THE INFLUENCE OF POLYNESIAN
LITERATURE AND THOUGHT ON
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

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Robert Louis Stevenson's Pacific career was a period of challenge, growth, and renewed creativity. Stevenson entered the Pacific with an openness unusual for his time. He seems to have been relatively free of race prejudice and generally found himself preferring the natives he met to the Caucasians.

Stevenson seems also to have been increasingly open in his views on culture, an evolution noticeable in his uses of such words as civilization, barbarism, and savagery. Some of his uses follow the nineteenth century conventional view: the West and China are the two great world civilizations. Barbarism and savagery are, in any case, usually used in simple, even classical, denotation rather than with pejorative connotations. In fact, civilization can be given a negative connotation, and, at times, the two sets of terms do not clearly refer to two different racial or cultural groups. Sometimes Stevenson simply juxtaposes the two: "Barbarous war is an ugly business; but I believe the civilized is fully uglier..." He can write: "like a gentleman or a fine old barbarian..."
The use of the word civilization for non-Western (or non-Chinese) referents marks a significant discovery for Stevenson. He writes from the Marquesas: “It is all a swindle: I chose these isles as having the most beastly population, and they are far better, and far more civilised than we”; he refers to an ex-cannibal as “a perfect gentleman.” In one of his last letters, he admonishes: “remember that all you can do is to civilise the man in the line of his own civilisation, such as it is.”

The words begin to be used more for what could be called moral virtues: “It is the proof of intelligence, the proof of not being a barbarian, to be able to enter into something outside of oneself . . .”

Stevenson had enough mental distance from his culture to contemplate the disappearance of the English language. Living in Polynesia, his attitude toward his own “civilization” becomes critical: “civilisation is rot.” His principal point is that Western civilization is too narrow: “this civilisation of ours is a dingy, ungentlemanly business; it drops out too much of a man, and too much of that the very beauty of the beast . . .”; “our civilisation is a hollow fraud, all the fun of life is lost by it . . .” Interestingly, Stevenson ends a description of a war he in fact regrets with “but Lord! what fun!” At the sight of war, “the old aboriginal awoke in both of us and knickered like a stallion.” Stevenson was sensitive to the instinctive elements under man’s social surface.

Parallel to this criticism of Western civilization is one of conventional Western views: they are too narrow to be adequate. Arthur Johnstone reports Stevenson’s saying that “some of the South Sea legends could be turned to account . . . if placed in antithesis against our modern beliefs.” The missionary in the fable “Something In It” lives “Upon one pin-point of the truth.”

Another important parallel development can be found in Stevenson’s literary aims and style. Stevenson expressed dissatisfaction with his work, and the forms he had been using. Positively, his work was expanding from the “too realistic” to the “queer realism” of his South Seas stories; from sweetness of style to brusqueness and ruggedness. He was discovering that his particular talent lay in the grim and terrible: “There I feel myself strong,” as in Weir of Hermiston. The general direction Stevenson advises links his literary development to that of his thought in general: “more of a whole, more worldly, more nourished, more commonplace—and not so pretty, perhaps not even so beautiful. No man

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10 Boodle 1926: 165. See also Stevenson 1895: 239; 1911a: 85 f.
11 Stevenson 1895: 275; cf. 1911b: 299.
12 Stevenson 1895: 213.
13 Stevenson 1911b: 28.
14 Stevenson 1911a: 142 f., 215.
15 Stevenson 1895: 226.
16 Stevenson 1895: 220; cf. racing, 264.
18 This is the theme of “Something In It” and a theme of “The Isle of Voices.” See also Johnstone 1905: 282.
19 Johnstone 1905: 103.
knows better than I that, as we go on in life, we must part from prettiness and the graces.”

Although Stevenson saw parallels between the Pacific and Europe, he deliberately sought those elements that were most remote from his own cultural background. He visits the Marquesas “as having the most beastly population...” He leaves the too Westernized Hawai’i to settle in Sāmoa, because it is “more savage.” He is “seized” by “picturesque features” and “savage psychology,” which is “astonishing.” His particular investigation of cannibalism, than which “Nothing more strongly arouses our disgust...,” leads him to a theory of cultural relativism. Stevenson is clearly broadening his experience and views.

