

## Rereading Robert Louis Stevenson

First of all: why should we read Stevenson? Or rather, since most of us have at least read *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped* at some point in our childhood, why should one reread him as an adult, as a general reader or as a student of the history of the novel? Perhaps his very status as a boy classic has prevented readers and critics from going back to him—after all he seems very firmly set in our own past at about the boy-scout age, and equally firmly set in the literary past. The initials “R.L.S.” have lost all of their late-Victorian glamour—in fact they date Stevenson precisely in that brief period around the turn of the century, when it was fashionable for authors to be known by their initials; A. E. (George Russell), H. D. (Hilda Dolittle), and of course the magnificent and long-forgotten Q. (Quiller-Couch), who appropriately enough completed *Weir of Hermiston*, the novel Stevenson left unfinished at his death. The initials conjure up a now-spurious intimacy—the author as travelling companion and personal friend. Even worse, Stevenson was also known as “Tusitala,” the Samoan word for teller of tales. This title was conferred on him by the people of Vailima in Samoa, where he spent his last years as a sort of unofficial feudal overlord. This image of the Great White Chief winning the hearts of the natives also dates Stevenson at the height of the Empire; it helped enable him to be adopted as healthy reading for boy scouts—Baden-Powell’s movement was just beginning at the time of Stevenson’s death. Further, Stevenson is still burdened by the rather didactic and simplified legends about his life—principally the image of him bravely and uncomplainingly wrestling with consumption (“bludie Jack,” as he jocularly called it) while writing the adventures he was too ill to live for himself. This kind of “fortitude in adversity” moral for his life has lost most of its appeal.

So far I have only given reasons for *not* reading Stevenson. But these reasons are in large part to do with his “image,” which was made for

him by publishers, biographers, reviewers, friends and so forth. The Edwardian image of Stevenson as a sort of hero and saint combined, overcoming physical sickness with moral health, and writing robust adventure stories in a good style, was easily overthrown by the generation of 1920, along with the earlier Eminent Victorians. The debunking biographies and critical attacks of the post-war decades presented Stevenson as a fraud and coward, a poseur and plagiarist. Take, for example, the outburst of Gordon Comstock, George Orwell's hero in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936). Comstock is dyspeptically surveying the stock of the seedy bookshop where he works:

He looked at the time-dulled 'classics' near his feet. Dead, all dead. Carlyle and Ruskin and Meredith and Stevenson—all are dead, God rot them. He glanced over their faded titles. *Collected Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*. Ha, ha! That's good. *Collected Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson!* Its top edge was black with dust. Dust thou art, to dust returnest. Gordon kicked Stevenson's buckram backside. Art there, old false-penny? You're cold meat, if ever Scotchman was.

This sense of falsity in Stevenson is also found in V. S. Pritchett's 1944 essay, which charges Stevenson with affectation, with being "too succulently conscious of his own role" (in itself a somewhat precious phrase). He goes on:

The thing that has damned Stevenson in our generation is the thing that made him in his own: the air of strenuous candour and masculine nonchalance which now seems to us too often a studied and evasive display.

The whole process of Stevenson's canonization and decanonization, though in itself an interesting study in literary sociology, is something of an obstacle to reaching an understanding of Stevenson's place in his own time, in the literary context of the 1870s and 1880s. Here we find a quite different picture. We find Stevenson as an alert and wide-ranging critic closely in touch with contemporary literature, especially American, French and Russian. And, perhaps most surprising, he was a close friend of Henry James. Stevenson wrote what he entitled "A Humble Remonstrance" to James' important 1884 essay on "The Art of Fiction" (which was itself a reply to Walter Besant's essay of the same title). The exchange developed into a correspondence and a personal friendship which lasted until Stevenson's death in 1894. The two were socially congenial (James got on with Stevenson's American wife much better than he did with the more Bohemian friends of RLS's bachelor days), and despite the difference in their subject matter, they shared a concern for fiction as a high art form, worthy to rank in status with poetry and drama.

