1959 and 1971 and it is these last three which will now be discussed. 20th-century Fox employed three writers - Sonya Levein, Richard Sherman and Walter Ferris in their 1938 version of the classic adventure story which was directed by Alfred L. Werker. Warner Baxter played Alan Breck and Freddie Bartholemew was Jim Hawkins in this well-made screen opus which however only acknowledged the original narrative from time to time.

Norman Sherry, in the first part of his exhaustive biography of Graham Greene (1904-92), reports that the famous novelist, a descendant on the Balfour side of Stevenson himself, saw red when, on 5 August 1938, he had to review a Fox film supposedly based on his cousin's famous novel Kidnapped. Greene writes:

'I doubt if the summer will show a worse film than Kidnapped; the only fun you are likely to get from it is speculation, speculation on the astonishing ignorance of film-makers who claim to know what the public wants. The public will certainly not want this Kidnapped, where all the adventures which made them read the book have been omitted. Is it even honest to bring in Stevenson's name?... Apart from the title and the circumstances of David's kidnapping, there is practically nothing of the original story here. Alan Breck's character with its cunning and its vanity, is not so much altered, as lost - he is shouting, over and over again. 'To Edinburgh' or 'The Redcoats'; he is only a set of teeth like those exhibited in the windows of cheap dentists... as for the girl with great dewy eyes, her dimples and her tartan and her kissing mouth, she represents, I suppose, the love interest - as if there wasn't enough love in the original story to wither these wistful caresses and misunderstandings and virginal pursuits.'¹⁸

This is plain speaking from a chip on the shoulder but it is a stout speaking-up for the Stevenson family. Margaret Isabella Balfour Stevenson, Louis's mother, would indeed have been proud of such a notice and no doubt would have pasted it in her scrapbook along with her son's press cuttings.

The Graham Greene family connection with Stevenson was extended through the Seed and Wilson families in New Zealand and one imagines they would have taken a less critical attitude to having their famous relation's work spread around the world via its cinemas.

The next film on the theme was in 1948 and featured Dan O'Herlihy and Roddy McDowell (who also produced the film) and an actor named Housely Stevenson who played Ebenezer. The screenplay was by W. Scott Darling and the Monigram production was directed by William Beaudine and shot on board James Cagney's three-masted yacht, the Swift. A Hollywood review of the time said:

'Kidnapped should click nicely with lovers of the Stevenson classic. Production values of the film are high. As pic has very little star-name value it will have to depend heavily on the pull of the Stevenson name.'

A treatment, commissioned by Walt Disney/Hugh Attwooll in 1959, was more faithful to the book but then the writer was also the director and it was a happy coincidence that his name was Robert Stevenson. Mr Stevenson essayed a modest adaptation with a British, if not wholly Scottish cast, with the exception of Peter Finch (an Australian Alan Breck) Peter O'Toole (an Irish Robin Oig MacGregor) and James MacArthur (a thoroughly American David Balfour). The unnamed critic in British Film Institute Bulletin for 1950 found it -

'remarkable for its fidelity to Stevenson's story and its commendable attempt to capture the spirit of the original by the use of Scottish actors... (but) the screenplay is verbose and confused... However, these failings can be partly blamed on the picaresque form of the novel itself which gains an intimacy from being told in the first person, which the cinema rarely achieves.'

An East German adaptation in 1968 featured Thomas Weisgerber as Alan Breck and Werner Kraus as David Balfour.

In the most recent version, Michael Caine played Breck and Lawrence Douglas was David Balfour. It also featured actors of the calibre of Trevor Howard, Jack Hawkins and Donald Pleasance in supporting roles. This Omnibus/Frederick H. Brogger production was directed by Delbert Mann at Pinewood Studios for the Rank Organisation during 1971. Jack Pulman, the writer, incorporated sections of Catriona into his screenplay, much as was done in the theatrical adaptations previously mentioned, in order to increase the distaff contribution. In film, even more than in theatre, the love interest must be found and if it is not there then it must be fabricated. Not for the first time, Stevenson finds himself having women thrust upon him. If they have no place in his original story they certainly feature in any scenario developed from it.

'Cherchez la femme' - and if one does not exist then invent one.

LOVE- RIDE-FIGHT!

with the renegade who defied a king's army
for a woman's lips!

WARNER BROS. PRESENT
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON'S
MASTERWORK OF ADVENTURE

THE MASTER OF BALLANTRAE

COLOR BY
TECHNICOLOR

The
heather-haired
hostage of the
besieged
Ballantrae
Castle!

"Rousing
adventure
novel
makes an
equally
rousing
movie" -**TIME**

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BEATRICE CAMPBELL
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Ebb Tide was made no less than ten times, the first being for Famous Players/Lasky in 1922 directed by George Melford with Noah Beery in the cast. The 1932 version was for Gaumont British Instructional. There are no cast details. In the same year Arthur Rosen made an adaptation of the story for British Paramount featuring George Barraud, Chilli Bouchier and Joan Barry. There was a most interesting, acerbic interpretation by Bertram Millhauser for Paramount/Lucien Hubbard in 1937. This version, directed by James Hogan, and with a cast that included Ray Milland, Frances Farmer, Oscar Homolka and Barry Fitzgerald, was also noted for its early use of colour. This script was the basis of the 1947 re-make which was entitled Adventure Island. Other versions were made in Canada in 1962, in the United States (Thomas Harris Production, director, Terry Hughes) in 1990 and in Australia, Craig Lahiff made his for Genesis Films in 1992.

Furnas remarks in his notes:

'According to press releases, Universal-International is planning a film version of The Beach under the title Pantang. So far as I can find out this is the first time it has been filmed.'

So far as the present writer can find out the film was never made although Isambard Productions in Auckland, New Zealand have professed an interest in making a Stevenson film with a South Pacific location.

The Suicide Club had versions in 1914 by the British and Colonial Film Company, in 1932 by Universal and again in 1936 under the title Trouble for Two in which J. Walter Ruben directed Robert Montgomery and Rosalind for MGM. Another version followed as recently as 1973 with Joseph Haskill, Margot Kidder and Joseph Wiseman. The Pavilion on the Links was made in 1920 by Paramount/Artcraft with the title White Circle. The director was Maurice Tourneur from a screenplay by Jack Gilbert and Jules Furthman. The cast was headed by Spottiswoode Aitken and Janice Wilson. Markheim was scripted by director, Mark Robson, for Screenplays Inc. in 1947 and was scheduled for production but no details are extant. Of the remaining Stevenson adaptations mention may be made of Universal's The Sire de Maletroit's Door, (The Strange Door), directed by Joseph Pevney and starring Charles Laughton and Boris Karloff. There are also titles like The Bottle Imp (1917), The Tame Cat (1921), The Body Snatcher (1945), The Silverado Squatters (1947) and others no doubt which gleam under other names on the silver screen.

So long as picture-making demands action, character and visual possibilities then it will demand the original stories of Robert Louis Stevenson. He can survive disasters like Herb Meadow's 1953 version of The Master of Ballantrae in which Errol Flynn played James Durie, but, as always, was Errol Flynn. There is no business like the film business but there is obviously a place in it for R.L.S. The Wrong Box in 1966, scripted by Larry Gelbert and Burt Shevelove and directed by Bryan Forbes, starred Ralph Richardson, John Mills and the ubiquitous Michael Caine. For all that the superimposed 'jokeyness' smothered the story and the film was not a success. Tom Milne sums it up as -

'A slapdash affair in which anything goes, irrespective of whether or not it fits.'²⁰

This more or less sums up filmdom's general treatment of Robert Louis Stevenson and yet there was a natural cinematic aptitude in his work.

G.B. Stern in her monograph on Stevenson makes the point that in his novels, and particularly in The Wrecker, he is -

'employing the speed, energy and facility of the camera 'on location' (which) might certainly have been planned in terms of celluloid.'

She also notes that -

'Films have given Treasure Island (and Jekyll and Hyde) as vivid a resurrection as any 19th-century writer could have desired who unconsciously employed such an excellent film technique as Stevenson.'²¹

The very number of film adaptations supports this view, as does the number of script writers used to work on the adaptations. Generally speaking, the greater number of writers involved, the less effective the finished script. Any number of Hollywood epics proves this - where a swarm of over-paid hacks worry and nibble away at a story line, which is then 'turned over' by the director and given a 'fine tuning' by the leading actors and then completely revised by the producer on orders from 'front office'. 'The Money' in New York then has its say before handing it over to the the cast on location where much of it is invariably improvised on the spot. Even then, it is still subject to what is called the 'sneak preview'. This is where the supposedly finished film is shown unexpectedly before an ordinary audience in an ordinary cinema (but always within a limousine's drive of the studios) and where the audience is canvassed for their opinions.

This is usually done by the completing of given cards. These are then collated and depending on the result of this straw poll, the film is released to the world or is returned to the cutting-rooms for still further editing by yet other hands. This is Hollywood. This is film. It is also a fact of cinematic life and anyone entering it knows that it is not, nor has it ever, pretended to be a palace of art (although works of art do emerge from time to time). It is an industry, a factory, a mechanical process where the works of Robert Louis Stevenson are just another fodder element. The fact that such frequent recourse has been made to his material is a compliment to both parties involved.

Tony Thomas in The Great Adventure Films says:

'The roster of adventure films would be considerably poorer were it not for the stories of Robert Louis Stevenson, as would a number of producers who have made booty from multiple versions...'

In recognising the intrinsic value of his original material for the screen, tribute is being paid to the seemliness of Robert Louis Stevenson as a modern screen writer. A token of his effectiveness is not only in the number of adaptations done in all media but the degree of success they have attained with audiences in each generation. Millions of people have been introduced to Stevenson's world by means of the cinema and television and from there they may be led to the books.

Finally, in this film section a piquant reminder of the play that began it all in the drama field for Stevenson - Deacon Brodie. In October 1933, a correspondent wrote to the Editor of the New York Sun mentioning that 'the movie people might have overlooked a good bet' in it as it 'might make a good screen success'.

It is an ironic note on which to finish, but then what was not ironic about Stevenson's success in a medium he could never have dreamed of - even with the help of his 'brownies'. But perhaps he did - and in his mind's eye that fateful night in Bournemouth he did not have a nightmare about Jekyll and Hyde but rather - he saw the film?

While walking in Beverley Hills, the present writer saw a shop-sign on the corner of Melrose and Bel Air Boulevards which announced:

'We don't stop playing with toys because we grow old.

We grow old because we stop playing with toys.'

Toy theatres perhaps - or cinemas? It does not matter which, they are the same dream, which might be summed up as Mr Skelt goes to Hollywood.

"Deacon Brodie"

A Play of the Eighties That Might Have Been Revived.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE SUN.—Sir: At a special matinee on Thursday, May 5, 1887, there was presented at Wallack's Theater at Thirtieth street and Broadway a play which, if the vogue for melodrama keeps up, may possibly again see the light of day. It would seem as if the movie people had overlooked a good bet, for the play of "Deacon Brodie," to which I refer, might have its original faults ironed out and make a good screen success and on the stage too, for that matter. The piece was supposed to be the work of Robert Louis Stevenson and William Ernest Henley, close friends at one time. The play was announced on the program: For the first time in America, of a new original Melodrama in four Acts and eight Tableaux, founded on facts, by Robert Louis Stevenson and William Ernest Henley, entitled "Deacon Brodie, or the Double Life."

The synopsis of the play which followed sounds much like the old-time drama of the Bowery. "Act I, Tableau 1. An Apparition. Tableau 2, Hunt the Runner. Tableau 3, Mother Clarke's. Act II, Tableau 4, Evil and Good. Act III, Tableau 5, King's Evidence. Tableau 6, Unmasked. Act IV, Tableau 7, The Robbery. Act V, Tableau 8, The Open Door." The cast of characters contained the names of E. J. Henley, who enacted the leading rôle of Deacon William Brodie, Master Carpenter and House Breaker; Walter Leslie, played by Eben Plympton, in love with Mary; the members of the Deacon's gang, excellently portrayed by Charles Groves, Charles Coote and F. Mackay. Other male characters were portrayed by Messrs. Everett, Martin A. Bow, Street runner; Patten, a highwayman, and Messrs. Pops and Lewis. The women's rôles were essayed by Miss Carrie Coote, who was billed as the Deacon's Mistress; Florence Eber as a servant, and Ella Chuder as Mother Clarke. Miss Annie Robt, leading lady of Wallack's, appeared as Mary Brodie, the Deacon's sister. "Vagabonds, Officers of the Watch and Maid Servants" helped along the play. The scene of the drama was laid in Edinburgh toward the close of the eighteenth century. The action of the story was supposed to take place within the limits of fifty hours, beginning at 8 P. M. on a Saturday and ending at midnight on Monday. I believe this was the only performance of the play given, and as usual with every play, opinions were divided as to its merits. George Tyler once talked of reviving it.

It was in looking up some of the characters assumed by the late De Wolf Hopper at Wallack's that the play came to mind. It also recalled that it was in the week that the career of the Wallack Stock Company came to an end at this house. In the company at that time were Harry Edwards, Creston Clarke, Kyrie Rellow, Herbert Kelsey, Charles Groves and John Gilbert. Other members were Mma. Ponist, Helen Russell and Annie Robt. On May 9 the McCaull Opera Comique Company presented "The Black Hussar." The company's names as printed on the house bill read: Mathilda Cottrelly, Marlon Manolo, Cella Ellis, Josie Knapp, Harry Standish, Hubert Wilkie, De Wolf Hopper, Edwin W. Hoff, J. De Angelis, Carl Irving. The following season Mr. Wallack's name disappeared from the program of Wallack's as manager, although it remained for a short time as proprietor. His name as manager had been upon the bills of Wallack's since the day in 1862 when he succeeded his father as director of Wallack's Theater at Thirtieth street.

CHARLES BURNHAM.
Winton, Mass. October 10.

Oct. 12, 1933 - [UNRECORDED]

9

RADIO

Section C

'Sans eyes'

A talk about Stevenson by Arthur Bouchier on January 27 1924 was the first programme about him to be heard on the wireless. Stevenson at Samoa was one of the first in the series, 'Workshops of Famous Men' presented by Caroline Buchan from the 2LO station in London on 2 November of the same year, to be followed on 15 October 1925 by a programme on the poetry of Stevenson and Henley. Thus it can be seen that Stevenson was present at the very beginning of broadcasting, even before the BBC was formally chartered as the international institution it now is. He has been regularly heard ever since either in commentaries about this life and work or in direct relays of his short stories. Markheim, for instance, was used as a reading for experimental radio work at Daventry in 1928 and 1930 and was broadcast again in 1943 and 1971. Tom Wright's dramatised version was broadcast from Radio Scotland in 1976 in a 'Thirty Minute Theatre' production by Gordon Emslie and featuring Tom Watson, Malcolm Hayes and Martin Heller in the cast. In the transcription information it was marked as being 'Suitable for Christmas'. Stevenson's short stories in fact have been almost a staple diet on radio as they lend themselves particularly well to the medium. Once again, it is the value of the human voice in reading the tales aloud that is confirmed. There is a relish in the word and phrase, particularly in his own Scottish idiom which lends itself happily to the microphone.

John Laurie read Treasure Island in 1945, Joseph Macleod read Travels with a Donkey in 1948 and in 1954 Laurence Olivier presented four Stevenson programmes on air - Markheim (9 Feb), Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (9 March), The Suicide Club (6 April) and The Sire De Maletriot's Door (11 May). Just about everything he ever wrote was utilised in every kind of broadcast programme from this time until the time of writing as the list of broadcast credits in the appropriate appendix will show. John Samson read all of Kidnapped in a version abridged by Elizabeth Bradbury in 1982 and in the following year Andrew Sachs and Douglas Leach combined to read Treasure Island abridged by Donald Bancroft. Samson returned in 1986 to read Catriona, the sequel to Kidnapped in fourteen episodes produced by Liz Mardall.

Stevenson readings of this type have become something of a hallmark in BBC broadcasting. Most of the famous titles have been read in more than sixty years of broadcasting. Many listeners have come to Stevenson for the first time through hearing his work on the air. This is a service where the medium can do the writer proud and it does it splendidly as his long list of broadcasting credits shows.

The new literacy is held to be visual but there is a place yet for the sound of good words well spoken and that is what we have when Stevenson is given to actors on radio. Aspects of Stevenson have been treated in the documentary mode and his political activities for instance were dealt with by Eric Ewans in his The Ivory Lighthouse or 'Robert Louis Stevenson and the Samoan Imbroglia' which was broadcast on the BBC Third programme on Sunday 29 June 1956. Moultrie R. Kelsall (who gave the Braemar Lecture on Stevenson in 1950) played R.L.S. and Natalie Lynn was Fanny. Stevenson lends himself easily to this biographical format, given his voluminous and colourful correspondence.

In 1979, Robert Louis Stevenson in the South Seas was a programme about the last years of the writer in the Pacific Islands. The script was compiled from his many letters and from the diary kept by his wife by June Knox Mawer and read by Robert Trotter as R.L.S., Margaret Robertson as Fanny and Robert Sheedy as the American historian, Henry Adams. The production was by Christopher Venning. For the most part, however, it has been in the adaptation of the main books as scripted serials that the main broadcasting focus has been, particularly in the Children's Programmes over the last fifty years. They were lucky, those children, like the writer of this thesis, who grew up in Scotland hearing all the great stories acted out into our eager ears before bedtime. We felt as the household at Vailima must have done as the author himself read out his day's work after dinner to all those seated around the verandah as the sun went down. With nothing to interfere with the imaginative reception of the word itself, the pictures spring instantly into the mind and the action unfolds before our eyes. Stevenson comes into his own when engaged directly like this and there is no more direct performer-audience engagement than in broadcasting. These broadcasts in turn spark off other memories in listeners, either of previous broadcasts of Stevenson or of seeing one of the films or of witnessing an adaptation in the theatre.