Stevenson also speaks of his encounter with the Pacific as liberating. In The Wrecker, a certain liberation from Christian teachings on original sin is hinted at: “the primal curse abrogated...” Stevenson does not seem to have explicitly developed this theme, but a religious relativism can found in “Something In It” and inferred from the fact that he takes South Seas religions seriously.

Stevenson does develop the theme of his liberation from Western classical culture, Greece and especially Rome. John LaFarge reported from Sāmoa Stevenson’s view “that here, at length, we were free from the pressure of Roman civilisation.” In In the South Seas, Stevenson writes:

“But I was now escaped out of the shadow of the Roman empire, under whose toppling monuments we were all cradled, whose laws and letters are on every hand of us, constraining and preventing. I was now to see what men might be whose fathers had never studied Virgil, had never been conquered by Caesar, and never been ruled by the wisdom of Gaius or Papinian.”

The connection between this theme and Stevenson’s general rethinking of cultural values and views is clearer when he writes:

“human nature is human nature; and the Roman Empire, since the Romans founded it and made our European human nature what it is, bids fair to go on and to be true to itself.”

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23 Stevenson 1911b: 321 f.; cf. 214. Stevenson’s use of third person narrative in works of this period, e.g., Stevenson 1895: 123; 1911b: 209, may be a result of the influence of Samoan prose or a desire to give a wider view on a story than allowed by his usual first person narrative.
24 E.g., Stevenson 1971: 80 f.
25 Stevenson 1911a: 76.
27 Stevenson 1911a: 285; cf. 1895: 121 f. Moors 1986: 92, found Stevenson on his arrival in Sāmoa “excited, or rather ecstatic in his demeanour.”
29 Stevenson 1911a: 78 f., 116 f.
30 Quoted in Furnas 1952: 268.
32 LaFarge 1912: 154. LaFarge’s own view is that Samoan culture is a remarkable parallel of classical, 77 f., 84, 86 f., 92 ff., 111 f., 176 f., 200, 250, 264, 272 ff., 354. Henry Adams, LaFarge’s traveling companion, seems to have been unable to assimilate the impression made on him by his Pacific travels, Adams 1931: 316 f., 350 f.
33 Stevenson 1971: 7; also, 49.
34 Stevenson 1911b: 114 f.
He describes himself as “going on with a lot of island work, exulting in the knowledge of a new world, ‘a new created world’ and new men; and I am sure my income will DECLINE and FALL off . . .”  

Stevenson found in the Pacific a conflict between the indigenous cultures and Western culture, which was being introduced and, in places, imposed. Stevenson felt personally near to the situation because of his own Scottish historical background, with “two civilizations having been face to face throughout—or rather Roman civilization face to face with our ancient barbaric life and government, down to yesterday, to 1750 anyway.” An even nearer parallel was the recent imposition of English authority and culture on Scotland:  

“It was perhaps yet more important that I had enjoyed in my youth some knowledge of our Scots folk of the Highlands and the Islands. Not much beyond a century has passed since these were in the same convulsive and transitional state as the Marquesans of to-day. In both cases an alien authority enforced, the clans disarmed, the chiefs deposed, new customs introduced, and chiefly that fashion of regarding money as the means and object of existence. The commercial age, in each, succeeding at a bound to an age of war abroad and patriarchal communism at home. In one the cherished practice of tattooing, in the other a cherished costume, proscribed. In each a main luxury cut off: beef, driven under cloud of night from Lowland pastures, denied to the meat-loving Highlander; long-pig, pirated from the next village, to the man-eating Kanaka. The grumbling, the secret ferment, the fears and resentments, the alarms and sudden councils of Marquesan chiefs, reminded me continually of the days of Lovat and Struan. Hospitality, tact, natural fine manners, and a touchy punctilio, are common to both races . . .”  

Polynesian culture was being forcibly ended, as was Scottish, by the imposition of the same alien culture. Stevenson’s projected “complete story of Polynesia” would “set face to face the extremes of native and foreign island life . . .”; “. . . its bearing will be upon the unjust (yet I can see the inevitable) extinction of the Polynesian Islanders by our shabby civilization. In such a plan I will, of course, make liberal use of the civilized element, but in the most and best the story shall remain distinctively Polynesian.”  