Stevenson was, in fact, very much a man of his generation, the contemporary of Zola and Hardy as well as James. He was born in Edinburgh in 1850, the son of Thomas Stevenson, engineer and stern Victorian *paterfamilias*, who provided consistent opposition to his son's bohemian tendencies and literary ambitions. Thus Stevenson was twenty in 1870: his coming of age coincides with an important transition in the history of the novel. The year 1870 saw the death of Dickens and the publication of *Middlemarch*; it is thus a convenient point at which to date the end of the great central period of the Victorian novel, dominated by the work of Dickens, Eliot, Thackeray and Trollope. In their various ways, these authors and others had created a new form of the novel which became the central literary vehicle of their age. This form was imposing in its bulk: it came serialized over many months, or bound in three stout volumes. It contained many characters, many detailed descriptions of clothes, rooms, houses, streets and landscapes, and long and often elaborate chains of connected events. But these are only the outward characteristics of the form: the inner, organizing principle is that of Society. In place of the more direct, more purely individual interactions and moral appraisals of the eighteenth-century novel, we find in the Victorian novel that relationships between individuals are nearly always mediated, and partly conditioned, by society as a total system of institutions, communities, and classes. Indeed the most striking development in the novel over the period 1830-1870 is a growth in the sense of the social system as a binding and constricting force, and a lessening of the sense of individual autonomy and self-determination. Such, then, is the dominant literary form which confronts the young writer in 1870.

Sartre has recently given us in his study of Flaubert an extremely interesting analysis of what he calls "the situation of the young writer in 1840." He stresses the point that the young writer generally does not know what he wants to write, except that he wants to write something new. This anxiety, this fear of simply copying the work of the preceding or still established generation, this doubt and uncertainty about how or what to write, is all too easily forgotten by the literary historian looking back at the completed *oeuvre*. In Sartre's terms, the historian sees literature retrospectively as *littérature-faite*, as what is written, published and finished; but for the young writer, literature is *littérature-à-faire*, unwritten literature which is his task to write. Sartre goes on to show how Flaubert's generation combined various elements from Romanticism and from the Enlightenment into a new mixture which formed the literature of the Second Empire. Sartre's dialectical model is particularly relevant here, because Stevenson, perhaps more

than others in his generation, suffered from uncertainty about how and what to write; from what Harold Bloom calls the *anxiety* of influence.

In his struggle not to write in the established forms of the older generation, the young writer naturally turns back to the generations before in search of alternatives. In Stevenson's case, as he looked back beyond the Victorian novel, the inevitable presence was that of Scott, not only as the founder of the European historical novel, but also as the greatest novelist of Scotland. Scott himself offered in novels such as *Waverley* or *Rob Roy* a synthesis between the "Lowland" bourgeois, common sense values of his decent, average heroes, and the romantic, chivalric, but historically doomed values of the Highland clans. This contrast of Lowland realism and Highland romance can be seen in Stevenson in the relationship between David Balfour and Alan Breck in *Kidnapped*, or between Henry and James in *The Master of Ballantrae*.

Yet Stevenson is far from being simply Scott's epigone. The Victorians had transferred the techniques of the historical novel, in particular the detailed descriptions of clothes, houses and landscapes, from the remote and exotic to the near and present, creating a sort of history of modern times, a reconstruction of the present treated as if it were the past. But it was precisely these aspects of Scott, the aspects which had been absorbed into the social novel, that Stevenson scrupulously omitted. Instead of setting aside a chapter for an expansive and leisurely inventory of a costume or a room, a castle or a valley, as Scott does, Stevenson generally confines himself to the few telling details noted by the characters in passing. Stevenson was very scathing about Scott's slow and ponderous style, which he described as "slovenly."

In fact, his own preferred stylistic model went back beyond Scott and Romanticism to the English novelists of the eighteenth century, particularly Defoe and Smollet. It is probable that Stevenson set so many of his novels and stories in that century partly to have an opportunity of writing in the style of the period. Through a first-person narrator like David Balfour, Stevenson develops a style of brusque practicality in description and direct judgement in matters of moral conscience, which, besides being delightful in itself, is historically appropriate to, say, 1745. Stevenson's historicism is of quite a different order to Scott's: period atmosphere is created much more by tone and style than by antiquarian reconstruction.