For the most part, however, people remember Stevenson from their childhood reading. It is this nostalgia that is often triggered off in being re-acquainted with any of his stories. For instance, when E.M.Delafield's adaptation of Treasure Island was broadcast on the National Programme on Wednesday 6 May 1936, Walter Rault wrote in the Radio Times:

'Seeing Arthur Bouchier as Long John Silver in his yearly free matinee to poor children on Christmas Eve, I never sat in so tense a house. When Israel Hands was crawling up behind Jim, with the long knife in his hand, the auditorium rang with frantic shouts of "Look be'ind yer, Jim!" (It was written for boys and boys love it.) But it was a good show for anybody of any age, though out of consideration for the nerves of the audience, Stevenson (or his adapters) made them rather too much figures of fun. They made no such mistake in the (1934) film. Wallace Beery, in the part of his lifetime as Long John had that terrifying quality that Stevenson took such pains to emphasise. I hope the broadcast will have it too.'

The broadcast was relayed on Wednesday 6 May with a repeat the next day on the Regional Programme. Cyril Wood was the producer and Baliol Holloway played Long John Silver. In the manner of the day, the characters were listed in order of appearance on air and the actors listed as an inclusive company. Apart from Long John Silver, there was no listed apportioning of parts as happens today. The play was illustrated in the Radio Times by a still from the 1934 MGM film featuring Wallace Beery and Freddie Bartholemew. It is difficult to think of such a thing happening today, and if it did, it would no doubt be at a hefty price. Even broadcasting has lost its innocence.

The first dramatised Stevenson programme came from the Scottish Regional station in 1931 and perhaps that is as it should be. It was an adaptation by James Macgregor of The Master of Ballantrae as a serial under the title of The Duries of Durrisdeer. Admiral Guinea followed next in the National programme on 7 March 1932, again produced by Cyril Wood, and was one of the earliest plays ever broadcast. Appropriately, for a work that involved William Henley, it came from the West Regional service operating from Bristol. Focusing as it does on the literal blindness of one of its main characters (Pew) it lends itself ideally to the 'sightless' medium of radio. The listener is free to concentrate on the terror of the situation itself in a manner even more effective than on stage or on screen. We can hear their very breathing...

Admiral Guinea was probably better served in the studio than on stage as has been suggested previously. (The play was re-produced on the Home service on 15 February 1956.) There was a plethora of special Stevenson programmes during the Centenary Year of 1950 including a reading of The Bottle Imp as 'Book at Bedtime' and Stevenson appreciations by G.B.Stern, John Connell, Richard Hughes and Miss L.F.Ramsay. A new play on Stevenson was presented on the Home Service on 9 November called The Man Who Gave Away His Birthday treating with the charming deed of transfer involving R.L.S. and young Annie Ide in 1891. Other 1950 transmissions included Kidnapped (BBC Scotland), The Master of Ballantrae (BBC Scotland Serial (which was also done by CBC in Canada), The Strange Case of Dr.Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (Home Service), The Beach of Falesa and Thrawn Janet (both BBC Scotland).

As indicated earlier, Children's Hour was a favourite recourse for Stevenson adapters and one can remember Kidnapped in 1953, repeated again in 1968), The Master of Ballantrae (1954), and Treasure Island (1956) as being among the more memorable Stevenson moments of the past. Children now as then would lend ears to any of these broadcasts. At the very time of writing, Radio New Zealand is transmitting Treasure Island on its Children's programme 'EARS', which only goes to show that the appeal of the tales can never be dated. Nor can radio, or the wireless as it was once called, ever be anything other than up-to-date. Nor can it be confined or proscribed. It has no theatrical proscenium arch nor a limiting frame to a camera shot, its horizons are boundless. For once anything is said, its sound goes on and on through the airwaves and into infinity. If sound cannot be stopped where does it end? Is every sound that ever was uttered still sounding yet at the very edge of the universe? If so, among that vast multiplicity of accrued sound could a rollicking voice be chanting into eternity -

'Fifteen men on the dead mans chest, Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!?' It is a sobering thought.

In sound waves all round the world the famous tales are virtually in constant use in adaptation by the Radio Drama departments of Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. In what is termed Week 28 of the BBC's working year of 1990, Martin Jenkins directed a version in three parts of Treasure Island scripted by John Scotney and featuring Peter Jeffrey as Long John Silver. The Listener for that week commented:

'This was a red-blooded, loud, rumbustious account of Stevenson's classic yarn, with Peter Jeffrey thoroughly enjoying himself as Long John Silver, Hugh Paddick bringing a whiff of Round the Horn to Ben Gunn and John Moffat making a splendidly over-ripe Squire Trelawney... Wally K. Daly as the parrot 'Captain Flint' surely achieved his finest hour.'

The BBC transcription information continues:

'This resilient tale of derring-do, of pirates and of hiddenn treasure, has enjoyed many adaptations on stage, screen and airwaves (and) this radio dramatisation ensures that nothing of the fun and excitement of the original is lost. Flint's treasure! The Black Spot! Pieces of Eight! These are only a few of the magic ingredients of this rollicking adventure story.'

The cast was a strong one and was evidence of the BBC's intention not to stint on the acting quality even if it were only for a Stevenson 'adventure story'. The publicity carries a half-page picture of Peter Jeffrey as Silver complete with tricorne hat, bandana, wearing 18th-century jabot and lace cuffs - and with a parrot on his shoulder.

Mention has already been made of the link with Long John Silver and Henley and of how this was acknowledged in Jonathan Smith's play 1989 Edinburgh Festival play Silver. This was first recorded in Bristol for the BBC in October 1988 with Bill Paterson as Stevenson and John Franklyn-Robbins as Henley in a production directed by Shaun MacLoughlan. The following is a brief extract from the broadcast script. On page 39, Henley is speaking 'internally':

W.E.H. I barely had time to sit down and look back at the old grey city and the stony streets. I scarce had a moment to think of the Hospital, half-workhouse, half-jail, where fifteen months I had been and where every day Life and Death meet. because Lewis was...riotous.

R.L.S. The wild prince and Poins, eh?...
(train effect)
I give you, William Ernest Henley. Poet.

W.E.H. And playwright.

R.L.S. Playwright?

W.E.H. Are you deaf?

R.L.S. That's the hardest path to climb, Will.
You realize that, don't you?

W.E.H. Wait till you've heard the idea I've got for us...
if it don't grab you by the goolies, call me sot.

R.L.S. Grab me. Go on.

W.E.H. Sober law-abiding citizen by day...but at night he climbs out of his bedroom window...and meets whores...and riff-raff in low stews. A man with dark reaches in his soul.

R.L.S. Deacon Brodie!

W.E.H. With Mr. Henry Irving as Deacon! And here, for your perusal, (slams down paper) is the plot of our play. (train effect)

Jonathan Smith is a Henley man and makes no attempt to hide the fact.

R.L.S. I love you, Henley, from my soul. (drinks)
You're a genius, and I'm a genius.

W.E.H. A genius?

R.L.S. When I see a man, Henley, who does not think pretty well of himself, I always suspect him of being in the right.
(They laugh)
(Train fades...with R.L.S. repeating in rhythm -
Suc-cess - suc-cess - suc-cess...)

Scene 27 on page 55 has another rumbustious recitation:

W.E.H. Madame Life's a piece in bloom,
R.L.S. Death goes dogging everywhere,
W.E.H. She's the tenant of the room,
R.L.S. He's the ruffian on the stair.

But in its final moments, the mood has changed and on page 84, Henley, exhausted, pours a drink. One feels the depth of his pain:

W.E.H. Friends...old friends
One sees how it ends:
A woman looks 3
Or a man lies...

The effect on radio of these lines in the hands of two good actors is searing because, owing to the very special dynamic of sound and silence that good radio acting conveys, what is not said is just as vital.

Canadian broadcasting has long known this and has always shown a strong interest in R.L.S. as a dramatic base both on radio and later on television. We must remember that Edward Henley's North American tour with Deacon Brodie in 1887 began at Montreal. CBC's Canadian National Theatre of the Air featured many of the known titles between 1925 and 1986 and some of the lesser-known adaptations such as - The Murder in the Pawn Shop, The New Arabian Nights, The Pavilion on Links, The Body Snatcher and The Christmas Adventures of John Nicholson etc. Bearing in mind the vast extent of Canadian territory one can see why theirs is one of the finest broadcasting systems in the world - it has such a wide spread of audience. The radio is often their only point of contact with the outside world of affairs and the inside world of the imagination. For many, radio is still preferable to television. It provides better pictures. As listeners we can 'see' what we want to see, the characters are exactly as we would like them - no villain could be as villanous, no hero more heroic, no heroine more beautiful than in our mind's eye. If we have the imagination, we can see anything.

That is the essential and the continuing appeal of broadcasting and why it survives as a dramatic medium right into our own technological today. It is derisively termed 'steam radio' by those insensible to its vast aesthetic possibilities, but its detractors will run out of steam long before it does. Oral to aural is a basic communicative need that is greater than cybernetics. It fulfils a mythic requirement by offering a little magic in a sadly rational world. We need to escape into the mind from time to time before we go out of our mind. We find such release in all great art, in music and in the sight of extraordinary physical phenomena, but we can find it most in the sound of the voice, especially in story-telling.

Radio recognises its own evocative power. One has only to remember Orson Welles's famous War of the Worlds broadcast from CBS/New York at 8pm on 30 October 1939 to realize that if sound broadcasting does anything, it has the power to evoke a complete reality. More than that, it can suggest actuality as the scenes of panic in New Jersey following the Welles performance testified. Not every broadcast has the impact of The War of the Worlds but there will always be a need for radio as long as people require the sound of the spoken word, and in the company of the spoken wordmongers, Robert Louis Stevenson is surely worth a place beside Orson Welles.

Apropos Mr Welles, it may also be mentioned that the first radio script chosen by Orson Welles and John Houseman for their famous radio series sponsored by Campbell Soups, was in fact, Treasure Island, in which Welles would play Silver. At the last moment, however, it was replaced by Bram Stoker's Dracula. Stoker was Henry Irving's manager and Welles liked everything associated with Irving. Not for the first time, an Irving cloud passed across the Stevenson sun.

The Edinburgh Evening News for Saturday 5 November 1932 announced:

'The broadcast disputes under the title "Attack and Defence" have succeeded in providing many controversial subjects on the microphone. Listeneres may remember these disputes take the form of two speeches on a particular subject. There is ten minutes of attack by one speaker, followed by ten minutes of equally defiant defence by another. The next subject chosen for dispute is the overrating of Robert Louis Stevenson. The attacker of the literary reputation of Stevenson is Dr W. Mackay Mackenzie, defender, Mr Moray McLaren. Even in his native city of Edinburgh literary fashion has turned in some quarters against Stevenson. Still, there are plenty of people who would defend him...'

The result of the ensuing debate is not known but it should be mentioned that the same Moray McLaren would in 1950 write his Centenary Study - Stevenson and Edinburgh for Chapman and Hall, London. It was also in 1950 that another radio link to Stevenson was made on the other side of the world when Arthur Seed talked of his father's association with the author on Radio 2ZB, Wellington, New Zealand. It will be remembered that the father, William Seed, on a visit to Edinburgh in 1875, was the first to put the idea of the South Pacific into Stevenson's head. The following are extracts from the broadcast talk:

'We are connected to the Stevenson family by the fact that my elder sister married a first cousin of R.L.Stevenson...

My father, after that event, visited Scotland and stayed with the elder Stevenson to discuss the question of lighthouses necessary to light the New Zealand coast...

After that my father met Stevenson, to my knowledge, only on two occasions, when Stevenson was passing through Auckland from Vailima to Sydney to consult his business principals and doctor...

They were casual visits as far as I know, other than that my father considered it so worth-while to see Stevenson again that he journeyed from Wellington to Auckland...in the very difficult travel facilities...

When R.L.Stevenson's ward and step-grandson, Austin Strong, came down to Wellington after Stevenson's death to live with our family and go to school with me, he brought a number of relics from Stevenson and later his mother came to stay with the family and gave me a flageolet, a plaid and a velvet jacket which I have treasured ever since as very valued relics...'⁴

This might be considered a typical New Zealand understatement on Arthur Seed's part. Arthur Seed and Austin Strong became great friends as schoolboys in Wellington and Strong took a hand in the design and layout of Cornwall Park in Auckland before returning to America to become a playwright. Before concluding the subject of New Zealand broadcasting it is of some note to record that Kenneth Melvin broadcast from the same radio station during the period 1950/55 a series of original stories which he read on 1ZB Auckland under the name of 'Tusitala'. How fitting that stories intended for listeners in the South Pacific should go out under the soubriquet of one who achieved immortality under that name almost one hundred years ago.

At the time of writing, the Concert Programme of New Zealand Radio plan to produce a commemorative programme in 1994 entitled A Scotch Tusitala to be scripted by the present writer and will concentrate on his South Pacific Years.

Finally, in this broadcasting context, mention must be made again of the innumerable Stevenson-related programmes over the past 70 years or so that were about Stevenson as opposed to programmes of his work or based on his life. Two examples have already been given but in this category there are too many to list - anthologies, documentaries, poetry recitals, excerpts from the letters, discussions about him as an essayist, novelist, poet, island politician and Scotsman - though never so far, any discussion of his place as a dramatist. Stevenson programming of this kind regularly peppers the radio schedules from Anstruther to Auckland and from Edinburgh to Monterey.

It seems a fitting way to remember a writer who belonged to both ends of the earth, whose life spanned two hemispheres and whose work now belongs to the world. Thanks to the radio microphone he is in the very air about us.

WEDNESDAY

National Programme

MAY

Continued from
previous pageDROITWICH
200 kc/s 1,500 m.LONDON
1,149 kc/s 261.1 m.WEST
1,149 kc/s 261.1 m.NORTH
1,149 kc/s 261.1 m.

ORCHESTRA
Symphonic Variations for Pianoforte
and Orchestra *Frank*
(Soloist, LILIAN NIBLETTE)
Idyll for Flute and Strings, The Water-
Lily Pool *Susan Spair-Dunk*
(Soloist, R. I. BODDINGTON)

PATRICK COLBERT
The Air Pilot *Garratt*
That's why Darkies were born
..... *Henderson*
Cart-load of Hay *Emmett Adams*
ORCHESTRA
Melodies from Paganini
..... *Léhar, arr. Kopriva*

LILIAN NIBLETTE
Rhapsody No. 12 *Liszt*
ORCHESTRA
L'Action (Scènes de Ballet)
..... *Glazunov*
Largo *Nepravnik*

4.45 THE JOHN
MACARTHUR QUINTET
Directed by JOHN MACARTHUR
Invocation
Dance of a Whim- (A Day in
sical Elf Fairyland)
A Dream Fairy *Haydn Wood*
I feel like a feather in the breeze *Revel*
Serenata amorosa *Becca*
A little rendezvous in Honolulu *Barke*
Humsti-Bumsti (In the Circus)
Galop *Armandola*
(From Glasgow)

5.15 THE B B C
DANCE ORCHESTRA
Directed by HENRY HALL

6.0 Time Signal, Greenwich
THE FIRST NEWS
including Weather Forecast and Bulletin
for Farmers

6.25 Interlude

6.30 The Foundations of Music

Beethoven
Early Chamber Music
played by
JOSEPH SLATER (flute)
GILBERT VINTER (bassoon)
REGINALD PAUL (pianoforte)
Trio in G for Pianoforte, Flute, and
Bassoon
1. Allegro; 2. Adagio; 3. Theme
(andante) con variazioni

6.50 London Scenes—4
Hyde Park
CLOUGH WILLIAMS-ELLIS

To the Londoner the thought of Hyde
Park conjures up a succession of
colourful scenes: the Row with its
riders of all ages and degrees of skill;
the sun gleaming on the Serpentine, its
surface ruffled by ducks. Lido bathers,
and rowing-boats: the drone of traffic;
nursemaids and children and barking
dogs and down-and-outs: music from
the bandstand punctuated by the
'ping' of ticket-collectors' punches.
Clough Williams-Ellis, a well-known
architect, will give his impressions of
these scenes, and lively impressions

they are, too. He will talk about
everything that has to do with the Park,
from the historical seizure of the grounds
of Westminster Abbey by Henry VII
to the present-day problems of upkeep
and organisation.