Stevenson found more analogies between Polynesia and Scotland than their historical situation. In fact, the comparison of aspects of the two became for him a real program for understanding Polynesia and explaining it to his public. Interestingly, two other Scottish immigrants to the Pacific, Archibald Cleighorn, the husband of Princess Likelike, whom Stevenson met in Honolulu, and Gertrude M. Damon, the later collector of the traditions of Moanalua Valley on O‘ahu, Hawai‘i, were also struck by the similarities between Polynesia and Scotland.

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35 Stevenson 1911a: 285 f.
36 Stevenson 1895: 88.
40 Stevenson 1971: 11 ff. Examples are numerous: 1971: 15, 18 f., 45 f., 49, 175 f., 189, 244, 246, 251, 256 f., 311 f., 335; 1895: 11, 282 f.; 1912b: 212; 1973: 37. Furnas 1952: 332. Stevenson did use analogies from other cultures, including Greece and Rome (at an important point, Stevenson 1895: 285), but these do not seem to have influenced his personal thinking to the same degree. Many of Stevenson’s comparisons between Scotland and Polynesia could, of course, be made with other cultures, but this is not relevant to a study of Stevenson’s attitude.
For Stevenson, such similarities went beyond cultural details to the personal level of feeling. Standing on his verandah in Sāmoa, "there went through me or over me a wave of extraordinary and apparently baseless emotion. I literally staggered. And then the explanation came, and I knew I had found a frame of mind and body that belonged to Scotland, and particularly to the neighbourhood of Callander. Very odd these identities of sensation, and the world of connotations implied . . ." He writes of a tropical shower: "It is good; it answers something which is in my heart; I know not what; old memories of the wet moorland belike."42

Moreover, he found a similarity of human type between the Polynesian and the Scot, a type with which he identified himself. Complaining of a harsh criticism of one of his works, he writes:

"I suppose I am growing sensitive; perhaps, by living among barbarians, I expect more civility . . . Frankly, I suppose 'insolence' to be a tapua word . . . My forbears, the tenant farmers of the Mains, would not have suffered such expressions unless it had been from Cauldwell, or Rowallan, or maybe Auchendrane. My Family Pride bristles. I am like the negro, 'I just heard last night' who my great, great, great, great grandfather was."43

This passage expresses Stevenson's increasing identification with Sāmoa, linked to his increasing identification with and longing for Scotland, so often expressed in his letters; he writes that he and Barrie are "Scotty Scots."44 His literary production at this period was usually an alternation between Scottish and Polynesian subjects, each one spelling the other.45

An important similarity between the Scottish and the Polynesian human type was an interest in and even contact with the spiritualistic, supernatural, or godly. Stevenson was very Scottish in this respect. A good deal of his literary production, such as "Thrawn Janet," "Markheim," "Olalla," and Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, turns on this kind of experience. Moreover, Stevenson was acutely aware of the subconscious workings of his own creative imagination and significantly chose to articulate his feelings with the device or literary machinery of Scottish supernatural beings, Brownies.46 Samoans recognized and appreciated this dimension of Stevenson's personality, which had already interested Theosophists in Europe.47 Stevenson's own mental make-up was therefore attuned in advance to a central area of South Seas experience and thinking, and he even took an active interest in it.48

Stevenson, as a Romanized and Anglicized Scot, suffered from the same intellectual

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41 Stevenson 1895: 213.
42 Stevenson 1895: 274; also, 273.
44 Stevenson 1911b: 14. Sāmoa: e.g., Stevenson 1895: 239, 275. He often signs himself with his Samoan title Tuisitala, as he had earlier with his Tahitian name Teritéra, 1911a: 92, 94, 96 f., 106, 111. Tuisitala means Writer of Tales, not Teller of Tales, as often stated.
48 Stevenson 1895: 37 f., 99. He seems to have concentrated on ghostly stories in his collecting of native literature; 1907b: 205; 1971: 180-203; 1973: xxi. See also Stevenson 1911a: 161. Johnstone 1905: 201; Moors 1986: 99; Menikoff 1984: 69, 78 f., 168 f. Stevenson had a number of "fanciful superstitions" which are not relevant to
and cultural division as the Polynesian in contact with the West. Stevenson learned Polynesian languages and researched island cultures, as he had Scots and Scottish history. Just as Anglo-Scots conflict became a significant theme for him, so did the clash of cultures in the Pacific. His personal preference was in each case the losing, disappearing culture.