Stevenson, besides looking back to Scott and the English eighteenth-century novel, also looked abroad. If there is a common factor among the foreign writers that he read enthusiastically and wrote critical essays on, it is that most of them were in some way outside, or opposed

to, the primarily secular, urban social perspective of the Victorian novel. Thus the great tradition of the nineteenth-century French novel, defined by twentieth-century critics like Harry Levin or Martin Tur-nell to consist of Balzac, Stendhal, Flaubert and Zola, was of less interest to Stevenson than Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas, both writers who enjoyed great prestige in their day, but who have been relegated to childhood or adolescent reading for much the same reasons as Stevenson himself: they seem belated, nostalgic, backward-looking romantics in a time when social realism was the "progressive" trend in the novel.

In American literature, however, social realism did not become fully established until late in the nineteenth century. Here the great tradition, as outlined by Harry Levin again in *The Power of Blackness*, is that of the romance rather than of the social novel. In this tradition, the central theme is the relationship between individual man and nature, extending into the supernatural, a relationship consisting of hard physical adventure or spiritual contemplation, or both. These themes were congenial to Stevenson. He was an early enthusiast for Whitman, praising his robust openness to experience, and an admirer of Thoreau's dogged independence in *Walden*, though he berated Thoreau's tendency to priggishness. Stevenson's literary affinity to America was also strengthened by personal ties, particularly after he made the harrowing trip across the Atlantic and took the newly-opened transcontinental railway to California to marry his American wife. From this point of view, James and Stevenson seem to meet and pass each other from opposite directions—James seeking the kind of settled society Stevenson was trying to leave behind.

The third foreign literature which attracted Stevenson was Russian. Here, though he knew and admired Turgenev, it was Dostoyevsky who made the greatest impact on him. When he first read *Crime and Punishment* in the French translation in the mid-1880's, he described Dostoyevsky as "the devil of a swell, to be sure." Stevenson paid the Russian author the high compliment of imitation; his story "Markheim" is more or less a recasting of the central episode of *Crime and Punishment*. Markheim, armed with various rationalisations about the end justifying the means and the need to redistribute wealth, murders an old pawnbroker on Christmas day, and then starts hallucinating. He has an interview with the devil, whose temptations he finally rejects, and ends up by surrendering himself to justice. The writing of this story initiates Stevenson's darker phase, where in novels like *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *The Master of Ballantrae* there is a strong diabolical or supernatural element. Dostoyevsky's novel, though set in urban St. Petersburg, had offered him an example of how

the novel could transcend the social and secular plane of existence and reach the metaphysical and spiritual.

Stevenson's general susceptibility to influence and, in particular, his use of Dostoyevsky, leads one to suspect that there is some basis for the accusations of plagiarism which helped to bring down his reputation after the First World War. But it should be remembered that even in 1922 T. S. Eliot was attacked for plagiarism in *The Waste Land*, and it was not for a while that he, Joyce and others made quotation and parody into respectable literary devices. Stevenson himself was a gifted borrower and parodist of a somewhat different kind—several of his lesser-known but highly entertaining works, e.g. the *New Arabian Nights*, *The Dynamiter* and *The Wrong Box*, are parodies of the detective novel and mystery thriller in the manner of Gaboriau. In the matter of style, Stevenson freely admitted that he had formed his prose style by "playing the sedulous ape to Hazlitt, to Lamb, to Wordsworth, to Sir Thomas Browne, to Hawthorne, to Montaigne, to Baudelaire and to Obermann." This confession was often quoted against him, particularly the self-deprecating phrase "sedulous ape." Chesterton's is the neatest rebuttal:

The real reason why this confession of plagiarism out of a hundred such confessions, is always quoted, is because the confession itself has the stamp, not of plagiarism, but of personal originality. In the very act of claiming to have copied other styles, Stevenson writes most unmistakably in his own style.

Stevenson's catholicity of taste in reading is matched by the great variety of his own work. He tried his hand at practically every type of literature: parody, satire, essays, travel books, adventure stories, horror stories, criticism and even poetry and plays. Partly, no doubt, this is due to his own temperament. Normally he liked to be working on two quite different types of book at the same time. Also we must remember that he died fairly young—at forty-four—in the middle of what could have been his one truly major work, *Weir of Hermiston*. Part of the problem is the historical situation of the English novel in the late Victorian period. Clearly one cannot leave Stevenson's personal eclecticism out of account, since other writers of his generation, such as Conrad or James, were able to find a form and achieve major work in it. Nevertheless, despite all of Stevenson's manifold experiments and minor successes, he never attempted (or at any rate never finished) a long novel about the individual in society. It is as if he spent his writing career of twenty years casting around in all directions which led away from the Victorian novel. Despite his undoubted gifts as a writer, he remains a minor figure, and for this very reason he can reveal

more about the historical situation of his generation of novelists than its major figures.