7.5 For Farmers Only
'Timber on the Farm'

J. A. SCOTT WATSON (Professor of Rural
Economy, University of Oxford) and
R. C. B. GARDNER

7.25 Interval

7.30 THE ALFREDO CAMPOLI
TRIO
Serenade Music

8.0 'Treasure Island'
by

Robert Louis Stevenson
Adapted as a Radio Play by
E. M. DELAFIELD
with BALIOL HOLLOWAY as Long John
Silver

The chief characters are
'Captain' Billy Bones, an old Bucca-
neer
Hawkins, landlord of the Admiral Ben-
bow Inn
Mrs. Hawkins, his wife
Jim Hawkins, his son
Dr. Livesey
'Black Dog' } old Buccaneers
Blind Pew }
Squire Trelawney }

Tom Redruth, his gamekeeper
Captain Smollett, Captain of
'Hispaniola'
Long John Silver, cook
Ben Gunn, a castaway

The Cast includes
GORDON BOYD, HEDLEY GOODA
H. PERCY HEARD, L. M. JOHNS
TOM JONES, BARRY KENDALL, I.
MADDOX, WARD R. PARKES, JER-
REED, CYRIL ROBERTS, JACK SANDI,
CONRAD VOSS BARK, FRANCIS W.
G. A. WIDMANN, GLYNNE WILLIAMS

The action takes place at the Admi-
ral Benbow Inn; at Squire Trelawney
house, at Bristol; on board
'Hispaniola'; and on Treasure Island

Production by CYRIL WOOD
(From Bristol)
'Treasure Island' will be broad-
cast again tomorrow at 8.0 in the Regio-
programme
(See the article on page 7)

9.30 Time Signal, Greenwich
THE SECOND NEWS
including Weather Forecast and
Forecast for Shipping

10.0 THE B B C
THEATRE ORCHESTRA
Leader, MONTAGUE BREARLEY
Conducted by
MARK H. LUBBOCK
MARGARET LAUDER (soprano)
ORCHESTRA
March, Die Wachtparade kommit (The
German Patrol) Eilenberg, arr. W.
Overture, Poet and Peasant
Suppé, arr. B.

MARGARET LAUDER AND ORCHESTRA
I shall be calling to you *Rede*

ORCHESTRA
Waltz, Venus on Earth *Lind*
Suite, Four Selected Pieces
Friml, arr. Long
1. Mignonette; 2. Chant
paroles; 3. La danse des demoiselles
4. Egyptian Dance

MARGARET LAUDER
Coming Home *Willb*
Red lips unknissed } A Kiss in Spain
The world laughs on } *Kalm*

ORCHESTRA
Pot-pourri, Aus der Zeit der jungen
Liebe (Youthful Love) arr. Komze

MARGARET LAUDER AND ORCHESTRA
Only a rose (The Vagabond King)
Friml

ORCHESTRA
Prelude and Three Dances (Young
England) *Clusam and B*
Prelude; 1. Hornpipe and Country
Dance; 2. The Mermaid Dance
3. Jig
Selection, Oh Kay! Gershwin, arr. Hig
March, Charge of the Hussars
Müllöcker, arr. Bauckner

11.15 LOU PREAGER
AND HIS BAND

Time Signal, Greenwich, at 11.30

11.30-12.0 Gramophone Records of
Dance Music

(The Picture-goer)

'TREASURE ISLAND'. Robert Louis Stevenson's classic adventure story, adapted for radio by E. M. Delafield, will be broadcast tonight at 8.0. This still from the film shows the buccaneers' raid on the Admiral Benbow inn in search of the clue to Flint's buried treasure.

RECORDING

The Spoken Arts and Caedmon Recording companies have been to the fore in recording Stevenson and versions of the favourites, Kidnapped, Treasure Island and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (with Anthony Quayle) have been put on disc in recent years in various abridged adaptations and excerpts. Markheim is also in the list.

George Rose narrated the life and works in a long-playing record written and edited by Murray Brown in 1974. Marianne Mantell produced for Caedmon in an American recording. Murray Brown threads his selection from the poems and stories through the main chronology of the life - where, as he says in the sleeve notes, he sees Stevensons moving - 'forever forward...with an unbroken courage:

'My undissuaded heart I hear
Whisper courage in my ear
With voiceless calls, the ancient earth
Summons me to a daily birth.'

The most successful Stevenson product as far as sound values are concerned was his quickly thrown-off A Child's Garden of Verses (1885), which easily heads the list of the many sound recordings made of this charming Stevenson work. They were written quickly on a sudden whim but now these brief little verses for children can be spoken and captured on tape for the benefit and enjoyment of the listener of any age. The appeal of these charming rhymes is timeless and as long as there are children there will be an audience for their kind of artless enchantment. The present writer was happy to make a small professional contribution in this area with the R.E.L. Company in Edinburgh in 1986 when he and Alannah O'Sullivan made a cassette recording, with music, of A Child's Garden of Verses.²

STN K Y 10/1/1
MR. JOHN CAIRNEY.
("JAMES")

REHEARSAL SCRIPT.

"THE MASTER OF BALLANTRAE"

(1)

BY

R. L. STEVENSON

Dramatised for Television

by

Constance Cox.

PRODUCED BY PHARIC MACLAREN

PART ONE.

CAST:

Lord Durrisdeer.
Alison Graeme
Henry Durie
James Durie
John Paul.
Tam Macmorland.
Ma connochie
Landlord
Jessie Brown.
1st Man at Inn
2nd Man at Inn
Maggie Gibson.
Extras at Inn.

SETS:

- 1: INT. GREAT HALL, DURRISDEER.
- 2: INT, EXT: FRONT DOOR & HALL, DURRISDEER.
- 3: INT. ALISON'S ROOM.
- 4: INT. ROOM AT INN.
- 5: INT. CORNER OF KITCHEN, DURRISDEER.

TELECINE:

VIEW OF SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS.
THE HOUSE OF DURRISDEER.
A MAN RIDING TOWARDS THE HOUSE.

PROVISIONAL DATES - ALL TO BE CONFIRMED:-

Rehearsals: Kelvinside Church Hall, Glasgow.

Monday, 26th March, to Friday, 30th March, 1962: 10.00AM - 5.00PM

Camera Rehearsal & Taping: Springfield Road Studio, Glasgow:

Saturday, 31st March, 1962. 10.00AM - 7.00PM

Transmission: TAPING: 8.00PM - 9.00PM.

Sunday, 1st ^{July} April, 1962. National Network. - 5.00PM - 5.30PM

TELEVISION

Section D

'Sans taste'

Television, as it is now, is not to everyone's taste but almost every family in the world has the means of seeing it - a television set. Its constant picture glares gaudily from some corner in nearly every home and it must be said that that was how Stevenson visualised his novels - 'in a series of small, bright, restless pictures'.

'The story, if it be a story, should repeat itself in a thousand coloured pictures to the eye... There is a vast deal in life... where the interest turns... not on the passionate slips and hesitations of the conscience, but on the problems of the body and of the practical intelligence, in clean, open-air adventure, the shock of arms or the diplomacy of life. With such material as this it is impossible to build a play, for the serious theatre exists solely on moral grounds, and is a standing proof of the dissemination of the human conscience. But it is possible to build, upon this ground... the most lively, beautiful and buoyant tales.'

'Bright, restless pictures' - A thousand coloured pictures to the eye' - He might have been talking about television today.

Stevenson has been described by critics as a miniaturist and he is certainly master of the fine effect, the telling detail, the slight allusion that tells all, the subtle phrase that can encapsulate a whole character. This is the hallmark of a writer who has found his own style and is comfortable with it. He can then work easily within it and unforcedly gain all his desired effects. Stevenson did just this and as a result offers the television screen a product that might have been made for it. The present writer had the pleasure of playing The Master of Ballantrae for BBC Television in a serial version in 1962 and remembers the delight it was in taking up the script of each episode (adapted by Constance Cox) and admiring the skill Stevenson showed, not only in maintaining tension and suspense but how he provided, it seemed, natural end scenes for each episode. The final scene, mentioned earlier by Clayton Hamilton, was as if it had been made for television it lent itself so easily to the cameras. It is of course work of skill on the part of the adapter (in this case, Constance Cox) but the adapter's work would be futile had not the possibilities been there in the original. It is extraordinary how a Victorian should be able to speak to us so clearly via today's media.

The value of the narrative voice in the first person, so difficult to achieve in any film medium, the bonus of credible character vignettes, the literary quality of the dialogue exchange, these are all plus factors in adapting any work for the smaller screen. The special intimacy of a one-to-one relationship with the viewer in his armchair virtually equates with the privacy of the reader in his armchair. This requires a finer shading in the treatment, a more direct and personal approach. It is in a sense a private performance for one person as opposed to the public performance for many which the theatre or cinema presentation entails. The suspension of disbelief required by an audience in the theatre is a tacit pact on the part of an assembled gathering to pretend that what they see happening before them is real and is actually happening at the very time of action. This is harder to realise on television when, at any time the telephone may ring or the doorbell sound, and it says much for the quality of Stevenson's stories on the small screen, and their level of adaptation, that they are able to keep the viewer in his armchair. A ring of the doorbell was what let Stevenson into many homes before the television screen did so. Door-to-door salesmen in the United States at the end of the last century sold pirated editions of Stevenson's Works to householders on the doorstep. There was in fact, in 1906, an edition published known as The Household Edition.

It was only a matter of a few steps and some forty years between The Household Edition and the mandatory household appliance that the ubiquitous television set has now become. In many ways, due to its endless wash of daily 'soaps', it has replaced the shilling novel in terms of popular story-telling and in equally numerous ways it has also usurped the cinema as an accessible medium of mass entertainment. All of which makes little difference to Stevenson's continuing ability, albeit by proxy, to find an audience. Indeed, like many other Victorian writers, Galsworthy, Wilde, even his friend Henry James, Stevenson has known something of a renaissance recently due to his narrative adaptability for the smaller screen. This is in part due to the common fastidiousness in their writing styles coupled with a broad sweep of action. There is also a general nostalgia for a period they represent. It is, however, by means of a modern electronic device like television that a new audience of millions may now enjoy Robert Louis Stevenson.

Increasingly today, films are specifically made for television and with the advent of pre-recording by the 1950s, the medium became more of a cinema in miniature than the photographed live theatre it had been until that time. Production methods changed entirely with the new processes but as in all the performing media, everything started with a script or a source for a script, and in that respect Robert Louis Stevenson was a virtual gold-mine. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation was the first to work this seam and it produced adaptations of Treasure Island (inevitably) and Kidnapped in 1947 and 1949 respectively. CBC (Canada) was also responsible for The Master of Ballantrae (1950), The Bottle Imp (1954), Markheim (1974) and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1968). Writer, Andrew Allan, was the adapter for the first three titles. Richard Denis did likewise for The Bottle Imp and Alfred Harris for Markheim. John Drainie, Alan King, Frank Peddie, Don Harron, Mavor Moore and Lloyd Bochner were among the actors involved, Sydney Newman and David Greene were the producers and Bruce Armstrong and Arthur Hiller were the directors. No credits were made available for Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Sydney Newman was later to become Director of Drama for Granada Television and was highly influential in developing television technique generally - but he made his start with Stevenson.

So too, it would seem, did the main television networks in the United States. As early as 21 January 1949 a version of The Sire de Maletroit's Door was shown on Your Show Time which also featured The Treasure of Franchard a few months later. In addition, a version of A Lodging for the Night was transmitted on the same slot in July of that same year with Stanley Waxman as Francois Villon. However, as usual, it was Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde that led the way on the smaller screen with no less than eight productions between 1949 and 1981. It began with Ralph Bell in the leading role on Suspense and continued with Basil Rathbone (Suspense 1951), Michael Rennie (Climax 1955), Douglass Montgomery (Matinee Theatre 1957), Jack Palance (ABC Special 1968), a Lionel Bart musical version with Kirk Douglas (NBC Special 1973) and David Jennings (Mystery Theatre 1981) in an adaptation by Gerald Savory - who will be remembered as Simpson in the 1933 stage play Tusitala at Hull. (See Page 308) Tusitala was also the name of the Four Star Playhouse production in 1955 which featured Scots-born David Niven as Stevenson, a felicitous piece of casting.

When one adds the productions of 'the shilling shocker' in Canada and Britain one can see that the famous tale still holds its audience. Inevitably it had its unlikely derivatives such as an animated version with Mr Magoo (Jim Backus) as both voices in 1964 but for the most part the adapters served Stevenson well. Further, the attraction of the dual role makes the part vie with Long John Silver as the actors' most popular Stevenson part. In 1978, CBS produced an hour-long special, The Incredible Hulk based on the Marvel comic strip which featured a super hero obviously based on the original Stevenson idea. In this case, Dr Banner accidentally exposed himself to gamma rays and, as a result, when angry, turns into an incredible hulk. Two actors were used here. This CBS special proved very popular and spawned a series of the same name which ran for years. In recent years, such are the cut-throat demands of the sponsor and the incongruous subservience of all concerned to the organised myth of the ratings, there is less call for the stylist or the teller of leisurely tales, but Stevenson still finds a place.

Treasure Island comes next in popularity with eleven adaptations (this includes two serial versions with Robert Newton as already mentioned in the previous Section B) and a television film showing of the 1949 Walt Disney feature film again with Newton as Long John Silver. The first to be screened, however, was a somewhat limited anonymous adaptation featuring Francis L. Sullivan as Long John Silver and Albert Dekker as Billy Bones with an Irish accent. Fortunately the worse actors are killed off quickly, although it must have the worst sabre fight ever televised. This was pure Skelt. There is a heavy use of voice-over and sound effect to compensate for the low-quality visuals. This version is on view at the Museum of Television and Radio.* This comes complete with a built-in commercial for Westinghouse Refrigerators by Betty Furness.

The Museum also has in its archives a copy of Markheim starring Franchot Tone which was adapted by Halsted Welles as a thirty-minute playlet for Electric Auto-Life's 'Suspense' series on 28 October 1952 with the appropriate title All Hallow's Eve. It was directed by Robert Mulligan and the cast included, as an urchin, Douglas Jay, who later became a prominent British politician.

* The Museum of Television and Radio, 25 West 52nd. St. New York, N.Y.

Kidnapped completes the usual top Stevenson triumverate with nine television adaptations including an animated version for Classic Tales on CBS and a cartoon version from New Zealand Television in 1975. More recent American television efforts include St.Ives and In Praise of Older Women for Cable Television in 1993, so it can be seen that Robert Louis Stevenson is alive and well and living on in one form or another by virtue of the cathode ray tube.

The BBC entered the television lists in November 1950 with their Dr.Jekyll and Mr.Hyde which was re-produced in 1972 and 1980. In addition to the standard Treasure Island (1957, 1968 and 1977), Kidnapped (1968 and 1980) and The Master of Ballantrae (1962 and 1975), BBC television has also attempted the lesser-known works such as The Sire de Maletroit's Door in 1951, Markheim (1952 and 1970), St.Ives (1955), Weir of Hermiston (1973) and The Silverado Squatters in 1977. The last-named was a production from BBC Scotland.

As indeed was Weir of Hermiston which was serialised in four parts from 15 February 1973 and it followed immediately upon the serialisation by the BBC of Tolstoy's War and Peace. For one unfinished work by a sickly Scottish exile to follow hard on the heels of one of the greatest 19th-century Russian novels speaks well both for Stevenson and the technical standard of television broadcasting set by producer, Pharic McLaren, and his team at the Broadcasting Studios in Glasgow. As mentioned, Tom Fleming had played Weir in R.J.B. Sellar's stage version when it was presented at the Gateway Theatre, Edinburgh, during the 1958-59 season and he repeated the role for television. This part must be considered as one of the greatest creations of Scottish literature - the grim, hanging Judge who is yet a loving father - in his way. Stevenson based Adam Weir on the case-history of the real Robert McQueen, Lord Braxfield, who allowed no humanitarian impulses to deflect him from his duty as a judge and he emerges as a strong character, thoroughly rounded as a human portrait despite his 'Roman' dedication to his legal activities. Fleming seized every acting chance and made the most of them throughout the serial. Archie, the critic-son of the judge-father, was tellingly played by David Rintoul, passionately handsome and an idealist. Kirstie (Virginia Stark) may be regarded as the first really successful heroine created by Stevenson. Her involvement with the villain of the piece, Frank Innes, and her love for

the hero, Archie Weir, wove further strands in a tragedy that seemed to be moving toward a terrible climax when the novel broke off at the Weaver's Stone on the afternoon of the night that Stevenson died. It was finished by other hands. What concerns this present discussion, however, is that the television ending was created by Tom Wright who offered a different solution to that given by R.G.B. Sellar on stage fifteen years earlier. Sellars had Weir come to Frank's cell and die of a heart attack on hearing Frank's confession. This allowed the lovers to go free at the end as Sellar considers Stevenson intended. It was an ending appropriate to a group tableau in the theatre and therefore worked in this case, but television made different demands.

Dr J.T. Low suggests, in his study of the novel, that Hermiston himself was intended to be the central figure at the beginning and at the end, and that the build up to his death, after all the ironical twists of the father-son relationship, would have provided the correct epic ending. This emphasis on Adam Weir would have justified the title (The Justice Clerk) and preserved the tragic unity.

Sydney Colvin stated his opinion:

"The situation and fate of the old judge, confronting like a Brutus, but unable to survive the duty of sending his own son to the gallows, seems clearly to have been destined to furnish the climax and tragedy of the tale."... It is clear that Stevenson was moving towards... a work... that has truth to life, mythic power and tragic vision.¹²

This is a lot to put into a little box in the corner of the sitting-room, but this was television. Adapter, Tom Wright, was quite clear about it:

'My first duty was not to Robert Louis Stevenson, or Robert Louis Stevenson's fans (one of whom I am) or to academics or to anyone else, but to the people who look into the programme.'