This cultural division can be observed in his own fiction. A good portion closely follows the literary conventions of his time. Another portion is either ethnic or springs from Stevenson’s very unconventional imagination. Stevenson preferred the latter portion: “Tod Lapaik is a piece of living Scots: if I had never writ anything but that and Thrawn Janet, still I’d have been writer.” This statement can be contrasted with his appraisal of David Balfour in which the story of Tod Lapaik appears: “I think David Balfour a nice little book, and very artistic, and just the thing to occupy the leisure of a busy man; but for the top flower of a man’s life it seems to me inadequate. Small is the word . . .” Unfortunately, Stevenson had the tendency to conventionalize his original inspirations, as in the case of “Olalla,” “The Beach at Falesá,” and perhaps Jekyll and Hyde. Weir of Hermiston, with all its dark atmosphere and hint of its heroine’s incipient madness, might well have been given a happy ending.

Stevenson writes that the Samoan political situation needed “a man that knows and likes the natives, qui paye de sa personne, and is not afraid of hanging when necessary.” Stevenson was himself such a man in the sphere of culture. He was genuinely involved both on the philosophical and personal levels in the South Seas.

This is the background against which Stevenson’s considerable body of writings on the South Seas is best understood. His vast, unrealized project, which would have combined his personal experiences and insights with scholarly research, arose from “a stern sense of duty.” He urges a young correspondent to “try to understand the Roman Empire and the Middle Ages; be sure you do not understand when you dislike them; condemnation is non-comprehension. And if you know something of these two periods, you will know a little more about to-day, and may be a good President.” Stevenson’s purpose in writing about the South Seas was not only to help the natives, but to broaden the understanding and thus the culture of his Western public, just as his own were being broadened. In The Ebb-Tide, this can be seen in a small compass in a statement by a missionary half-assimilated into island culture:

The missionaries “go the wrong way to work . . . Clothes, clothes, are their idea;

this essay, e.g., Stevenson 1911a: 301; 1912b: 212 ff. Moors 1911: 32, speaks of Stevenson’s dual personality: conventional and bohemian; also Moors 1986: 99, 104, emphasizes that Stevenson was not overtly or conventionally religious.
49 E.g., Stevenson 1895: 186 f.; 1973: xxxii; on “The Bottle Imp.”
50 Stevenson 1895: 197 f. See Moors 1911: 89. Stevenson writes that his style stems from the Covenanters writers, 1911b: 266; Heathercat will represent “the race—our race,” 314. Strong and Osbourne 1902: 98.
51 Stevenson 1911b: 284; also, e.g., 1895: 198; but see 225.
52 Stevenson 1907c: 318 f. Moors 1911: 90; 1986: 99, 113 f., Moors felt Stevenson was too receptive to the opinions of others on his work.
53 Stevenson 1911b: 144 f. The partial reason for this was certainly his financial worries, of which he writes often in his letters, e.g., 1895: 156. Strong and Osbourne 1902: 35. Moors 1986: 98 f., 111, 113.
54 Stevenson 1895: 211.
55 Discussing the possibility of financial loss on A Footnote to History, Stevenson 1911a: 375, writes, “I have a purpose beyond . . .”
56 Stevenson 1911a: 145; also, 144 ff.
but clothes are not Christianity, any more than they are the sun in heaven, or could take the place of it! They think a parsonage with roses, and church bells, and nice old women bobbing in the lanes, are part and parcel of religion. But religion is a savage thing, like the universe it illuminates; savage, cold, and bare, but infinitely strong." 

His island experience broadened his view of religion from the "civilized," superficial form it had assumed in England to the "savage thing" that can illuminate the universe because it is appropriate to it.

This broadening of understanding and culture could be accomplished on many levels: political writings expressing the point of view of the natives, an immediate need; expositions of native culture, such as In the South Seas and Stevenson’s letters to Colvin and to others put into book form; and works of imaginative literature, the deepest in understanding and communication and the most attractive to the public.