Despite the breadth of his reading and writing, Stevenson was always a stout, though never narrow-minded, opponent of Naturalism. After 1870, the Naturalist movement led by Zola occupied the centre of the literary stage. In one sense, Naturalism can be seen as an extension or outgrowth of the mid-century realism of the Victorian novel: naturalist fiction is largely social and secular in its outlook, and usually involves long descriptions of the external environment. Gradually, over the period 1830-1870, the sense of the power and complexity of the social system seemed to override the other factor in Victorian realism—the individual's freedom of action and conscience. By the time we reach Zola, this gradual change has produced, as he well realised and proclaimed, something qualitatively different from realism: Naturalism, the study of man as if he were merely a part of nature. The novelist becomes a natural scientist presenting human life as a purely objective phenomenon. If there is a key phrase for the Naturalist movement, it is *la bête humaine*—the human animal—whose behaviour results from the interplay of heredity and instinct with environmental conditions. Individual conscience is largely a pious delusion. Although Naturalism in its extreme, polemical form never dominated the English novel as thoroughly as it did the French, there are plenty of approximations: besides the Zolaism of George Moore and Somerset Maugham in their youth, we have the pessimism of George Gissing and Thomas Hardy; all of them incline to despair of individual self-fulfillment. Poverty or fate, inner weakness or disease, slowly and inevitably undo all the higher aspirations of the individual. If the novel is the literary form of middle-class individualism, it seems among many of the social novelists of Stevenson's generation to have turned into its own opposite: the form in which the individual is gradually crushed and annihilated by forces outside his control.

Stevenson's different writings can be usefully placed in relation to the different reactions against the "decline" of the social realistic novel into naturalism and pessimism. The most conspicuous reaction is, of course, the aestheticism of the 1880s and 1890s, which in a way simply surrenders the whole terrain of society to the naturalists, and takes refuge in a world of complete artifice. "Art for art's sake" proclaims a sort of *unnaturalism*, a kind of wilful perversity most typically expressed in Huysmans' *A Rebours* (well translated as "Against Nature"), where the hero shuts himself up in a house in suburban Paris to cultivate exotic sensations in complete solitude. Stevenson showed a healthy skepticism about this sort of thing in several of his satires, particularly the *New Arabian Nights* and *The Wrecker*, where the

"Aesthetic" affectations of his young heroes are deftly ridiculed. On the other hand one has to concede something to Oscar Wilde's counterattack. Wilde read Stevenson's *Vailima Letters* (about Samoa) while he was in Reading Gaol, and commented:

I see the traces of a terrible *strain* to lead a natural life. To chop wood with any advantage to oneself, or profit to others, one should not be able to describe the process. In point of fact the natural life is the unconscious life. Stevenson merely extended the sphere of the artificial by taking to digging. The whole dreary book has given me a lesson. If I spend my future life reading Baudelaire in a café, I shall be leading a more natural life than if I take to hedger's work or plant cacao in a mudswamp.

Wilde's stress on writing as an inherently artificial activity points up the paradox in Stevenson's work which led William Archer, in an early review, to describe him as an "athletico-aesthete"—an awkward but memorable phrase. Chesterton expressed much the same idea in his book on Stevenson: "It really did seem preposterous to many that a serious literary artist of the age of Pater should devote himself to rewriting Penny Dreadfuls." That Stevenson was indeed one of the most self-conscious of stylists one can see from his essay "On some technical elements of style in Literature," which is in itself very self-conscious in style. Stevenson believed in giving his reader sharp little stylistic shocks, for instance, by using words in somewhat unusual senses or contexts, "to restore to them their primal energy, wittily shift them to another issue, or make of them a drum to rouse the passions." In sentence structures, he liked to produce a kind of "knot," or "hitch," a "moment of suspended meaning" (this may account for his near-addictive use of the semi-colon). The aim is to create suspense on the syntactical as well as the plot level. Stevenson's stylistic care even reaches to devices like assonance and alliteration, which we are normally more conscious of in poetry than in prose. He writes in his essay on stylistic techniques:

You may follow the adventures of a letter through any passage that has particularly pleased you: find it, perhaps, denied awhile, to tantalize the ear; find it fired again at you in a whole broadside; or find it pass into congenerous sounds, one liquid or labial melting away into another.