When he agreed to write the BBC serial he had no idea how it would end.

'But I did know I wasn't going to finish it the way people thought it was going to finish...'¹³

Wright, nonetheless, recognised the problem that falls to many adapters, in whatever medium, and that is of translating narrative to dialogue but he was happy to give the original author his place.

'The author is a character and keeps guiding you towards his interpretation.'¹⁴

Wright explained his own interpretation to the present writer:

'The problem with adapting Weir of Hermiston (is) not that it is an unfinished book but that it had not reached the middle before it was put aside... (Stevenson) had drafted and redrafted the 50,000 words or so without reaching beyond a third of the story content and the key points in the action have not been reached...

There is a sort of plot which he outlined, but had this satisfied him, he would have certainly finished the novel...

There is a sense of doom in the beginning of Weir that does not prefigure a happy ending...

The central character of the book is not Archie but Weir. Every title proposed for it shows this as did every comment he made on it. Whoever adapts Weir of Hermiston has to find, not only an end, but a middle as well - and to provide Archie with a motive for the murder of Frank Innes. This was to be Frank's seduction of young Kirstie. For me, the best way to chart the course of Stevenson's work on Weir, and to discover where it might legitimately have gone, was to read what he wrote about it:

To Barrie (Nov 1892) - 'Hermiston has a son condemned to death...

And I meant he was to hang. But now on considering my minor characters, I saw there were five people who would - in a sense, who must - break prison and attempt his rescue... Why should not young Hermiston escape clear out of the country - after a real fight - and live happily ever after with - ? But soft, I will not betray my secret or my heroine.'

This was the ending recounted to Colvin by Belle Strong who had taken Stevenson's dictation. She said that Weir too would die in the cell and this was the construction Sellar utilized in the stage play.

Wright comments:

'(My) answer to this is twofold - firstly, as preachers used to say, it is a happy ending; secondly, he has lost his leading character and focused on Archie.

To Colvin (Jan 1893) - 'I have rewritten the First Chapter of the Justice-Clerk...' (and by May 17) 'It's going to be excellent no doubt... The plot is not good but Lord Justice-Clerk promises to be a plum.'

Here he not only echoes my doubts about the plot, but stresses that Weir is the centre of the work.

To Colvin (July 1893) - I have been recasting the beginning of The Hanging Judge or The Justice-Clerk... And again -

To Colvin (Feb 1894) - 'I see I can work in that constipated, mosaic manner which is what I have to do just now with Weir of Hermiston... (and by April) which will either be something different or I have failed.'

On the morning of his last day, according to Lloyd Osbourne, Stevenson judged it - 'the best he had ever written'.

What seems to have been forgotten by every commentator is what Stevenson himself wrote to Baxter on 1 December 1892:

'The heroine is seduced by one man, and finally disappears with the other man who shot him... Certain evidence cropping up, the charge is transferred to the Justice-Clerk's own son. Of course, in the next trial, the Justice-Clerk is excluded, and the case is brought before the Lord Justice-General.'

Wright is aware of this legal nicety and solves it by having Archie injured by a severe blow to the head which causes concussion, so that when he pleads guilty to the charge in chambers he is held to be unfit to plead. But Archie insists on doing so and brings forward old Kirstie as his witness and she confirms what he has said. The result is that Adam Weir then knows, for all the ambiguity of the out-of-court verdict, that his only son will hang...

Wright concludes:

'For all his pretence about not studying, Stevenson passed Advocate 'with credit'. He would have known that Weir could not try his son in any court (but) by combining the trial of Dand with the revelation that Archie was guilty of the murder, I could make two things happen legitimately - the trial of Archie, in which his father takes part, and the tragedy focusing on Weir himself. A tragedy, I felt, more potent than the death of Weir would have been.'

Wright here has made a good point, that the tragedy is all the greater because Weir goes on living with the knowledge that his son is guilty of murder and will have to answer to this capital charge. The adapter here, in having the 'trial' of Archie take place in his father's retiring room, has made use of the old Scottish practice of Avizandum, where a judge may consider a case out of court. As he indicates above, Wright has neatly killed two birds with one stone, in having the father, in effect, 'try' his son but yet having to go in to court immediately afterwards to hear the real case against Dand with the real truth searing his mind. The television adaptation ends with a large close-up of Tom Fleming/Weir of Hermiston as this awful knowledge bites deep. Fade to black...

VIDEO

It is understood from the Turner Programme Services in Atlanta, Georgia, that prints of the major Stevenson films, Kidnapped, Treasure Island, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde etc, are being transferred to video cassette MGM/UA Home Video in Culver City and by MCA//TV, Universal City, California, for future home showing as domestic video cassettes. The door-to-door salesmen may have found another market. What began as a Stevenson word on a page now goes spinning into the future an electronic product, but what is reassuring is that it will carry with it wherever it goes the name of Robert Louis Stevenson - born Edinburgh, Scotland - and still living in the world's imagination through the network of television relays. His readership has become a viewership and his topicality is thus sustained into the new age.

In his 1992 biography of Stevenson, Ian Bell writes:

'The popularity of a few R.L.S. stories has made him as much of the mass cultures of television, cinema and tourism as of literature. Today he is a brand name, a guarantee of quality, a looted storehouse of phrases, plots and characters for a society grown avid for elemental narratives... Elsewhere his relics decay under glass, a trail of debris littering museums across the globe, while Treasure Island is turned into a pantomime, still more films, (in an 'international co-production') or a science-fiction thriller for television. Through it all the writer-as-hero is paraphrased, parodied, adapted, acted, filmed and imitated while much of his work remains out of print. The man and his art have become obscured behind an electronic veil.'⁶

However, in this discussion of Stevenson in relation to script adaptation for the performing media, perhaps the last word is best left to him. In a letter to Henry James in 1893, he said of his own writing:

'I hear people talking, and I feel them acting...'⁷

That says it all.

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

CONCLUSION

'The instant that my health is anyway together again,
I shall prefer to take to plays than anything else...'
(Letters, 1,175)

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

CONCLUSION

'Sans everything'

We have seen that Stevenson did not complete his seven ages and that what might have been his seventh age was given over to the posthumous Stevenson, that is that phenomenon called 'R.L.S.' which rose on his death like a phoenix over Samoa and held sway over the public, if not the critics, until the end of the Second World war. It is strange to think that if Stevenson had inherited the sterner side of his ancestry and lived beyond his allotted span he might still have been alive in 1945. He would have seen his star rise and fall and rise again since he gladly lay down under that starry sky and no doubt he would have been suitably surprised that his fame has lasted more than the four years he had said to Fanny would be his.

What might not have surprised him was that his plays with Henley have been ignored and forgotten. He was always realistic about his own contribution to the drama. This is not, however, to ignore or forget the fact that Robert Louis Stevenson was very much a theatrical man, and as this study has shown, was a latent dramatist of the first order, given other circumstances. Everyone can act but not everyone can act on stage on cue. R.L.S. chose to act out his life in a succession of personae. Sydney Colvin confirms that Robert Louis Stevenson was a natural actor -

'He comprised within himself, and would flash upon you in the course of a single afternoon, all the different ages and half the different characters of men... always acting up to the best he knew.'

He was at best a limited actor on stage, but he knew no limits when he choose the everyday world as his platform. Ian Bell writes:

'Stevenson was, even without trying, like a character out of time; there was a flamboyance in his nature, a certain taste for self-dramatisation, as though a difficult performance was being perfected... his art² was a moral argument presented in an entertainer's costume.'

'Motley, I count the only wear' he had written but he never completely discarded the velvet jacket. He was always the New Town Edinburgh boy at heart and he never totally applied his natural theatrical aptitude to the writing of plays even though he sympathised completely with what was required:

'It is sometimes supposed that the drama consists of incident. It consists of passion, which gives the actor his opportunity; and that passion must progressively increase, or the actor, as the piece proceeded, would be unable to carry his audience from a lower to a higher pitch of emotion. A good serious play must therefore be founded on one of the passionate 3 cruces, where duty and inclination come nobly to the grapple...'

He knew what was wanted but, in the end, he was found wanting. Duty to Henley drove him more than any real inclination to dramatise with passion. He certainly could write, but not everyone can write a play that will sound correct when uttered by actors to an audience.

L.A.G.Strong in Commonsense About Drama states that while good theatre is recognised as an instrument of enlightenment it is also a form of dream. Stevenson was exactly this kind of dreamer and fully acknowledged what he regarded as 'the scenery of dreams' - in other words, that condition of physical and imaginative suspension where anything can happen in the reader or spectator's mind's eye. He had the key to the dream world where all good theatre exists. This is why the dialogue in all his tales rings true. He instinctively guessed at one of theatre's truths - that the words have to fit the character as much as the costume fits the actor. Either too small or too big and the effect is ruined. Or, as St John Ervine put it:

'Dialogue is most truly life-like, when it corresponds to the emotional state of those who use it.'⁴

This is only one of the accepted precepts in the theatre code. There are so many hidden practicalities and demands. L.A.G.Strong continues:

'The dramatist requires special gifts, foremost among them the power to use the actual resources of the stage as an effective means of telling his story.'⁵

He requires a sense of the stage in order to get these effects economically. Without this, no knowledge of character or skill in dialogue will avail him. Every art has its own technique and theatre's is in the interplay of sight and sound. The dramatist must never forget that the audience is an essential component of the theatre experience. The born dramatist understands this instinctively. He must make all his points in the action. he cannot 'explain', he must 'show'. As the old troupers used to say - 'Tell 'em you're a-goin' to tell 'em, tell 'em, and then tell 'em you've told 'em!'

There are centuries of theatre wisdom in that terse instruction.

Mr Strong concludes:

'The dramatist must finally convince his audience that the story, whatever it was, could only have been told in terms of theatre. Drama is about life and bears the same relation to it as life does to the Eternal.'⁶

Strong words indeed.

Max Beerbohm, in an article entitled, 'Style and the Stage' adds:

'In dramaturgy, you will perceive that there is a deep pitfall for modern stylists. Most of them are quite aware of the danger, and refrain from writing plays...'

Beerbohm was here speaking of Henry James, but the same might equally apply to Stevenson. He goes on:

'Dialogue spoken on the stage must be composed in a natural and un-literary manner. Every character in an acted play has a voice, has gestures and tricks of face; he must say the kind of things that he would say in real life... and not that he would write... whilst he must (owing to the conditions of drama) be prevented from saying many other things which he might say in real life without adding to the effect of the speech selected by the dramatist. Style, in dialogue, is thus a matter of compression from real life, of translation, never...'

Stevenson was well aware of this fact and said so to Henley when he advised cuts (or compressions). Beerbohm continues:

'To be able to make an absurd and absurdly-situated character express himself in terms of of exquisite, elaborate gravity is a very valuable power for the farce-writer... Robert Louis Stevenson was a master in the art, as I recalled a few weeks ago, regretting that he was not alive to use it in Drury Lane melodrama.'

In the end it is the final effect that matters but ante omnia verbum - before everything, the word. Nothing can begin in the theatre until the playwright has finished his work. The word determines the act. Although practical theatre is more a matter of sweat and tears than sudden inspiration, the word counts. The stage may rely on its bodily functions, as it were, in its physical plasticity, but that is merely the kinetic element and it is by no means the whole picture. Actor-bricks need writer-straw and the resulting artefact is what we recognise as dramatic art. It is both a dwelling for the heart and a haven for the mind. It is also a platform for the unbridled imagination. It is a large demand to make of a writer and it needs a writer of large talent to accomplish it fully. Robert Louis Stevenson was such a writer but he could not do it alone. Nor need he have done. Theatre, like many artistic endeavours, is a collaboration of so many talents. Perhaps Stevenson was unlucky in his? Even in the low period of Early Victorian theatre, Sheridan Knowles had Macready and as J.C.Trewin tells us:

'Macready had a gift for the rapid reconstruction of a text in terms of theatre (as well as in terms of the leading part). He showed Knowles where it ('William Tell') was wrong. The play was re-drafted, split-apple archery and all, and it boomed upon the stage as an actable melodrama.'

Dickens, himself a first-rate actor and director, with whom Stevenson had so much in common in terms of attitude and personality, had Wilkie Collins as co-writer in the several plays they presented. Barrie had J.L.Toole (1830-1906), a first-rate actor and director, to help him with his first plays. Who might Stevenson have turned to? Beerbohm Tree might have helped more had he been allowed to. Was it Henley who stood in the way? Or was Stevenson hiding behind him? Ultimately, the four or five or six works for the theatre, (depending on whether or not the unperformed texts are included), are the yardsticks by which we must judge Robert Louis Stevenson as a dramatist.

It may seem obvious that theatre dialogue is more than words on paper or good speeches for actors, although Patrick Hamilton (1904-62), writer of the immensely successful play Gaslight (1938) and Rope (1947) had exactly this view:

'Writing a money-making play is very simple. Just give the actors something good to say... that's all they're interested in - good, long, self-indulgent speeches.'⁹
He wrote to his brother after the first night of Gaslight:

'I had a wonderful letter from the author, James Bridie, about the play, who said if (R.L.) Stevenson had been alive today he would have loved to have written it - this pleased me enormously.'¹⁰

Like any craft, playwriting has to be studied and learned. It is a product that has to be 'made', patiently built up, effect by effect, so that the whole can realize the picture the author has in his mind and transmit it to the minds of those in the theatre at the time of performance. Artistically and technically, this is no mean feat and it is something that has occupied great minds from Aeschylus to Anouilh but R.L.S. was content to give it, in actual working terms, the spare moments of a few months within two or three years. Small wonder then, its great mysteries eluded him. He had all the instincts of a dramatist but he failed to develop in any of the plays what he had so much of in life - theatrical flair.

Finally, it has to be said in this theatre and performing connection, that in whatever form, for whatever platform or purpose and for whatever audience, Robert Louis Stevenson has left us a mint of literary coin, a cornucopia of imaginative scenes and characters. As far as the drama is concerned, his plays have been made and are now, for the most part, forgotten. He is now for adaptation only.

In his Introduction to the 1907 Pentland Edition, Edmond Gosse wrote:

'It is to be noticed that both Stevenson and Henley took their dramatic writing in a light way. This was particularly the case with R.L.S., who never realised any possibilities for the modern stage beyond the idealisation of Skeltdom. For him, the play was a purely artificial thing, nowhere in touch with real life, and he made a more or less languid attempt to supply the public with the sensation they wanted. If he had lived during a healthier theatrical period - the ideal of plays was lowest in England in the 'seventies and 'eighties - it is probable that the undoubted aptitude which he possessed for dramatic effect might have taken literary form on the stage.'

It must be conceded that this was so.

Stevenson played with words in the mouths of paper characters on a cardboard, cut-out stage but his words on a page of paper are a different thing entirely. Perhaps that is where his real theatre is to be found - on that stage of the mind where the reader is his own actor, and the 'play' is in that vast world of the imagination opened up to all. Stevenson had the key to this world of the mind and he has unlocked it for succeeding generations. His was a unique, individual and very Scottish voice arrived at by the meticulous arrangement of words on a page. The shame is that he never allowed this voice to be heard more often in the theatre other than in subsidiary characters such as Procurator-Fiscal Lawson in Deacon Brodie.

Professor David Daiches assists this point in a reference he made to the Stevenson-Baxter correspondence during his contribution to the 1980 Stevenson seminar in Edinburgh - Stevenson and Scotland. Professor Daiches quoted from the letters, which, in their way, were scenarios in Scots. One can just see the putative playwright peeping through the easy, unforced picture of two old Edinburgh hypocrites:

'Thomson - It's done. I'm a dissenter. I kenned fine frae the beginning hoo it would a' end. I saw there was nae justice for auld Johnstone. The last I tauld ye, they begun a clash aboot the drink. O, sic a disgrace...'

Professor Daiches comments:

'(Thomson and Johnstone)) were characters invented by Stevenson and Baxter, roles they assumed in their correspondence when the mood took them. They were small-town hypocrites who employed a racy Scots speech in letter form. In this curious exercise in role taking Stevenson was in fact satirising the kind of character who later in the century was to be treated with such sentimental affection in the literature of the Kailyard.'

Professor Daiches then followed in his paper with an excerpt from the correspondence in which Johnson (Stevenson) writes to Thomson (Baxter) and reports how he was falsely accused of embezzling money from the church collection - 'No bonny-feed wi' the plate!' The 'script', if one might call it that, is tight, true and colourfully Scots in a way that cries out for playing. Freed to use his 'mither-tongue' Stevenson seems to leap at the release and within a page presents a real person before us. This was all he had to do in the plays but instead of boldly turning to Scotland for his characters he retreated to Toyland and with him went any chance that he might also have anticipated Barrie. Barrie, himself a Stevenson disciple latterly, had always wanted the elder man to write 'the big book back at Bournemouth among high walls' but what was just as possible was the 'big play', a Scottish play, set among the high walls of the Edinburgh that Stevenson still remembered so well.