Stevenson felt himself faced with a vast Western ignorance of and even indifference to South Seas cultures. He insists strongly that his correspondents make an effort to understand: "You must try to exercise a trifle of imagination, and put yourself, perhaps with an effort, into some sort of sympathy with these people, or how am I to write to you?" Not to understand is Philistine; "the proof of intelligence, the proof of not being a barbarian, is to be able to enter into something outside of oneself ..." He is delighted when he hears that Henry James "could take a First in any Samoan subject."

Stevenson is acutely aware of the problems of understanding another culture. The greatest obstacle is language. Language is also the only means of real understanding. At a ceremony, Stevenson hears "a singular ululation, perfectly new to my ears; it means, to the expert, 'Long live Tuiatua'; to the inexpert, is a mere voice of barbarous wolves."

As a writer, Stevenson was naturally attentive to language and literature. He found Polynesians "a ceremonious, oratorical race." Literature in Scotland, and by extension in Polynesia, "is an evidence of refinement more convincing, as well as more imperishable, than a palace."

Each language has its peculiar advantages and capacities, not found in other languages. Stevenson had a very sensitive ear and was able, for instance, to compare interestingly the sounds of Hawaiian and Tahitian.

Stevenson apparently learned languages comparatively easily. He had a classical educa-

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58 Stevenson 1912a: 100. The Ebb-Tide is a remarkable and neglected novel, which anticipates some aspects of Conrad's work.
59 Stevenson 1895: 61 f., 156, 265; 1911b: 123; see also 1911a: 77 f. Moors 1986: 45, 50, 107, very much appreciated A Footnote to History.
60 Stevenson 1895: 185; 1911a: 286; 1956: 267.
61 Stevenson 1895: 255; also, 239; cf. 1956: 267.
62 Stevenson 1895: 145, 275; 1911b: 317 f.; see also 1971: 121.
64 Stevenson 1895: 144; cf. 1971: 317.
66 Stevenson 1971: 15; also, 13 f.
68 Stevenson 1911a: 185; 1973: 199.
tion and had studied German. He had studied and wrote in Gaelic. His French was exceptional; he wrote in French and was perhaps influenced by French literature. He was learned in Scots, which he used extensively in his formal and informal writings, as well as in his conversation.

In the Pacific, he was happy to find that "The languages of Polynesia are easy to smatter, though hard to speak with elegance. And they are extremely similar, so that a person who has a tincture of one or two may risk, not without hope, an attempt upon the others." Significantly, he compares the pronunciation of Marquesan to Scots. Also, just as Scots, "this illustrious and malleable tongue," was dying, so were Polynesian languages in danger of extinction. Stevenson’s reaction to this situation as regards Scots displays his characteristic self-identification:

"Till then I would love to have my hour as a native Maker, and be read by my own countryfolk in our own dying language; an ambition surely rather of the heart than of the head, so restricted as it is in prospect of endurance, so parochial in bounds of space."

Stevenson gives some notes on Marquesan words and seems to have been able to carry on a simple conversation at the end of his stay. Very important, he gives a translation of a short passage in Marquesan which reproduces to a remarkable degree the sound, rhythm, and tone of the original.

Stevenson denies any knowledge of Gilbertese (modern Kiribati), but gives a note on it, studied Gilbertese literature, and wanted Binoka’s name spelled correctly.

Stevenson did reach the level of "broken Tahitian" and learned some of the refinements of the language, but, at a ceremony, gave his speech in French, which was then translated into Tahitian.

Hawaiian seems to be the first Polynesian language that Stevenson studied in any depth. His teacher was the eminent Hawaiian editor Joseph Mokuhoai Poepoe. Stevenson found the language "bewildering," but was soon using Hawaiian words and forms of names, significantly in "The Bottle Imp," quoting and translating Hawaiian sentences, and apparently managing simple conversation, although he gave a formal speech in English which was then translated into Hawaiian.

Stevenson tried to give in English some impression of the Hawaiian language, as he had done for Marquesan. He is uncannily successful in one prose passage. The English flows

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very naturally, but is very faithful to the Hawaiian. Stevenson is playing the "sedulous ape," carefully imitating a style for the purpose of developing his own.