Like Pope's imitations in the *Essay on Criticism*, this sentence demonstrates the kind of alliterative interweaving it describes, the key letters being p, f and l. There is also a characteristically teasing Stevensonian hitch in "find it, perhaps, denied awhile, to tantalize the ear." This level of self-consciousness in the writing of prose is clearly as high as that of Flaubert or Pater or Wilde.



Beyond the cult of style which he has in common with the aesthetes, Stevenson also moves away from the social novel in the matter of bulk, particularly in his omission of the long, detailed descriptions of environments. This feature, he writes, "was inaugurated by the romantic Scott; and at length, by the semi-romantic Balzac and his more or less wholly unromantic followers, bound like a duty on the novelist." Rejecting this kind of prolixity, Stevenson recommends "a more naked narrative articulation ... a general lightening of this baggage of detail." As a stylist, Stevenson may have travelled self-consciously, but he believed in travelling light. His landscapes are rendered from the point of view of someone who has to move through them, to find a hiding place or evade pursuit, rather than as decorative backdrops or static social environments. Take, for instance, this rendering of the valley which Alan Breck and David Balfour have to cross without being seen by the many scattered redcoat sentries:

When we must pass an open place, quickness was not all, but a swift judgment not only of the lie of the whole country, but of the solidity of every stone on which we must set foot; for the afternoon was now fallen so breathless that the rolling of a pebble sounded abroad like a pistol shot, and would start the echo calling among the hills and cliffs.

Here we learn that the scene is a stony valley walled by hills and cliffs on a very still afternoon; yet the scene is presented purely in terms of the personal danger of the fugitives, the qualities they will need to survive, and their calculation of the risk of making a noise. Stevenson has made each stone sit in the valley as vividly as the pistol shot they fear.

In keeping with this alert and active style, there is a new emphasis in Stevenson's work on physical experience. For him, romance should concentrate:

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.

And indeed much of the care of Stevenson's style is devoted to rendering with sharp particularity the texture of bodily sensation—hunger and repletion, fatigue and rest, pain and pleasure. Moral problems are of course not absent from the adventure stories, but they are of a different kind than the earnest soul-searching of the heroes and heroines of the Victorian social novel. The main problems are of loyalty and enmity between men; they occur in action and often have to be resolved quickly. Where the dilemmas of the Victorian novel have to be settled within the contexts of marriage, the family or the surrounding community, the questions of loyalty and trust that occur,

say, between Alan Breck and David Balfour, are more purely individual, and are resolved by reflex or instinct within a rapidly changing situation. Often we are in the presence of something akin to the warrior ethic, a morality older than the complex codes of man in a settled society. This connects Stevenson to the epic and the medieval romance, as well as anticipating the ideas of activism and virile fraternity in writers such as Silone, Hemingway and Malraux.

Stevenson's emphasis on physical experience is quite different from that of the Naturalists, in whose work the body is either degraded in itself, through disease or filth, or degrades the moral conscience through its imperious, uncontrollable demands for satisfaction. Bodily suffering for Stevenson is to be mastered and controlled by the will or the conscience. The sheer safety of modern middle-class society seemed to him ignoble and emasculating:

Already in our society as it exists, the bourgeois is too much cottoned about for any zest in living; he sits in his parlour out of reach of any danger ... and there he yawns. If the people in the next villa took pot-shots at him, he might be killed indeed, but so long as he escaped he would find his blood oxygenated and his views of the world brighter.

His own efforts to experience danger on his travels, especially those described in *An Inland Voyage* and *Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes*, were doomed to disappointment, even though he found plenty of discomfort. He writes ruefully:

Wolves alas! like bandits, seem to flee the traveller's advance; and you may trudge through all our comfortable Europe, and not meet with an adventure worth the name.