And that might be the very crux of the problem, for not only was Stevenson a Scot, he was an Edinburgh man. He admitted that that might present difficulties with regard to the 'kittle art of the drama':

'In the theatre, we never forget we are in a theatre... We sit wavering between two minds, now merely clapping our hands at the merit of the performance, now condescending to take an active part with the characters... The pleasure that we take is critical; we watch, we approve, we smile at incongruities, we are moved to sudden heats of sympathy... but the characters are still themselves, they are not us; The more clearly they are depicted, the more widely do they stand away from us, the more imperiously do they thrust us back into our place as a spectator.'¹³

Perhaps that is where Robert Louis Stevenson would have been happiest - in the darkness of the theatre stalls, instead of being reluctantly pulled up on stage into the harsh glare of the rehearsal gaslight. He did not linger long in its illumination because he knew that it showed him in a bad light. He escaped, but not into the shadows of the theatrical stalls, but to the shade of a palm tree. Unwittingly, he had cast himself for a more demanding, and more rewarding role in real life than ever he was to invent for the theatre. R..L.S. was about to become Tusitala. He had no need of any bigger stage or of any other actors - even Henry Irving. In order to get something from anything one must be prepared to make an investment, either of time or talent or industry - and to the fullest extent. Stevenson had made only a token gesture on all three fronts. It is small wonder the return was meagre.

Lloyd Osbourne has spoken of Stevenson's superb actor's voice in reading the first draft of Jekyll and Hyde at Bournemouth and there have been many other accounts of the pleasure Stevenson himself had in reading to the household at Vailima, so we know that there was an actor in him somewhere. It may be that he was like that other Robert, Robert Burns, even more fluent and charming in speech than with his considerable pen. All of which points again to the actor's instincts in the man.

Just like any actor upon the stage Robert Louis Stevenson was constantly aware of spectators in his life. Wherever he was he seemed to need an audience and it was as an audience that he thought of his readership. Readers of his best stories know they are hearing his voice as they read. Here, he is the attained actor at last. Free from the tedious physical business of pretending in the flesh, he can give rein to his imaginative actor's instinct on the page. It is not unreasonable to suppose that his plays might have succeeded better had he himself been a better practical actor. But while the good artist can be many things to all men it is unfair to expect him to be everything. Robert Louis Stevenson was a writer first and last. In his real-life role-playing he was a dozen men but in his best writing he was always himself.

He gives his best moments to his readers in just the same way a good actor gives his to his audience. The good writer and the good actor are always after this same thing - a good moment - and for the audience, not for himself. When it happens neither is entirely sure how it arrived even if they have both carefully contrived towards it. Dramatists too are aware of the need for the moment. James Barrie was adept at providing such valuable pegs for performance in his plays.

It is not surprising that Stevenson and Barrie remained friends despite their disparity. They were both avid Scots in love with words and the effect of words. It would be reasonable to conjecture that the timid, little Barrie envied Stevenson's adventurous and roving life - but would the quixotic Stevenson have settled in one place long enough to become, like his old University friend, the sedentary scribe to London's Edwardian theatre? He could so easily have done. The doors of the Saville Club were always open and through them he could have walked on to any stage. Whatever else, he did not lack London opportunities.

Throughout his life he appeared to have friends at every corner. Is it significant that all of Stevenson's London friends seem to be of the same physical stock - like Barrie, small, slight, fastidious and painstaking? Sydney Colvin, Leslie Stephen, Henry James, George Meredith, Andrew Lang, Austin Dobson, Edmond Gosse, Thomas Hardy, Rudyard Kipling - all men of letters, all very different kinds of writer, but all of the same physical type and temperamental cast; all that is except the remaining two of the recognised Stevenson circle - William Henley and Herbert Beerbohm Tree. Not that either of these was ever within the circle. They were both too big to be contained in any circle, they made their own. Both these men were Goliaths in comparison with the clique. Small men loomed large in London letters at the latter end of the century as did the gaie creatures of the artistic demi-monde but Henley and Tree towered over all of these and strode their respective stages surely - albeit one did so on one leg.

It is probably only a matter of conjecture but one is left with the teasing thought - in his pen-portrait of R.L.S., what had Henley left UN-said? Of all the friends, only Henley could be said to have really known him. But what he knew of Stevenson was his secret and we must leave it with him. Perhaps the great play was in that? We shall never know...

One thing is clear, however, Stevenson had the gift of friendship and a need of fellowship at every stage and at every level all through his relatively short life. Friends, old and young, male and female, white-skinned and brown, kings and commoners, amateur writers and professional men - they all had one thing in common - a love of Robert Louis Stevenson. This assumed almost cult proportions even in his lifetime and did much to provoke the inevitable reaction. He was hardly cold in his Samoan mountain top when the critical sniping began. It is one of the minor irritations of large talent in any field to be constantly troubled by fleas. In 1914, Frank Swinnerton wrote a whole book to prove Stevenson 'a writer of the second class' - 'If Romance is dead, Stevenson killed it,' he said. But who reads Mr Swinnerton today? Similarly, others like Maurice Hewlett and John Freeman joined in a general disparagement but Stevenson survives.

Do they? Leonard Woolf, took up the defence in his article - 'The Fall of Stevenson':

'The climax of the legend was that Stevenson not only wore a velvet coat, had flashing eyes, and was a brilliant talker, but was also a great writer, a great novelist, a great thinker and consummate artist in words... Mr Stevenson seemed to have been placed in a very high niche among the greatest of writers when the younger generation began to read 'Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant'... Well, even metaphorical tides have a habit of ebbing and flowing; and when a writer's reputation has been plunging steadily downhill for thirty years, it has usually gone too far and it is time for a revival. Is there going to be a resurrection of Robert Louis Stevenson? To judge from the current publishers' lists, the Stevenson resurrection is already beginning...' ¹⁴

His own attitude was that -

'All who have meant good work with their whole hearts have done good work, although they may die before they have time to sign it...' ¹⁵

These were Stevenson's words on a paragraph dwelling on the artistic benefits of dying young but if they are applied to his work as dramatist we may have a keener clue to their commercial and artistic failure. He died before he could write his great play.

He wrote to William Archer in 1894:

'You must sometimes think it strange - or perhaps it is only that I should think it - to be following the old round, in the gas lamps and the crowded theatres, when I am away here in the tropical forests and vast silences.' ¹⁶

Some folk memories must still have remained for him of city nights in Edinburgh, London, Paris, New York and San Francisco - even Sydney - where he was another kind of man among writers, painters, musicians, actors et hoc genus omne. He loved actors (if one excludes Teddy Henley perhaps) and he showed this affection in Providence and the Guitar (1878) which has already been mentioned and again in The Inland Voyage of the same year. The story is entitled Precy and the Marionettes and deals with the old stroller who was not, as he readily admits, in the highest flight of French stage performers. But Stevenson understands:

'But if a man is only so much of an actor that he can stumble through a farce, he has made free of a new order of thoughts. He has something else to think about beside the money box. He has a pride of his own, and, what is of far more importance, he has an aim before him that he can never quite attain. He has gone upon a pilgrimage that will last him his life long, because there is no end to it short of perfection. He will better himself a little day by day; or, even if he has given up the attempt, he will always remember that once upon a time he had conceived this high ideal, that once upon a time he had fallen in love with a star...' ¹⁷

This is a credo that every young actor should learn by heart.
And Stevenson has the old stroller make his own statement of faith:

'If anyone is a failure in life, is it not I? I had an art, in which I have done things well - as well as some - better, perhaps, than others; and now it is closed against me. I must go about the country gathering coppers and singing nonsense. Do you think I regret my life? Do you think I would rather be a fat burgess, like a calf? Not I! I have had moments when I have been applauded on the boards; I think nothing of that; but I have known in my own mind sometimes, when I had not a clap from the whole house, that I had found a true intonation, or an exact and speaking gesture; and then, messieurs, I have known what pleasure was, what it is to do a thing well, what it is to be an artist...' ¹⁷

One can scarcely forbear from cheering.

William Archer, to the end, still thought Robert Louis Stevenson had a play in him. Nine years before, replying to the latter's enquiry in as to why he (Stevenson) had not written his Timon, Stevenson replied candidly:

'Well here is my answer... I have tried to expand my means, but still I can only utter a part of what I wish to say, and am bound to feel; and much of it will die unspoken. But if I had the pen of Shakespeare, I have no Timon to give forth. I feel kindly to the powers that be; I marvel they should use me so well... To have suffered, nay, to suffer, sets a keen edge to what remains of the agreeable. This is a great truth, and has to be learned in the fire.' ¹⁸

In playing with theatrical fire, rather than bursting into the expected flame, it must be said that Robert Louis Stevenson only got his fingers burned.

On 3 November 1933, Robins Millar, the Scottish dramatic critic, gave a lecture to the R.L.Stevenson Club in Glasgow on 'R.L.S. as Dramatist' and came to the conclusion that -

'Stevenson never succeeded in adapting his ideas to the requirements of the stage... Nevertheless, his plays did show that he possessed a remarkably rich and powerful sense of the essentials of drama... Stevenson was detached from actual contact with the theatre, but one could guess from his plays that he had in his imagination the potentialities of a really great dramatist... It could be said that they had qualities that revealed the brilliance of his powers. Under different circumstances (he) might conceivably have developed as one of our great dramatists.' ¹⁹

This is repeating exactly what Pinero had said thirty years before, what Hamilton had iterated, what Archer had always maintained and what this study has sought to prove. Stevenson had told Fanny to hurry his biography as his fame would last no more than four years. He was never so wrong about anything. But he was often right about theatre.

As witness -

'Footlights will not do with the sun. The stage morn and the real, lucid morn of one's dark life look strangely on each other.'²⁰

He has said it.

Such things have on them the dew of man's morning. He also said:

'In the highest achievement of the art of words, the dramatic and the pictorial, the moral and romantic interest, rise and fall together, by a common and organic law. Situation is animated with passion, passion clothed upon with animation. Neither exists for itself, but each inheres indissolubly with the other. This is high art; and not only the highest art possible in words, but the highest art of all, since it combines the greatest mass and diversity of the elements of truth and pleasure...'²¹

And there rests the case for Robert Louis Stevenson - Dramatist.

To end, the present writer can only repeat what a former friend and colleague, the late Moultrie R. Kelsall, actor and writer, said at the end of his Braemar Lecture on Stevenson in 1950:

'I don't pretend to have read everything he wrote. At best I can but hope you haven't regarded any item of my choice as quite unworthy of inclusion; I realize that sins of omission are bound to be laid at my door, but perhaps these very omissions will send you back to Stevenson.'²²

No better sentiment could be found for the conclusion of this study.

IN THE CITY OF EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND

RLS 86 is the first-ever celebration of this sort and it will be a truly memorable one, for it has the full support of Edinburgh District Council, Lothian Regional Council, the Commonwealth Institute and an energetic group of writers, artists and other individuals committed to the success of this project.

ENVOI

The Scots Observer of 26 January 1889, in its series, Modern Men, concerned itself with Robert Louis Stevenson:

'Why does not Mr. Stevenson do a great work?
Why does he scatter the small change of his wealth?...
Let us leave Mr. Stevenson alone and not pester him with advice,
not even with injudicious and perilous encouragement.
His impulses will guide him right.
There is an unfurnished window in his palace, as in Aladdin's,
the window that should be painted with the effigy of a Becky Sharp,
a Beatrix Esmond, a Di Vernon, a Jeannie Deans.
Let not the window be finished and adorned with a copy...
But we have no right to ask everything even from so various a
humourist, so accomplished a wielder of style, so keen an observer,
such a master of the terrible, so winning a teller of tales...'

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

APPENDICES

'It does seem strange that these dependent arts -
singing, acting, and, in its small way, reading aloud,
seem the best rewarded of all the arts.

(Letters, 1,144)

ADAPTATIONS OF STEVENSON-RELATED WORKS PERFORMED IN THE THEATRE

DR JEKYL AND MR HYDE by T.Russell Sullivan (With Richard Mansfield)	USA and London	1887
DR JEKYL AND MR HYDE by Daniel Bandmann		1888
PRINCE OTTO by T.B.Thalberg and Gerald Gurney at Harrogate (and York 1900)		1888
BLANCHE de MALETOIT by A.E.W.Mason		1894
PRINCE OTTO by Otis Skinner - Wallach's Theatre, New York		Sep 3 1900
JEKYL by J.Comyns Carr - Queen's Theatre, London with H.B.Irving and Dorothea Baird		1910
TREASURE ISLAND by Jules Ekhart Goodman, Directed by Charles Hopkins at the Punch and Judy Theatre, New York.		1915
TREASURE ISLAND by James B Fagan - (With Arthur Bouchier as Long John Silver for A Christmas Matinee Season		1922
TREASURE ISLAND by Ruth B.Kimball for the Walter H. Baker Company, Boston		1927
TREASURE ISLAND by J.B.Fagan - Strand Theatre, London with Robert Lorraine as Long John Silver and Pew		1929
TREASURE ISLAND by Kurt Heuser, Berlin		1931
DR JEKYL AND MR HYDE Adapted by William Senior from version by J.Comyns Carr (1910) Music by Philip Cathie.		1931
	Adelphi Theatre, London with Arthur Philips as Jekyll/Hyde.	14 July 1931
TREASURE ISLAND by J.B.Fagan - Comedy Theatre, London with Malcom Keen as Silver. Produced by Nigel Playfair		1933
TUSITALA by Leonard John Hines and Frank King at Hull Repertory Theatre (Chatto and Windus, 1933/34) 27 March		1933
TREASURE ISLAND by Nemo Bufano as a Federal Theatre Project, New York (National Service Bureau publication)		1939
TREASURE ISLAND by Dorothy Drew for Children's Theatre, South Hills, Charlton VA,USA.		1939
DR JEKYL AND MR HYDE by Richard Abbott		1941
THE MASTER OF BALLANTRAE by R.J.B.Sellar (Performed Gateway Theatre, Edinburgh 1959)		1943
THE JEKYL AND HYDE WOMEN by Anna Bird Stewart for Martha Mansfield		16 April 1943
TREASURE ISLAND by J.B.Fagan - Granville Theatre, London, with Tony Quinn as Silver. Produced by John Lenau.		1945
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON A play by Harriet Hinsdale		1947
TREASURE ISLAND by J.B.Fagan - Whitehall Theatre, London (British Theatre Group) with Harry Welchman as Silver		1947
(Production repeated at St.James's Theatre, London. Christmas 1947)		
WEIR OF HERMISTON by R.J.B.Sellar (Performed Gateway Theatre, Edinburgh 1958)		1947
TREASURE ISLAND by J.B.Fagan - Fortune Theatre, London with Robert Atkins as Silver. Produced by Reginald Long		1948
(Production repeated with Sir Donald Wolfit, Christmas 1949.)		
TREASURE ISLAND BY J.B.Fagan - The Playhouse, Liverpool with Cyril Luckham as Long John Silver		1949
TREASURE ISLAND by Finlay J. Macdonald. Falcon Theatre Club, Glasgow with Duncan Macrae as Silver		1950
TREASURE ISLAND by J.B.Fagan - Theatre Royal, Stratford East with Michael Logan as Silver. Producer:Phylis Gow		1950
ADMIRAL BENBOW An Adventure Play for Boys by Kenneth L. Anderson		1953
TREASURE ISLAND by Malcolm Morgan		1954
TREASURE ISLAND by Luigi Galbazzi, Milan		1955
WITNESS IN DANGER by Christine Orr. (Based on 'Catriona')		1955
DR JEKYL AND MR HYDE by Lance Sieveking - Birmingham Repertory Theatre		20 November 1956

TREASURE ISLAND by Bernard Miles and Josephine Wilson - Mermaid Theatre, London.
Directed by Peter Coe, Designer: Sean Kenny, Music: A.L. Lloyd.

14 December 1959

(Production repeated with John Woodvine as Long John Silver and Spike Milligan as Ben Gunn, 1961.)

(" " " Barry Humphries as Silver and produced by Sally Miles, 1967.)

(" " " Percy Herbert as Silver and directed by Ron Pember, 1969.)

(" " " Christopher Benjamin as Silver and directed by Sally Miles, 1972.)

(" " " Bernard Miles as Silver and directed by Josephine Wilson, 1973.)

(Performed as 'A Musical Adventure' with Music by Cyril Ornadel and Lyrics by Hal Shaper)

(Text printed by Evans Plays, London 1973)

TREASURE ISLAND by David Magee. Directed by Robert England at the Bohemian Grove, San Francisco

BILLY BONES or 'The Old Buccaneer' by Raymond Mount, Branford, Connecticut, USA

EBB by Robert David MacDonald, (Based on Ebb Tide) - Citizens' Theatre, Glasgow.

THE DOCTOR AND THE DEVILS (The Body Snatcher) by Dylan Thomas (Edinburgh Festival)

KIDNAPPED by Keith Dewhurst - Royal Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh. Directed by Bill Bryden,

THE PRIVATE LIFE AND PUBLIC WORKS OF ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON by Alanna Knight / John Cairney, Aberdeen Festival

MR R.L.S. a solo play on Robert Louis Stevenson, by John Cairney, (With Alanna Knight) Shanter Prods

GOOD AFTERNOON, MR STEVENSON by Alanna Knight/John Cairney Royal Lyceum Studio Theatre (Edinburgh Festival)

THE BEACH OF FALES An Opera by Alan Hoddinott

WEIR OF HERMISTON An Opera by Robin Orr. Libretto by Bill Bryden. Scottish Opera/ Edinburgh Festival

MR AND MRS R.L.S. - a play by Alanna Knight (with John Cairney). Shanter Productions, Glasgow.

THE STRANGE CASE OF DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE by Andy Smith. Directed by Mel Smith, McRobert Centre, Stirling.

With Iain Mitchell and Michael Carter.