Settling in Sāmoa, Stevenson characteristically set himself to learning the language. His letters often mention his lessons and progress in Samoan. He seems to have attained a good speaking knowledge of the common language, with some competence in the chiefly, although at ceremonies he would usually use an interpreter, as he had in Tahiti and Hawai'i. This could be fitted easily into Samoan custom: the Talking Chief expresses the views of the silent High Chief. When Stevenson gave his own speech at the opening of the Road of Gratitude, he wrote it in English and had it translated. He often uses Samoan words in his letters, with or without translation. After finishing a large batch of galley proofs, he writes: "Consummatis est; ua uma." The use of a word like tapu indicates the adoption of a native concept.

Stevenson was enthusiastic about Samoan. He writes:

"O, Colvin, what a tongue it would be to write, if one only knew it—and there were only readers. Its curse in common use is an incredible left-handed wordiness; but in the hands of a man like Pratt it is succinct as Latin, compact of long rolling polysyllables and little and often pithy particles, and for beauty of sound a dream."

"I am particularly taken with the finesse of the pronouns. The pronouns are all dual and plural, and the first person, both in the dual and plural has a special exclusive and inclusive form. You can conceive what fine effects of precision and distinction can be reached in certain cases . . . it is exquisitely elegant, and makes the mouth of the littérature to water."

"The talking man replied with many handsome compliments to me, in the usual flood of Samoan fluent neatness . . ."
Stevenson was naturally able to make very interesting translations and planned an entire collection of them. He also tried writing in Samoan: doggerel, oaths, and prayers. In the last two, Samoan ideas were incorporated: "I fear it may sound even comic in English, but it is a very pretty piece of Samoan, and struck direct at the most lively superstitions of the race."

Stevenson also wrote political works in English that were meant to be translated into Samoan. Such works would have been written in a style that could be easily passed into Samoan. The Road of Gratitude speech is clearly different from Stevenson's usual style, and the fact that it was meant to be translated into Samoan is the most proximate cause. Moreover, the form of the speech follows some of the rules of Samoan oratory, with its salutations, mention of the occasion, religious and secular quotations, religious tone, and terminal benediction.

The most important writing designed for translation into Samoan is "The Bottle Imp," which in its sentence structure, third person narrative unusual for Stevenson, and strict chronology, gives the best impression in English of a Samoan prose tale, an important and excellent genre in Samoan literature. Stevenson was again being the "sedulous ape."

Stevenson had urged his friend, H. J. Moors—the American immigrant, trader, and enthusiast for Sāmoa—to write something for the Samoan reading public. When it was proposed that one of Stevenson's own works be published in a missionary paper, he apparently answered that he had a work available "provided it lends itself to translation." When the manuscript was completed, the translator "found that the work of translation was an easy task ..." Stevenson supervised the translation himself. Unfortunately, the Samoan of the missionary translator is complicated. The prose is more Samoan in English than in Samoan.

Because Stevenson adopted Samoan concepts along with Samoan words, "The Bottle Imp" can related to Polynesian thought. This is, of course, partially explained by the fact that it was designed primarily for a Polynesian public. The nearness of the Road of Gratitude speech and "The Bottle Imp" to Polynesian literary forms is the result of Stevenson's careful study of Polynesian literature.

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94 Stevenson 1895: 179. See also Johnstone 1905: 281-284.
96 Stevenson 1895: 281-285.
97 Stevenson 1907b: 205. On Samoan tales, see, e.g., Moyle 1981. Numerous examples can be found in, e.g., Stuebel 1896, Krämer 1902, and Herman 1955.
99 Moors 1911: 98. The tradition that "The Bottle Imp" was written in Hawai'i, McGaw 1950: 76-79; Stevenson 1973: xxxi f., is easily explained by Stevenson's practice of writing up later an earlier inspiration. Stevenson probably had notes on the story, which he then composed in a Samoan prose style. The evidence suggests that "The Bottle Imp" was written in Sāmoa, Stevenson 1911a: 74. See also Johnstone 1905: 200.
100 Moors 1911: 98. Stevenson 1895: 52; 1907b: 206; 1958, a reprint in booklet form. "The Bottle Imp" was the first serial in Sāmoa, McGaw 1950: 154 f. Stevenson may have been inspired by the popularity of such serials in Hawaiian language newspapers, Stevenson 1973: 9, 22, 186.
Different problems arose when a non-Polynesian public was addressed. The South Seas presented a mass of good material for fiction and poetry. The material was of different types, each of which had to be dealt with in a different way. Stevenson’s own observations could be used variously. The predominantly Western material could be worked up into more or less conventional novels, such as *The Wrecker* and *The Ebb-Tide*, although even the whites in the South Seas could be “as remote in thought and habit as Rob Roy or Barbarossa, the Apostles or the Caesars.”