Comfort was almost an enemy to Stevenson on his travels, as we see from his rather masochistic voyager's credo:

For my part, I travel not to go anywhere, but to go. I travel for travel's sake; the great affair is to move; to feel the needs and hitches of our life more nearly; to come down off this featherbed of civilization, and find the globe granite underfoot and strewn with cutting flints.

Although the metaphor is potentially ludicrous (get out of bed and cut your feet on some sharp stones), it conveys well the temper of Stevenson's attitude towards Victorian life as a sleep from which a bracing awakening is needed.

It is mainly this search for more primitive and invigorating circumstances that led Stevenson to set his adventure novels either in the past, or in the geographical peripheries of the social-industrial system, where more open, more risky conditions still existed. The North of Scotland, upstate New York, California and of course the South Seas

were ideal as areas where the dangers of the unpredictable and the unknown could still present a bracing challenge to the adventurer. Stevenson may be compared to writers like Kipling, Conrad and Rider Haggard, in this preference for remote and exotic settings, which also reflected the new interest in distant parts created by the second major expansion of the British Empire. Yet Stevenson did not, like Haggard, present as his heroic type the unflappable Englishman, proving his own and his nation's mettle among the barbarians; his heroes are (like Conrad's, though with less symbolic and metaphysical depth) essentially individualists, testing their own natures through the experience of danger and hardship. It is as though this kind of individualism, the mainspring of the novel since Defoe, had reached the point of suffocation within the novel of urban society, and been forced to discover the remotest outlets to get an open field of action. *Treasure Island* is an attempt to revisit the island of *Robinson Crusoe*, an attempt to release the enormous pressure of society on the individual which had built up since.

The challenge that has to be met at this point is that all of this adds up to evasion, to escapism, to a romantic nostalgia for other times and other places, to a flight from social reality. In one sense this is obviously true. But a society reveals itself as much in the kinds of alternative worlds it projects, as it does in direct self-portrayal. Stevenson's adventure stories imply a critique *by negation* of an unadventurous, smug and ignoble culture. His values of individual courage and independence are genuinely *alternative* values. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to call Stevenson a radical. He found various ways of accommodating his alternative values to those of his society. One is to present the adventure as a youthful episode, a sort of puberty rite, which is followed by successful reintegration into the settled fabric of society. This happens to Jim Hawkins and David Balfour: they learn a lot, grow up, and settle down provided with a good fund of story material to tell their children round the fireside. A second compromise, found mostly in the essays and travel books but also represented in the novels, is what one might call the philosophy of truancy. The time to indulge in heretical values and ways of life is on holiday, roughing it on a walking tour or voyage, and then returning, refreshed, to the constrictions and comforts of civilization. Both of these are ways of getting the desire for adventure out of one's system, as it were, and avoiding confrontation with society.

Stevenson was adept at having things both ways, for being on both sides at once. Like Scott, he is temperamentally closer to Hegel's

*both/and* than to Kierkegaard's *either/or*; it may be that this accounts for his unpopularity in eras of commitment and confrontation. He has the peculiar kind of honesty needed to answer the question "Whose side are you on?" by saying "I'm not quite sure." A rather amusing version of this exchange actually occurs in *The Black Arrow* where the young hero Dick Shelton has complex ties on both sides of the war. When challenged "Are ye Lancaster or York?" he answers "I shame to say it, I can scarce clearly answer!"

Stevenson's own ambivalence between the social, domestic and prosaic virtues, and the more stirring qualities of the adventurer is expressed in the principal structural device of his novels—the double hero. One figure is ordinary and cautious, the other extraordinary and reckless. David Balfour is an extremely unwilling participant in the exploits of *Kidnapped*, as the passive case of that brilliant and original title indicates. He is continually shocked by the drinking, swearing, gambling and violence of his companions, astonished and resentful of the feats of physical endurance that are expected of him, and in fact is mostly bent on extricating himself from the whole business. Yet all the while Alan Breck is kindling in him a reluctant respect for values alien to those of his own upbringing—quick passion in friendship and enmity, recklessness in action, elegance in dress, and an almost feudal sense of personal honour. The achievement of *Kidnapped* lies in this balance: the romantic rebels against the ordinary, but the ordinary also rebels against the romantic.