WEIR OF HERMISTON by Tom Wright. Directed by Peter Lincoln, McRobert Centre, Stirling.

With students of the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, Glasgow.

THE PRIVATE LIFE OF R.L.S. - a play by Alanna Knight (with John Cairney). Wilfion Books, Paisley.

TREASURE ISLAND by Robert Robertson at Dundee Repertory Theatre with John Forgeham as Long John Silver

DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE by Donald Campbell at Dundee Repertory Theatre

THE PRIVATE LIVES OF DEACON BRODIE by Donald Mackenzie at the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh.

SILVER by Jonathan Smith at the Canongate Hall Edinburgh Festival

RLS IN THE SOUTH SEAS A Play by Jenni Calder with John Shedden as R.L.S. at the Edinburgh Festival.

TREASURE ISLAND Adapted by Frank Dunlop with Hywel Bennett as Long John Silver at the Edinburgh Festival

THE STRANGE CASE OF DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE by David Edgar for the Royal Shakespeare Company London 21 November

JEKYLL AND HYDE adapted by Robin Brooks for the Empty Space Theatre Company at the Lyric Theatre, London.

TREASURE ISLAND Directed by Elric Hooper at the Court Theatre, Christchurch, New Zealand.

DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE adapted by Robin Brooks and directed with Jon Pope with Sandy Welch and Martin McCardie

at the Studio, Citizens Theatre, Glasgow.

December 1992

November 1993

ADAPATIONS IN MANUSCRIPT OR PUBLICATION

A MISSPENT LIFE by Louella Forepaugh and G.F.Fish for Stanley French, New York. 1887
 WEIR OF HERMITON by W.B.Yuill for the Scottish National Theatre Society, Glasgow. N/D.
 DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE A play in four acts by Nelson Compston/USA. 1910
 DIOGENES AT THE SAVILLE CLUB by David G. Joyce for F.M.Morris, Chicago. June 1921
 TREASURE ISLAND by Beulah Chamberlain for Segal's Acting Drama No.62, Chicago. 1926
 THE STIRE DE MALETOIT'S DOOR by Lawrence Langnor for Stanley French, New York City. June 21 1931
 HIS OWN GUESS by Carl Mason based on 'The Master of Ballantrae', Hamilton, Ohio, USA. N/D.
 DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE A play in three acts by Richard Abbott for Stanley French, Los Angeles. 1941
 THE BEACH AT FALESA by Dylan Thomas (1914-63) for Stern and Day, New York. 1963
 TREASURE ISLAND A Musical by Bruce M. Snyder (The Music Box). N/D.
 DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE An Opera by Philip Cannon (RCM, London). N/D.
 TREES OF PARADISE (Author unknown) University of the Pacific, Samoa. N/D.

ADAPTATIONS IN PROGRESS

DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE by John Maxwelll for the Royal Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh.
 TREASURE ISLAND by Geoffrey Case for the Royal Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh.
 DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE A Solo Play by Arthur Scholey (1974).
 KIDNAPPED or CATRIONA (1992) A Musical by Richard Stalker. Lyrics by Gavin Bolus and Bill Dunlop. N/D.

ADAPTATIONS OF STEVENSON-RELATED WORKS FOR THE CINEMA

<u>DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE</u>	(Selig Polyscope Company) Directed by Otis Hunter featuring Hobart Bosworth and Betty Harte.	1908 1909 1910 1912
<u>THE SUICIDE CLUB</u>	(Biograph)	
<u>DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE</u>	(Nordisk) Featuring Alwyn Neuss.	
<u>THE BLACK ARROW</u>	(Edison)	
<u>DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE</u>	(Thanhauser Films) Directed by Lucius Henderson With James Cruze as Henry Jekyll and Harry Benham as Edward Hyde.	1912 1912 1913 1913 1914 1917 1917 1918 1920
<u>TREASURE ISLAND</u>	(Edison) with Adison Rothermel	
<u>DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE</u>	(Universal) Dir: James Cruze. Cast: King Baggott, Jane Gail, Mark Snyder, Wm Sorrell	
<u>THE WRONG BOX</u>	(Solax)	
<u>THE SUICIDE CLUB</u>	(British and Colonial)	
<u>THE BOTTLE IMP</u>	(Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company))	
<u>KIDNAPPED</u>	(Edison) Serialised by Pathe as 'The Mystery of the Double Cross'.	
<u>TREASURE ISLAND</u>	(Fox) Directed by Chester M. Franklin	
<u>TREASURE ISLAND</u>	(Paramount/Artcraft) with Charles Ogle as Long John Silver, Shirley Mason as Jim Hawkins.	
<u>THE WHITE CIRCLE</u>	(Paramount Artcraft) Script by Jack Gilbert and Jules Furthman based on 'Pavilion on the Links' Directed by Maurice Tourneur with Spottiswoode Aitken, Janice Wilson, and Harry S. Northrup.	1920
<u>DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE</u>	(Famous Players/Lasky) Adapted by Clara S. Beranger and starring John Barrymore Directed by John Stuart Robertson. Also featuring Nita Haldi and Martha Mansfield.	1920 1920 1920
<u>DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE</u>	(Germany) Dir: F.W. Murnau. Cast: Conrad Veidt	
<u>DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE</u>	(Pioneer Film Corporation/USA/ Louis Mayer) with Sheldon Lewis.	
<u>THE TAME CAT</u>	(Arrow Film Corporation) Dramafilm based on 'The Rajah's Diamond' Directed with William Bradley with Ray Irwin and Marion Harding.	1921 1922 1925
<u>EBB-TIDE</u>	(Famous Players/Lasky) Directed by George Melford with Noah Beery	
<u>DR. PICKLE AND MR. PRIDE</u>	(Standard Film Corporation) Stan Laurel Series N°11 with Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy.	
<u>DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE</u>	(Paramount) Script: Samuel Hoffenstein/Percy Heath Dir: Rouben Mamoulian Cast: Frederic March (Academy Award Winner) with Miriam Hopkins, Edgar Norton, Rose Hobart, Halliwell Hobbs, Holmes Herbert. (The Screenplay published 1976 in Film Classics Library (Editor-Richard J Anabole)	1931 1932
<u>THE SUICIDE CLUB</u>	(Universal Pictures)	
<u>EBB TIDE</u>	(British Gaumont Instructional)	
<u>EBB TIDE</u>	(Paramount) Directed by Arthur Rosen. with George Barraud, Chilli Bouchier and Joan Barry.	1932

TREASURE ISLAND (MGM) Script: John Lee Mahin. Dir: Victor Fleming. Cast: Wallace Beery as Long John Silver and Jackie Cooper as Jim Hawkins with Lewis Stone, Lionel Barrymore, Otto Kruger, Douglas Dumbrille, Nigel Bruce, Chic Sale and Sue Collins as 'Cora-Sue'. 1934
(Distributor: MGM/UA Home Video, Culver City)

THE SUICIDE CLUB or 'Trouble For Two' (MGM) Director: J. Walter Ruben. With Robert Montgomery, Rosalind Russell, Reginald Owen, Frank Owen, Louis Hayward, E.E. Clive and Walter Kingsford. 1936
(Paramount) Script: Bertram Millhauser. Director: James Hogan. Music: Victor Young

THE EBB-TIDE (Paramount) Script: Ray Milland, Frances Farmer, Oscar Homolka, Barrie Fitzgerald, Lloyd Nolan. 1937
Cast: Ray Milland, Frances Farmer, Richard Sherman/Walter Ferris. Dir: Alfred Werker.

KIDNAPPED (20th Century/Fox) Script: Sonia Levien/Richard Sherman/Walter Ferris. Dir: Alfred Werker. 1938
Cast: Warner Baxter and Freddie Bartholomew with Arleen Whelan, John Carradine, C. Aubrey Smith, Nigel Bruce and Reginald Owen. 1940

THE SUICIDE CLUB (J.H. Hoffburg/Germany) Released as 'The Living Dead' 1941
DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE (MGM) Script: John Lee Mahin. Dir: Victor Fleming. Cast: Spencer Tracy, Ingrid Bergman and Lana Turner with Ian Hunter, C. Aubrey Smith, Donald Crisp and Sara Allgood. 1945
(Distributor: MGM/UA Home Video) 1947
1947

THE BODY-SNATCHER (RKO) Dir: Robert Wise. Prod: Val Lewton. Cast: Henry Daniel, Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi. 1948
Edith Atwater and Russell Wade 1949

KIDNAPPED (Monogram/RKO) 1949

THE EBB-TIDE (Paramount) Released as 'Adventure Island' 1948
SILVERADO SQUATTERS (Columbia) Released as 'Adventure in Silverado'. 1949
THE BLACK ARROW (Columbia) Dir: Gordon Douglas. Cast: Louis Hayward and Janet Blair with George Macready, Edgar Buchanan and Paul Cavanaugh 1949

MARKHEIM (Screenplays Inc) Director: Mark Robson 1948
ST IVES (Warners) Released as 'The Secret of St Ives' 1949

TREASURE ISLAND (RKO/Walt Disney) Script: Lawrence Edward Watkin. Prod: Perce Pearce Dir: Byron Haskin. 1949
With Robert Newton as Long John Silver and Bobby Driscoll as Jim Hawkins and also Walter Fitzgerald, Basil Sydney, Denis O'Dea, Geoffrey Wilkinson, Ralph Truman, William Devlin 1949

SIRE DE MALETOIT'S DOOR ('Strange Door') Universal International - Director-Joseph Pevney. With Charles Laughton, Boris Karloff, Sally Forrest, Richard Stapeley, Michael Pate, Paul Cavanagh, Alan Napier 1951
1951

SON OF DR JEKYLL with Louis Hayward 1951
THE TREASURE OF FRANCHARD or 'The Treasure of Lost Canyon' (United Artists) Director: Ted Tetzlaff. 1951
With William Powell, Julie Adams, Charles Drake, Rosemary de Camp, Henry Hull and Tommy Iva. 1952
(Distributor: MCA/TV, Universal City)

THE MASTER OF BALLANTRAE (Warner/First National) Script: Herb Meado. Dir: William Keighley. 1952
Cast: Errol Flynn and Anthony Steel with Roger Livesey, Beatrice Campbell, Felix Aylmer, Mervyn Johns, Jacques Bertier, Yvonne Furneaux and Ralph Truman. 1953
1953

GREY METROPOLIS 1952
ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE 1953

DAUGHTER OF DR JEKYLL with Gloria Talbot. 1957
KIDNAPPED (Disney) Script/Dir: Robert Stevenson. Prod: Hugh Atwooll. Cast: Peter Finch and James MacArthur
 with Bernard Lee, John Laurie, Finlay Currie, Niall MacGinnis, Peter O'Toole, Miles Malleon,
 Oliver Johnston. Duncan Macrae and Andrew Cruikshank. 1959
 1960

THE UGLY DUCKLING

THE TWO FACES OF DR. JEKYLL (Hammer) Script: Wolf Mankiewicz. Dir: Terence Fisher. Prod: Anthony Nelson Keyes
 ('House of Fright' USA) Paul Massie Dawn Adams Christopher Lee David Kossoff Frances de Wolf Norma Marla. 1960
 THE MASTER OF BALLANTRAE (Royal Films USA as British/German co-production) With Michael Craig as James Durie. 1961
 LE TESTAMENT DU DOCTEUR CORDELIER (Experiment in Evil) Dir: Jean Renoir. With Jean-Louis Barrault. 1961
 THE NUTTY PROFESSOR (Paramount) Based on 'Jekyll and Hyde' with Jerry Lewis 1963
 THE WRONG BOX (Columbia/Salamander) Script: Larry Gelbert/Burt Shevelove. Dir: Bryan Forbes. Music: John Barry
 Cast: John Mills, Michael Caine and Tony Hancock with Ralph Richardson, Wilfred Lawson, Nanette
 Newman, Peter Cook, Dudley Moore, Peter Sellers, Thorley Walters, Cicely Courtneidge, Irene Handl,
 John le Mesurier. Gerald Sim, Norman Bird and Tutte Lemkow. 1966
 1967
 1968
 1968
 1969
 1970
 1970

THE MAN AND THE BEAST (Mexico)

EDGE OF SANITY (Canada)

KIDNAPPED (Germany) Featuring Thomas Weisgerber and Werner Kraus.

DOCTEUR JEKYLL ET LES FEMMES (France)

I MONSTER

HYDE (Britain) Animation based on 'Jekyll and Hyde'.

DR JEKYLL AND SISTER HYDE (Hammer Films) Script: Brian Clemens Director: Roy Ward Baker 1971
 with Ralph Bates and Martine Beswick

TREASURE ISLAND (Massfilms/Eguiluz/Harry Allantowers Prods) Script: Wolf Mankiewicz/ O.W.Jeeves (Orson Welles)
 Dir: John Hough. Cast: Orson Welles as Long John Silver
 with Kim Burfield, Lionel Stander, Walter Slezak and Rik Battaglia. 1971
 1972

TREASURE ISLAND (Japan) Dobutsu Takarajima (Cartoon)

DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE (Hammer) Script: Brian Clemens. Dir: Roy Ward Baker
 With Ralph Bates, Martine Beswick, Gerald Sim, Lewis Fiander, Dorothy Alison. 1971
 KIDNAPPED (Moviela/Omnibus) Script: Jack Pulman. Dir: Delbert Mann. Prod: Frederick H Brogger
 Cast: Michael Caine and Lawrence Douglas with Trevor Howard, Jack Hawkins,
 Donald Pleasance, Gordon Jackson, Freddie Jones, Jack Watson. 1971
 THE SUICIDE CLUB (Universal) With Joseph Haskell, Margot Kidder and Joseph Wiseman. 1973
 ADVENTURE ISLAND (Paramount) Re-make of 'Ebb Tide'. 1974
 1974
 1974
 1984

MARKHEIM

DR HECKLE AND MR HYPE Directed by Charles B. Griffiths.

DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE (Cannon Films) Cast: Michael Caine, Cheryll Ladd, with Joss Ackland and Lionel Jeffries. 1990
 Also Ronald Pickup, Diane Keen and Miriam Karlin. 1991

L'ISLE AU TRESOR (Film du Passage) Directed by Raul Ruiz.

ADAPTATIONS OF STEVENSON-RELATED WORKS FOR RADIO

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON	Talk by Arthur Bouchier	27 January	1924
STEVENSON AT SAMOA	by Caroline Buchan	3 November	1924
STEVENSON AND HENLEY	(Schools) J.C.Stobart and Mary Somerville	15 October	1925
TREASURE ISLAND	Talk by Arthur Bouchier - 'Treasure Island' - the Book, the Author and the Play	5 January	1926
THE WRECKER	Dramatised by C.A. Lewis with Sir Edmund Gosse (Experimental Radio)	3 December	1926
MARKHEIM	(Experimental Radio Daventry) Birmingham	24 May	1928
THE WRECKER	by Michael Talbot	14 January	1930
DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE	by Barbara Burnham, London Regional	5 November	1930
THE DORIES OF DURISDEER	(Scottish Regional) Serial adapted by James MacGregor from 'The Master of Ballantrae'	29 July	1931
THE WRECKER		10 July	1932
MARKHEIM	by Ursula Branston (London Region Radio)	7 March	1932
ADMIRAL GUINEA	Arranged Cyril Wood from West Regional (with repeat 8 March)		1932
THE BOTTLE IMP	by James MacGregor (National)	18 May	1933
WEIR OF HERMISTON	(Scottish Regional)		1935
TREASURE ISLAND	(National) Adapted by E.M.Delafield and produced by Cyril Wood from West Region with Balio! Holloway as Long John Silver.	Wednesday 6 May	1936
TREASURE ISLAND	(Re-performed on Regional Programme)	Thursday 7 May	1936
TREASURE ISLAND	by Olive Dehn in three parts for Regional on September 10, 17 and 24.		1936
KIDNAPPED	(National) Book talk		1937
THE SUICIDE CLUB	(Part 2) by Ursula Branston for National on July 6 and 9.		1937
ST IVES	(Regional)		1938
MARKHEIM	(National)		1938
WEIR OF HERMISTON	(Home Service/Scotland)		1943
TREASURE ISLAND	(Home Service)	12 December	1944
KIDNAPPED	(Home Service) South Region	4 January	1945
DO YOU KNOW LONG JOHN SILVER	(Home Service) West Region	26 January	1945
THE BLACK ARROW	(Home Service) North Region. Serial - 5, 12, 19, 26	July	1945
THRAWN JANET	(Home Service) Schools	13 September	1945
MASTER OF BALLANTRAE	(Home Service) Schools - In Two Parts	20 and 27 November	1945
TREASURE ISLAND	(I.P.) Reading by John Laurie	23 November	1945
THE STRANGE CASE OF DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE	(I.P.) 'Dr Lanyon's Narrative'	25 November	1945
THE TALE OF TOD LAPRAIK	(Home Service)	13 January	1946
THE WRECKER	(Light Programme) A Nightly Reading in the Series - 'The Tellers of Tales' - 6 to 24 (inc)	May	1946
WEIR OF HERMISTON	(Home Service/Scotland)	17 September	1946
R.L.S.	A talk by Ian Finlay (Home Service/Scotland)	13 November	1946