In *The Master of Ballantrae*, the heroes are one degree closer together than Balfour and Breck: they are brothers. Henry Ballantrae is the younger; he is forced to stay at home and look after the family and the estate, while James, the Master, goes off to wars and adventures, returning only to torment his duller younger brother and seduce the affections of his wife and children. James acquires the right of truancy, the magic release from day-to-day responsibility and prosaic virtue. At Ballantrae he is the prodigal son returning, surrounded with the glamour of a freer, more dangerous, more exciting life. He captivates the stay-at-homes with his airs and graces, and in crises displays the gift of instinctive command. Henry, on the other hand, is described by the narrator, Mackellar, as almost too pure an example of family virtue:

A kind man, I remembered him; wise, with a decent pride, a son perhaps too dutiful, a husband only too loving, one that could suffer and be silent.

Henry's dogged righteousness and the Master's devilish charisma cannot be harmonised; unlike Balfour and Breck, who maintain an abra-

sive kind of amity, the two brothers express opposite principles and exacerbate each other until both are destroyed. Yet Stevenson still refuses to take sides with this battle to the death between domesticity and adventure; though the Master is undoubtedly evil, Henry is undoubtedly dull.

With *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* the double hero becomes two parts of the same person, though this, of course, is not revealed until the end in Jekyll's last confession. At the beginning of that document, Jekyll presents his situation very much in terms of the Stevensonian philosophy of truancy, holiday, escape and risk, and spontaneity, the care-free casting-off of family, social position, industrious routine and cautious security. Jekyll describes the effect of his first transformation into Hyde in these words:

I felt younger, lighter, happier in body; within, I was conscious of a heady recklessness, a current of disordered sensual images running like a mill race in my fancy, a solution of the bonds of obligation, an unknown but not an innocent freedom of the soul.

This passage would not need to be adapted much to describe the feelings of the Stevensonian traveller casting off the trammels of urban life and surrendering to the trance of motion in the open air.

What Jekyll wants is, of course, the best of both worlds—impeccable bourgeois dignity combined with unhampered truancy. As he remarks: "I was the first that could thus plod in the public eye with a load of genial respectability, and in a moment, like a schoolboy, strip off these lendings and spring headlong into the sea of liberty." One can sense here the insidious attraction this formula must have held for Stevenson: the echo of Lear's "Off, off, you lendings!" suggests Jekyll is reaching his true identity beneath the trappings of office. Faced with Hyde in the mirror for the first time he says: "I was conscious of no repugnance, rather of a leap of welcome. This, too, was myself. It seemed natural and human." But as Hyde sinks deeper into crime, he comes to seem less natural and less human: "that child of Hell had nothing human," he comments later. What Jekyll calls his "vital instinct," which at first seemed released from repression in Hyde, now turns against him as a supernatural usurper: "I thought of Hyde, for all his energy of life, as of something not only hellish but inorganic."

Thus Hyde begins as "the beast within," the Darwinian ape that still lurks within the Victorian breast, the unrepressed animal self—in short *la bête humaine* of the naturalists. Yet he was brought out not by a combination of heredity and environment, but by a feat of individual scientific genius—this is what gives Jekyll a Faustian rather than a Zolaesque dimension. Jekyll, in his own person, continues to suffer

remorse for the crimes of his alter ego, and Jekyll's attempt to defy the limits of the human condition is ultimately, like Faust's, a straightforward battle between good and evil.

*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *The Master of Ballantrae* seem to mark between them a growing sense in Stevenson that you cannot always have things both ways—there is a great difference between the occasional ruthlessness of Alan Breck and the brutality of Edward Hyde or the refined sadism of James Ballantrae. Adventurous release cannot always be as simple as a youthful escapade or holiday from society or family—it can also be radically destructive of them. These later works show both an intensification and a growing distrust of the adventure ethic: the adventurers become villains, then devils. Here, too, Stevenson remains opposed to naturalism—if he abandons his adventure ethic it is not for social or secular reasons, but for moral and religious ones.

The inbuilt critique provided by the device of the two heroes—romantic and unromantic, poetic and prosaic, unsocial and social, reckless and cautious, extraordinary and ordinary—however one chooses to put it, actually works to substantiate and validate the reality of the adventure. The reader's skepticism, his resistance to the extraordinary element in the story, is overcome by including it *within* the story. The prosaic-minded narrative of David Balfour acts as the guarantee of Alan Breck's reality. The cantankerous family retainer Mackellar does the same for the Ballantrae story. In this way the adventure vouchsafes itself by criticizing itself, making fun of itself. There is a correspondence here to the parodies in *New Arabian Nights*, where a series of young men with overheated romantic imaginations go off in quest of adventure and end up making fools of themselves. The quixotic formula of romantic expectations and prosaic reality corresponds to that of adventure novels like *Kidnapped*, where a prosaic mind confronts a romantic reality. There is always a check, an inner resistance in Stevenson's novels, a respect for human timidity and human ordinariness.

In all of these different ways, Stevenson participated in the reaction against the social novel: the cult of style, which he shared with Pater and the aesthetes; in his "lightening of the baggage" of the novel, his preference for the short story and the short novel, forms which in his generation broke the dominance of the three-decker; in his choice of exotic and remote settings, and in his adventure ethic and its emphasis on physical experience and spontaneous action, along with his device of the double hero, the inclusion of the unadventurous—which authenticates and morally corrects the adventurousness.

Stevenson's fiction reflects in its diversity the scattering of new directions which follow the breakdown of the mid-Victorian synthesis. I have taken the opposition to Naturalism as the common element in this diversity—but, put in a more positive way, one could also say that the preservation of individuality is the binding force and centre of his work. Since, like many of his contemporaries, he felt that a free and wholesome individuality could not flower within the social system of his time, the solution, both for himself and for his heroes, was to leave it, for places and times where the system had not yet established itself. For Stevenson, a man cannot find himself through love and marriage, family, community or work, until he has tested himself through adventure and danger, through male companionship and the old warrior ethic. It is this kind of vital experience that is lacked by the average man of the modern city. James astutely observed that for Stevenson "the normal child is the child who absents himself from the family circle." Only in the abnormal, the extraordinary, the adventurous situation, could a deeper kind of human normality be aroused. In Stevenson's own words:

The obvious is not of necessity the normal; fashion rules and deforms: the majority fall tamely into the contemporary shape, and thus attain, in the eyes of the true observer, only a higher power of insignificance; and the danger is lest, in seeking to draw the normal, a man should draw the null, and write the novel of society instead of the romance of man.

Walter Raleigh observed in his book on *Romance* that "Man is, in one sense, more truly seen in a wide setting of the mountains and the sea than close at hand in the street." Stevenson rediscovered the free individual in the open air and in an open world, grappling actively with the unexpected, rather than being passively determined by heredity, habit and social circumstance. This is the essential meaning of adventure—not knowing what will happen next. The mark of Naturalism is that one nearly always knows what will happen next.

This is the core of Stevenson's importance for the next generations of writers, not only in the more obvious line of descent in the English novel through John Buchan to Ian Fleming, but also in France. Marcel Schwob saw Stevenson's "réalisme irréel" as a way beyond Naturalism, Gide studied his novels closely and admiringly while he was exercising his English, and Jacques Rivière in *Le Roman d'aventure* recommended his work as a model of open, adventurous fiction, where the action is not enclosed within systems of knowledge and predictability, where the end is not implicit in the beginning.

One can only attempt to sum up Stevenson's place in the history of the novel by putting forward a series of contradictions. In the era of

naturalism he was an inveterate romantic, keeping alive the tradition of Scott and Dumas in the age of Zola. Yet many of his romances are presented from a highly unromantic point of view. As a virtuoso of style he comes halfway to rivalling Joyce, since his range runs from the elaborate mannerism of Pater to the plain style of Defoe. His self-consciousness in style allies him with the aesthetes, yet among them he seems an athlete, a hearty vitalist, a writer of action. Among writers of action he appears almost a humourist, capable of making and deflating pretensions to heroism. In an era of secularism, he is a moralist, showing an underlying belief in good and evil as spiritual forces. And above all, in an era which saw man as the passive servant of great abstractions like Progress, Evolution or Capital, Stevenson maintained an image of man as an individual, free agent.