THE LAND OF COUNTERPANE - Readings from 'A Child's Garden of Verses' (Home Service) Schools 27 November 1946
 LETTERS AT CHRISTMAS - by R.L.S. and others (Home Service) 22 December 1946
 TREASURE ISLAND (Extracts) Schools - 'Plain English' 28 January 1947
 TREASURE ISLAND (Home Service/Scotland) Devised from the autobiographical papers of R.L. Stevenson 21 March 1947
 KIDNAPPED (Light Programme) Reading.
 THE SCOT WHO LIVED IN SAMOA (Light Programme) Play from Books - A talk on R.L.S. 18 September 1947
 KIDNAPPED (Home Service) Schools
 THE LAMPLIGHTER (Home Service) Children's Hour Requests 11 November 1947
 TRAVELS WITH A DONKEY Reading by Joseph Macleod 29 January 1948
 THE MASTER OF BALLANTRAE (Extracts) Light Programme 26 February 1948
 TRAVELS WITH A DONKEY (Home Service/Scotland) 'A Camp in the Dark' 4 March 1948
 TRAVELS WITH A DONKEY (Third Programme) Interlude Reading also AN INLAND VOYAGE (22 March) 21 March 1948
 TRAVELS WITH A DONKEY (Light Programme) New Books and Old 3 April 1948
 THE MASTER OF BALLANTRAE (Home Service/Scotland) 6 May 1948
 TREASURE ISLAND (Light Programme) New Books and Old 12 June 1948
 CATRIONA (Light programme) Pleasure from Books 11 November 1948
 TREASURE ISLAND (Light Programme) Curtain Up 29 December 1948
 TREASURE ISLAND (Light Programme) Monday Matinee 2 January 1949
 PROVIDENCE AND THE WRITER (Home Service) 5 January 1949
 AN ISLAND JOURNEY (Third Programme) Interlude Reading 6 January 1949
 THE EBB TIDE (Light Programme) Plays from Books 7 April 1949
 ST. IVES (Home Service/Scotland) Serial from April 17 to June 5 1949
 KIDNAPPED (CBC) 1949
 THE RETURN OF LONG JOHN SILVER (Light Programme) Morning Story 19 April 1949
 KIDNAPPED (Light Programme) 24 May 1949
 EDINBURGH (Home Service/Scotland) Interval Talk 22 August 1949
 R.L.S. - A Dramatic Biography (Home Service) Schools 18 October 1949
 THE MASTER OF BALLANTRAE (Home Service) Schools 25 October 1949
 POEMS (Light Programme) Woman's Hour 27 April 1950
 THE FRIENDLY COW (Light programme) Listen with Mother on 3 and 6 May 1950
 R.L.S. (Home Service/Scotland) Schools programme by John Keir Cross 30 May 1950
 (Repeated June 6)
 TOD LAPRAIK (Home Service/Scotland) This Is My Country 10 June 1950
 THE PAVILION ON THE LINKS (Home Service/Scotland) This Is My Country 13 October 1950
 (Repeated October 20)
 POEMS (Home Service/Northern Region) Verse for Autumn 16 October 1950
 THE YOUNG MAN (Home Service/ Scottish and Northern Regions 18 October 1950

THE PAVILION ON THE LINKS (Home Service/Scotland)	Part 2 - 'The Attack'	This Is My Country	20 October 1950
THE BEACH OF FALESA (Home Service/Scotland)			1 November 1950
TREASURE ISLAND (Light Programme)	The Younger Generation		10 November 1950
WEIR OF HERMISTON (Home Service Scotland)			13 November 1950
THE BOTTLE IMP (Light Programme)	Serial in Five Parts to November 17		13 November 1950
	(Third Programme and Scottish Home Service) Extracts from works as Interval Readings and birthday tributes from John Connell, G.B.Stern, Richard Hughes, L.F.Ramsay and James Paton variously until November 14.		
THE CELESTIAL UNION (Home Service)	Play on R.L.S.		15 November 1950
KIDNAPPED (Scottish Home Service)	Serial in Three Parts until 29 November		15 November 1950
THE MAN WHO GAVE AWAY HIS BIRTHDAY (Home Service)	Play on R.L.S.		19 November 1950
THE WEEVIL IN A BISCUIT (West Region)	Programme on R.L.S.		19 November 1950
R.L.S. (West Region)	'What Shall I Read?' with G.B.Stern		18 December 1950
POEMS (Home Service)	John Connell's Book Club with J.A.Smith		23 December 1950
KIDNAPPED (CBC)			1951
TREASURE ISLAND (Third Programme)	Interval Reading also ST. IVES (11 January) KIDNAPPED (12 January) WEIR OF HERMISTON (20 February) LETTERS (daily from 21 until 23 February)		4 January 1951
THE MASTER OF BALLANTRAE (Light Programme)	The Younger Generation		26 January 1951
KIDNAPPED (Home Service)	Extracts with prose and verse readings		28 June 1951
ENGLISH STREAM AND SCOTTISH BURN (Home Service)	Extracts from R.L.S.		30 September 1951
ST. IVES (Home Service/Scotland)	Scottish Heritage		7 May 1952
AT THREE MOUNTAIN GRAVES No 1, R.L.S. by Hilton Brown,	(Home Service/Scotland) Scottish Life and Letters		1 Oct 1952
VOYAGE TO WINDWARD by J.C.Furnas (Home Service)	The Story of R.L.S. - Talking of Books		19 October 1952
TELLER OF TALES (Home Service/Scotland)	Imaginary conversation with R.L.S. Chapbook		7 December 1952
THE WRECKER (Home Service)	Extract		7 December 1952
SONGS (Home Service/Scotland)	Settings of R.L.S. poems sung by Lyn Blair		19 December 1952
THE IMPACT OF R.L.S. (Home Service/Scotland)	Scottish Life and Letters. Fabric of Scottish Literature		18 Jan 1953
KIDNAPPED (Home Service/Scotland)	This Is My Country		24 April 1953
LONG JOHN SILVER (Home Service/Scotland)	Schools 'Adventures in English'		27 May 1953
THE PAVILION ON THE LINKS (Home Service)	Schools		16 June 1953
KIDNAPPED (Home Service)	Dramatised excerpt		23 June 1953
THE EBB TIDE (Home Service)			27 July 1953
EDINBURGH - PICTURESQUE NOTES (Third Programme)	Prose Reading (Repeated 2 September)		29 August 1953
CARLINA (Home Service)	Extract		17 September 1953
CHRISTMAS AT SEA (Home Service)	Prose and Verse Readings		7 December 1953

MARKHEIM (Light Programme)	'Laurence Olivier presents....'	9 February 1954
DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE (9 March)		
THE SUICIDE CLUB (6 April)		
THE SIRE DE MALETOIT'S DOOR (11 May)		
SMOUT (Home Service/Scotland)	A play on R.L.S.	15 February 1954
A GOSSIP ON ROMANCE (Home Service)	Extract	19 May 1954
THE BOTTLE IMP (CBC)		1954
TREASURE ISLAND (Home Service/Scotland)	Scottish Heritage	25 April 1955
THE BOTTLE IMP (Home Service/Scotland)	Schools	9 May 1955
TRAVELS WITH A DONKEY IN THE CEVENNES (Home Service)	'May We Recommend....?'	17 November 1955
THE VAGABOND (Home Service/Scotland)	St Andrew's Children	29 November 1955
THE UNFORGOTTEN CHOICE (Home Service)	Life and Letters	1 January 1956
DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE (Light Programme)	Curtain Up - 'The Stars in their Choices....'	8 February 1956
ADMIRAL GUINEA (Home Service)		15 February 1956
TREASURE ISLAND (Home Service/Scotland)	'May We Recommend....?'	8 March 1956
THE LAND OF COUNTERPANE (Home Service)	Party Pieces	26 March 1956
THE IVORY Lighthouse (Third Programme)	'Robert Louis Stevenson and the Samoan Imbroglia' (Eric Ewans) (With Moultrie R.Kelsall as Stevenson and Natalie Lynn as Fanny).	29 June 1956
THE ANNALS OF SCOTLAND (Home Service/Scotland)	Excerpts from 'The Counterblast' and 'Grey Galloway'	23 October 1956
R.L.S. (Home Service/Scotland)	This Is My Country	26 October 1956
CATRIONA (Home Service/Scotland)	Excerpts	2 November 1956
WEIR OF HERMISTON (Home Service/Scotland)	Arts Review Theatre	14 November 1956
CHRISTMAS AT SEA (Home Service)	Schools	15 February 1957
THE CELESTIAL SURGEON (Home Service)	Excerpts in 'Lighten Our Darkness'	9 March 1957
R.L.S. - A BIOGRAPHY (Home Service)	Tellers of Tales (Schools)	28 March 1957
POEMS (Home Service)	Schools	4 April 1957
IN PRAISE OF WALKING (N.Ireland)	Excerpts from Essays	12 April 1957
SMOUT (Home Service/Scotland)	Childhood of R.L.S. linked with 'A Child's Garden of Verses'	13 May 1957
ST IVES (Home Service/Scotland)	Scottish Heritage	20 May 1957
IN THE SOUTH SEAS (Third Programme)	Prose readings	30 May 1957
KIDNAPPED (Home Service/Scotland)	Schools	29 May 1957
R.L.S. (Northern Region)	Illustrated Talk	11 June 1957
TRAVELS WITH A DONKEY (Light Programme)	Excerpts in 'Before We Sleep' (also 19, and 20)	18 June 1957
THE FRIENDLY COW (Light Programme)		9 July 1957
WEIR OF HERMISTON (Home Service)	Repertory in Britain	15 July 1957
R.L.S. (Home Service/Scotland)	Literary Reminiscences and Recollections	3 September 1957
OUT OF TERM (Home Service)	R.L.S. in Edinburgh till 1881	12 September 1957
THE BLACK ARROW (Home Service)	(To March 20. Repeated Northern Region 21 April)	13 February 1959

THE CASE OF DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE (Home Service) This Is My Country (Repeated 29 May)
 A CHILD'S GARDEN OF VERSES (Home Service) (Repeated 14 June)
 THE MERRY MEN (Home Service/Scotland) This Is My Country
 TO TRAVEL HOPEFULLY (Home Service) The Works of R.L.S.
 THE WRONG BOX (Home Service)
 TREASURE ISLAND (Light Programme) Roundabout
 TOD LAPRAIK (Home Service/Scotland)
 THE TALE OF THRAWN JANET (Home Service/Scotland)
 THE SEVEN AGES OF MASTER TRIUMPHANS (Home Service)
 OLALLA (Light Programme) Woman's Hour (To 14 April)
 TRAVELS WITH A DONKEY (Home Service) 'May We Recommend...?'
 A CHRISTMAS AT SEA (Home Service) Prose and Verse Readings
 THE WHOLE DUTY OF CHILDREN (Light Programme) 'Voices and Verses' in Woman's Hour
 TREASURE ISLAND (Home Service) 'The Old Sea Dog'
 A WORLD OF SOUND - NOW AND THEN (Home Service) Memories of R.L.S.
 THIS IS MY COUNTRY (Home Service/Scotland) Biography of R.L.S. (Repeated 12 December)
 TREASURE ISLAND (Home Service) Schools
 KIDNAPPED (Home Service) Extract - 'In the Steps of David Balfour'
 A LOWDEN SABBATH MORN (Home Service/Scotland) Scottish Life and Letters
 THE EBB TIDE (Home Service) Afternoon Theatre
 DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE (Home Service) Books, Plays and Poems (Repeated 6 December)
 THE VAGABOND (Home Service) Readings On Record
 CHRISTMAS AT SEA (Home Service) Books, Plays and Poems
 FROM A RAILWAY CARRIAGE (Home Service) All of a Kind
 WINDY NIGHTS (Home Service) Stories and Rhymes
 A CONVERSATION ON R.L.S. (Home Service/Scotland) Scottish Life and Letters
 MARKHEIM (Home Service/Scotland) Late Night Bookshelf
 also TRAVELS WITH A DONKE (1 July)
 DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE (11 and 22 November)
 THE MISADVENTURES OF JOHN NICHOLSON (April 6-17 1964)
 AUTUMN FIRES (Home Service) 'Let's Join In'
 R.L.S. (Home Service) Eye Witness - Auction of Stevenson's House
 TRAVELS WITH A DONKEY (Home Service/Scotland) Interval talks (until 29 August)
 A CHILD'S GARDEN OF VERSES (Home Service/Scotland) Fireside Sunday School
 R.L.S. (Northern Ireland) Home This Afternoon - 'A Shipmate Talks'
 THE LIVING VOICE (Home Service/Scotland) Memories of R.L.S.
 THE SIRE DE MALETROIT'S DOOR (Home Service)
 TREASURE ISLAND (Home Service) A Second Start - Ideas on Education, Children and Fiction

22 May 1959
 7 June 1959
 12 June 1959
 12 July 1959
 24 August 1959
 18 December 1959
 27 February 1960
 5 March 1960
 27 March 1960
 4 April 1960
 17 May 1960
 23 May 1960
 27 May 1960
 22 August 1960
 25 November 1960
 2 December 1960
 20 January 1961
 7 April 1961
 7 May 1961
 16 October 1961
 22 November 1962
 9 February 1962
 30 May 1962
 31 July 1962
 22 February 1963
 28 April 1963
 17 June 1963
 6-17 1964)
 16 October 1964
 14 March 1964
 24 August 1964
 22 November 1964
 12 March 1965
 18 July 1965
 31 August 1965
 28 October 1965

THE COW (Home Service) Stories and Rhymes	January 1966
MY SHADOW (Home Service) Stories and Rhymes	February 1966
FROM A RAILWAY CARRIAGE (Home Service) Springboard: 'Trains' (Light Programme)	March 1966
THE STRANGE CASE OF DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE (Repeated on Home Service - Schools)	May 1966
THE BOTTLE IMP (Home Service) Story Time - 'Island Tales'	1966
TRAVELS WITH A DONKEY (Home Service) Home This Afternoon	August 1966
THE ISLES OF VOICES (Home Service) Story Time	1966
A LODGING FOR THE NIGHT (Northern Region) Schools 'The Art of the Short Story	September 1966
A CHILD'S GARDEN OF VERSES (Home Service/Scotland) Fireside Sunday School	October 1966
YOUNG MAN WITH CREAM TARTS (Home Service/Scotland)	October 1966
PRAYERS WRITTEN AT VAILIMA (Home Service) Ten to Eight - 'By Request'	October 1966
TREASURE ISLAND (Home Service) Story Time - Serial in Seven Parts (until May)	November 1966
THE CELESTIAL SURGEON (Home Service) Ten to Eight - 'The Bequest'	April 1967
R.L.S. (Home Service/Scotland) Life, (in two parts)	June 1967
A CHILD'S GARDEN OF VERSES (Home Service) Home This Afternoon	1967
TRAVELS WITH A DONKEY IN THE CEVENNES (Home Service/Scotland) Repeated July	November 1967
THE ADVENTURES OF DAVID BALFOUR (Home Service/Scotland) Adapted from 'Kidnapped' and 'Catriona'	April 1968
DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE (Home Service) Schools	June 1968
KIDNAPPED (Home Service) Children's Hour	1968
THE DUMB SOLDIER (Radio 4) Stories and Rhymes	May 1969
TRAVELS WITH A DONKEY (Radio 4) Story Time (Repeated June)	May 1969
THE MASTER OF BALLANTRAE (Radio 4) Story Time	February 1970
TO TRAVEL HOPEFULLY... (Radio 2) Woman's Hour Talking Point	June 1970
EDINBURGH: PICTURESQUE NOTES (Radio 4) 'Start the Week with Richard Baker'	August 1970
THE BODY -SNATCHER (Radio Scotland) Six Stories	October 1970
STRANGE TALES FROM SCOTLAND (Radio Scotland) Based on R.L.S.	January 1971
THE MISADVENTURES OF JOHN NICHOLSON (Radio 4) Serial in Four Parts (until May)	April 1971
FOREIGN CHILD (Radio 4) Material for Assembly (Schools) Also PREJUDICE in same month	June 1971
MARKHEIM (Radio Scotland) Adapted by Tom Wright	October 1971
THE WRONG BOX (Radio 4) Saturday Night Theatre	January 1972
THE TREASURE OF FRANCHARD (Radio 4)	1972
TREASURE ISLAND (Radio 4) Serial Reading in Ten Parts for Children	August 1972
TREASURE ISLAND (Radio 4) Christmas Afternoon Theatre	December 1972
THE MASTER OF BALLANTRAE (Home Service/Scotland) Adapted by R.J.B.Sellar	1973
VIRGINIBUS PUERISQUE (Radio 3) Reading by Richard Hurndall	February 1973
THE BEACH OF FALESA (Radio 3) Opera by Alun Hoddinot	April 1974

THE PHILOSOPHER OF NOMENCLATURE	(Radio 3)	Interval Reading also FIVE POEMS (24 November)	(Repeated 16 September 1976)	9 October 1975
HERMISTON	(Radio 3)	An Opera in three acts		
CHRISTMAS AT SEA	(Radio 4)	Poetry Prom		1 November 1975
THE MASTER OF BALLANTRAE	(BBC4)			24 December 1975
THE PAVILION ON THE LINKS	(BBC4)			1975
MARKHEIM	(Radio Scotland)	Dramatised by Tom Wright. Producer Gordon Emslie. (With Tom Watson, Malcolm Hayes and Martin Heller)		1975
NURSES	(Radio 3)	Interval Reading		31 May 1976
THE BODY-SNATCHER	(Radio4)			3 September 1976
DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE	(Radio 4)	Story Time		14 January 1977
DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE	(Radio 4)			31 January 1977
ESSAYS OF TRAVEL	(Radio 3)	Interval Reading - 'A Winter's Walk in Carrick and Galloway' also 'An Inland Voyage' (13 October)		5 April 1978
				12 April 1978
THE MASTER OF BALLANTRAE	(BBC4)			20 November 1978
GOOD AND BAD CHILDREN	(Radio 3)	Interval reading also CATHEDRALS (27 July) THE BODYSNATCHER (21 September) A SLEEP BENEATH THE STARS (9 October 1979, 12 June 1980 and 23 December 1982) THE PAVILION ON THE LINKS (15 October) AN INLAND VOYAGE (23 January 1980 and 4 February 1982) THE FRIENDLY COW (28 January) CHRISTMAS AT SEA (28 February 1981) NURSES (14 May and 4 June 1983) GOOD AND BAD CHILDREN (5 December) ACROSS THE PLAINS (9 April 1982) ANIMALS (15 August)		27 May 1979
THE RAJAH'S DIAMOND	(BBC3 An Opera)			1979
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON IN THE SOUTH SEAS		(BBC Features) Written and presented by June Knox Mawer with Robert Trotter as RLS, Margaret Robertson as Fanny and Robert Sheedy as Henry Adams.		August 1979
THE BODYSNATCHER	(Radio 4)			21 September 1979
THE PAVILION ON THE LINKS	(Radio 4)			15 October 1979
ACROSS THE PLAINS	(Radio 4)			1980
THE GLIMMERING LANDSCAPE	(Radio 4)	Reading of R.L.S.		30 May 1981
CATRIONA	(Radio 2)	Woman's Hour Serial		1981
KIDNAPPED	(BBC Readings)	Abridged by Elizabeth Bradbury (Reader - John Samson)	Woman's Hour	13 August 1981

TREASURE ISLAND (Radio 4) Story Time	16 August 1982
MISADVENTURES OF JOHN NICHOLSON (Radio 4) Story Time	27 December 1982
TREASURE ISLAND (Radio 4) Abridged by Donald Bancroft (Readers - Andrew Sachs/Douglas Leach (6 May)	July 1983
THE PAVILION ON THE LINKS (Radio 4) A Book At Bedtime	11 September 1983
TREASURE ISLAND (Radio 4)	26 December 1984
KIDNAPPED/CATRIONA (Radio 4)	16 June 1985
DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE (Radio 4) Afternoon Theatre	12 November 1985
TREASURE ISLAND (Radio 4) Schools	14 November 1985
THE AMATEUR EMIGRANT (Radio 4) A Book at Bedtime	5 May 1986
CATRIONA (Radio 4) Abridged in Fourteen Episodes (Reader - John Samson)	October 1986
TREASURE ISLAND (Radio 4)	25 December 1989
TREASURE ISLAND (BBC Drama Department, London) Dramatised by John Scotney and directed by Martin Jenkins with Peter Jeffrey, Hugh Paddick, John Moffat, Glyn Houston, Brian Haines and Wally K. Daly.	July 1990
(Repeated 29 October 1990)	
KIDNAPPED/CATRIONA (Radio Scotland) Adapted as a Serial in Ten Episodes	
THE BEACH OF FALESA (Radio 4) Classic Serial	20 July 1991
(Repeated 3 January 1992)	
THE HUNTER AND THE HILL (Radio Scotland) 'Saturday Playhouse' Writer Tom Wright Director Hamish Wilson	20 July 1991
THE MISADVENTURES OF JOHN NICHOLSON (Radio 4) Classic Serial	27 July 1991
THE EBB TIDE (Radio 4) Classic Serial	3 August 1991
THE PAVILION ON THE LINKS (Radio 4) Classic Serial	10 August 1991
WEIR OF HERMISTON (Radio Scotland and BBC4) Dramatised by Robert Forrest.	Saturday 11 July 1992

SOUND RECORDINGS

KIDNAPPED - Spoken Arts 2 (6089/90)

DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE (Abridged) Caedmon Records TC 1283 / CDL 51283. With Anthony Quayle

DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE (Excerpts) Spoken Arts 2 (1089/6117/18)

MARKHEIM Toppo (CMS 654)

TREASURE ISLAND (Excerpts) Spoken Arts 1025 / SAC 7019

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON - His Poetry, Prose and the Story of his Life - Caedmon Records TC 1448

Written and Edited by Murray Brown Producer: Marianne Mantelli Reader: George Rose. 1974

A CHILD'S GARDEN OF VERSES REL Records, Edinburgh (RECS 481) Narrated by John Cairney and Alannah O'Sullivan

Guitar - Geoffrey Davidson. Flute - Fiona Cameron. Boy Soprano - Joshua Sofaer. 1986

ADAPTATIONS OF RLS FOR TELEVISION

TREASURE ISLAND (CBC/TV) Adapter: Fletcher Markle, Producer/Director: Andrew Allan (with Mavor Moore).	1947
KIDNAPPED (CBC/TV)	1949
THE SIRE DE MALETOIT'S DOOR - 'Your Show Time' / USA - 28 January	1949
THE TREASURE OF FRANCHARD - " " / " - 18 March	1949
THE SUICIDE CLUB - The Chevrolet Tele-theatre / USA - 2 May	1949
A LODGING FOR THE NIGHT - 'Your Show Time' / USA - with Stanley Waxman as Francois Villon - 15 July	1949
DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE - Suspense / USA - with Ralph Bell as Dr. Jekyll - 20 September	1949
THE SUICIDE CLUB " " / " - 14 February	1950
TUSITALA (BBC/TV)	1950
DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE (BBC/TV) Nov 14	1950
THE MASTER OF BALLANTRAE (CBC/TV) Adapter/Producer/Director: Andrew Allan (with John Drainie, Alan King).	1950
TUSITALA	1950
THE SIRE DE MALETOIT'S DOOR - Starlight Theatre / USA - 30 April	1951
TREASURE ISLAND (BBC/TV Serial) May 1 to June 19	1951
THE SIRE DE MALETOIT'S DOOR (BBC/TV) Dec 30	1951
THE BOTTLE IMP - Lights Out / USA - 15 January	1951
DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE - Suspense / USA - Re-staged with Basil Rathbone as Dr Jekyll - 6 March	1951
THE SIRE DE MALETOIT'S DOOR - Lux Video Theatre / USA - 7 May	1951
TREASURE ISLAND - Studio One - Teleplay Donald Davis - 5 May	1952
A LODGING FOR THE NIGHT - Omnibus / USA - with Yul Brynner as Francois Villon - 8 March	1952
MARKHEIM (BBC/TV) Dec 28	1952
KIDNAPPED (CBC/TV) Adapter/Producer/Director by Andrew Allan with John Drainie, Don Harron, Frank Peddie.	1952
EBB TIDE (BBC/TV) Feb 5	1952
KIDNAPPED (BBC/TV) July 7	1952
A LODGING FOR THE NIGHT - Rheingold Theatre - with Douglas Fairbanks Jun, as Francois Villon - 13 May	1953
THE BOTTLE IMP (CBC/TV) Adapter: Richard Denis, Producer: Sydney Newman, Director: Arthur Hiller.	1954
SMYRNA INCIDENT - Cavalcade of America - 19 January	1954
KIDNAPPED - Kraft Theatre / USA - 9 January	1954
MRS ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON - TV Reader's Digest - 31 January	1955
TUSITALA - Four Star Playhouse / USA - with David Niven as R.L.S. 24 February	1955
TREASURE ISLAND (1950 Feature Film) Walt Disney Presents... I May and I December	1955
DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE - Climax! / USA - Teleplay Gore Vidal - with Michael Rennie as Dr Jekyll - 28 July	1955
THE ADVENTURES OF LONG JOHN SILVER - DuMont Network / USA - with Robert Newton - 26 Episodes from 12 September	1955
A STATE OF SEIGE - Appointment with Adventure / USA - 6 November	1955
ST IVES (BBC/TV Serial) Oct 28 - Dec 2	1955
MARKHEIM - The Screen Directors' Playhouse / USA - Teleplay Paul Osborn/John McGreevey - 11 April	1956

THE BOTTLE IMP - Matinee Theatre/USA - 22 May	1956
THE SUICIDE CLUB - Lilli Palmer Theatre - Teleplay Harry Allan Towers - 12 December	1956
MARKHEIM (CBC) Adapter: Alfred Harris, Producer/Director: David Greene.	1957
TREASURE ISLAND (BBC/TV1)	1957
DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE - Matinee Theatre/USA - Teleplay Robert Esson - (with Douglas Montgomery) - 8 March	1957
THE BOTTLE IMP - The United States Steel Hour - 13 March	1957
THE WRECKER - (novel with Lloyd Osbourne) Maverick/USA - Teleplay by Russell Hughes - 12 January	1957
THE BLACK ARROW (BBC/TV) Serial Jan 19- Feb 25.	1958
THE SUICIDE CLUB - Matinee Theatre/USA - Teleplay by Robert Esson - 25 February	1958
TREASURE ISLAND - The DuPont Show of the Month/USA - Teleplay Michael Dyne - 5 March	1960
ST IVES (BBC/TV) June 12	1960
THE SUICIDE CLUB - The Mystery Show - Teleplay by Norman Lessing - 18 September	1960
A STATE OF SEIGE - Maverick/USA - 1 January	1961
THE RETURN OF LONG JOHN SILVER (from 'Treasure Island') Shirley Temple Theatre - 19 February	1961
THE MASTER OF BALLANTRAE (BBC/TV Scotland) Serial May 27 - June 3 Adapted: Constance Cox,	1962
Producer/Director: Pharic McLaren. With John Cairney, John Breslin and Fulton Mackay	1963
KIDNAPPED - (1960 Feature Film) - Walt Disney presents... 17 March and 24 March	1963
KIDNAPPED (BBC/TV) oct 13	1963
TREASURE ISLAND - Franco-London Film Television Series of 13 Episodes during season 1965-66	1967
" " " " " 17 (Directed by Wolfgang Liebenheimer)	1967
ST IVES (BBC/TV) April 9	1967
DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE (ABC/TV/USA) Adapter: Ian McLellan. Producer: Dan Curtis Director: Charles Jarrott with Jack Palance as Dr Jekyll - 7 January (9-11-30 pm)	1968
DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE (CBC/TV)	1968
KIDNAPPED (BBC Scotland)	1968
TREASURE ISLAND (BBC/TV1) Nov 11	1968
TREASURE ISLAND (Franco-London-CBC/TV)	1969
MARKHEIM (BBC/TV1)	1970
KIDNAPPED (Omnibus Productions)	1972
DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE (BBC/TV) 9 Feb	1972
DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE (Timestex/NBC/TV Special) Music: Lionel Bart Direct: David Winters (with Kirk Douglas).	1973
Also Susan George, Susan Hampshire, Stanley Holloway and Donald Pleasance.	1973
THE SUICIDE CLUB - ABC Wide World of Mystery (British Production) 13 February (11-30pm - iam)	1973
WEIR OF HERMISTON (BBC Scotland Serial) Feb 15 Adapter: Tom Wright. With Tom Fleming	1973
Also David Rintoul and Virginia Stark.	1975
KIDNAPPED (New Zealand TV Cartoon)	1977
KIDNAPPED CBS Classic Tales - Animated Feature (No specific date)	
TREASURE ISLAND (BBC/TV1) Oct 16	

THE SILVERADO SQUATTERS (BBC/TV Scotland)	1977
WEIR OF HERMISTON (BBC Scotland Compilation)	1977
THE RAJAH'S DIAMOND (BBC/TV opera)	1979
KIDNAPPED (BBC Scotland)	1980
<u>THE STRANGE CASE OF DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE</u>	(BBC/TV2/Mystery!) Nov 20 Teleplay Gerald Savory (with David Hemmings)
	Also Lisa Harrow, Ian Bannen and Diana Dors.
	1980
TREASURE ISLAND (NZ/TV Serial)	1981
<u>TUSITALA</u> (ABC/TV - Australia) Teleplay by Peter Yeldham with John McEnery as R.L.S.	1982

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

REFERENCES

'No man can say I have been idle'
(Letters, 11, 79.)

THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

REFERENCES

(For fuller details see Bibliography under Author. All quotes from Works and Letters indicate Edition and Year)

Theme

1. Balfour, 2,162.

Introduction

Part One

'All the world's a stage'

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2. The Foreigner At Home (Memories and Portraits) Chatto and Windus, 1904, p14.
3. Masson, p199.
4. Ibid p213.
5. A Chapter On Dreams (Across the Plains) Chatto and Windus, 1905, p159.
6. Ibid p160.
7. Robert Louis Stevenson, Bookman Extra Number, 1913, caption to photograph p41.
8. St.James Guide to Biography, ed: Paul E. Schellinger, (1991), pp42.
9. Ibid p43.

Part Two

1. Child's Play (Virginibus Puerisque) Chatto and Windus, 1915, p164.
2. Ibid p161.
3. An Apology For Idlers (Virginibus Puerisque) Chatto and Windus, 1915, p78.
4. Theatricality - Sociology and Theatre, Elizabeth Burns, p1
5. Ibid p33.
6. Ibid
7. Ibid p8.
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11. Elizabeth Burns p10
12. Ibid
13. Poem - 'To A Louse' by Robert Burns (1759-96) Works, Bicentenary Edition (Ed. William Wallace), 1959, p150.
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19. Ibid p153.
20. Ibid p12.
21. Elizabeth Burns p20/21.
22. Lay Morals, London, Chatto and Windus, 1914, p5.

Section B (i)

THE CHARITY BAZAAR

1. Letters, (Methuen 1911), 4,263.
2. Balfour, 1,65.
3. Swearingen, p21.
4. Letters, (Methuen 1911), 4,262.
5. ~~Booklet~~ given to the present writer by Mrs Kathleen McFie, wife of the then owner of 17 Heriot Row. It perpetuates the error that Stevenson wrote the piece when he was sixteen. ,
6. Masson, p41.

Section B (ii)

MONMOUTH

7. Stevenson (R.L.S. to R.A.M.) correspondence Beinecke Collection, Yale University. See Swearingen, p5.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
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15. Notes and Introduction by Charles Vale. 1928 Edition.
16. Press cuttings from Margaret Stevenson's Scrapbook.
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STAGE TWO
Section A

'Creeping like snail'

1. Masson, p64.
2. Balfour, 1,85.
3. Kelman, p96.
4. Lay Morals, Chatto and Windus, 1914, p36.
5. Some College Memories, (Memories and Portraits) Chatto and Windus, 1904, p16.
6. Crabbed Age and Youth, (Virginibus Puerisque) Chatto and Windus, 1915, p59.
7. Reflections and Remarks on Human Life, (Edinburgh Ed. 1898), pp 26/41. Also Tusitala 26. See Balfour, 1, 102.
8. Letters, (Methuen 1911) 1,53.
9. Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde after One Hundred Years. Edited by William Veeder and Gordon Hirsch. 1988, pp107-116.
10. Ibid.
11. Weir of Hermiston, (Chatto and Windus 1904), p28
12. Letters, (Methuen 1911), 1,44.
13. Swearingen, p4.
14. Works, (Pentland Edition 1907) Introduction, p2.
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16. Swearingen p13.
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19. Masson, p159.
20. Elwin, p 38.

21. Some College Memories, (Memories and Portraits), Chatto and Windus, 1904, p20.
22. Elwin, p38
23. Ibid. Also Aldington, p44.
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25. Unpublished letter to Mrs Fanny Sitwell. Beinecke Collection. See Furnas, (Appendix B), p398.
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27. Letter to Charles Baxter quoted Balfour, 1,84 and Bell, p77.
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STAGE TWO
Section B

'Unwillingly to School'

1. Talk and Talkers (Memories and Portraits) Chatto and Windus, 1904, p100.
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STAGE TWO
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'And then the lover'

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'Sighing like furnace'

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Morals, Chatto and Windus, 1914, p14.
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Section B

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COMMENT AND ANALYSIS

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COMMENT AND ANALYSIS

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COMMENT AND ANALYSIS

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COMMENT AND ANALYSIS

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Section B

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A HENLEY CODA

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Section A

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STAGE SIX
Section D

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Section E

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STAGE SEVEN
Section A

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FILM

Section B

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'Sans Taste'

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2. Works (Weir of Hermiston) Chatto and Windus 1920 Editorial Notes by Sidney Colvin, p167.
3. Interview in Scottish Sunday Express 11 February 1973.
4. Ibid.
5. Letter to present writer, 2 May 1994.

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1. Bell (Preface), p17.
2. Letter (Methuen 1913) 4,231.

CONCLUSION

'Sans everything'

1. Hampden, p9
2. Bell p13
3. Works (Memories and Portraits) Chatto and Windus 1904. A Humble Remonstrance, p178.
4. Strong, p89.
5. Ibid p101
6. Ibid
7. Beerbohm, (More Theatres 1956) pp305/310.
8. Trewin, (Mr. Macreadie 1955) p77.
9. Jones, p91.
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THE THEATRICAL R.L.S.

THE END

'Ah vanitas vanitatum!
which of us is happy in this world?
which of us has his desire? or having it satisfied?
Come children, let us shut up the box and the puppets,
for our play is played out'.