The great problem was to present Polynesian culture and the Polynesians themselves in an understandable way to the Western public. Most writings on the South Seas have “no etching, no human grin, consequently no conviction.”

Stevenson attempted several solutions. One of the first, if not the first, can be found in “The Feast of Famine, Marquesan Manners”:

“In this ballad I have strung together some of the more striking particularities of the Marquesas. It rests upon no authority; it is in no sense . . . a native story; but a patchwork of details of manners and the impressions of a traveller.”

Stevenson seems to have been happy with the ballad on completing it, but to have been more doubtful about it later, especially as to its accuracy.

A solution he found more satisfactory was to adapt a genuine Polynesian story to the Western public by modifying its form. Stevenson writes of “The Song of Rahéro, A Legend of Tahiti”: “This tale, of which I have not consciously changed a single feature, I received from tradition.” Stevenson felt “The Song of Rahéro” was a success and planned another ballad and even a book of South Seas ballads. The reception of the work was, however, disappointing:

“Glad the Ballads amused you. They failed to entertain a coy public, at which I wondered; not that I set much account by my verses, which are the verses of Professor; but I do know how to tell a yarn, and two of the yarns are great. Rahéro is for its length a perfect folk-tale: savage and yet fine, full of talliforemost morality, ancient as the granite rocks; if the historian, not to say the politician, could get that yarn into his head, he would have learned some of his A B C. But the average man

met two important collectors of Samoan literature: Oskar Stuebel, Stevenson 1895: 36; and F. Otto Sierich, 1971: 200 f.; and consulted the manuscripts of George Turner, 93. Ulufa’a, his original place name for “The Beach at Falesá” may be based on the Samoan character Ulufa’a’ese’e, e.g., Stuebel 1896: 151-154, 234 ff.; cf. Menikoff 1984: 11. When Stevenson asks for gold letters to arrange in mottos on the wall, he is most likely thinking of Samoan proverbial sayings, an important genre, but one which does not seem to have influenced him, Stevenson 1911b: 198 f., 239; cf. 1895: 87. On proverbs, see Schultz 1965.”

The publications of Samoan literature to which I refer postdate Stevenson, but the works are traditional. Stevenson would have known versions of them or similar works of the same genre.

103 Stevenson 1971: 2.
104 Stevenson 1895: 77, referring to Caucasians in the South Seas as well.
107 Stevenson planned to do this for Gilbert Islands religious stories, Stevenson 1907b: 205. Polynesian stories themselves were to be included in a large work he projected, 1911a: 153. Cf. above, note 92.
at home cannot understand antiquity; he is sunk over the ears in Roman civilisation; and a tale like that of Rahéro falls on his ears inarticulate. The Spectator... cannot so much as observe the existence of savage psychology when it is put before it. I am at bottom a psychologist and ashamed of it; the tale seized me one-third because of its picturesque features, two-thirds because of its astonishing psychology, and the Spectator says there’s none.”

This important passage articulates several of Stevenson's aims and problems. The "folk-tale" has just those "savage" qualities that he feels could lead those "sunk" in "Roman civilisation" to a broader understanding. The problem is to express the tale in such a way as to make such a reader "observe" and "understand" the qualities of the tale.

The lack of popular success for "The Song of Rahéro" was due, I believe, to its failures as a solution to the general problem Stevenson had posed for himself. As in "The Feast of Famine," Stevenson concentrated on "striking particularities," "picturesque features," and "astonishing psychology." This was in the line of his own researches, which concentrated on what was most remote from Western conventions. But, of course, such features are remote, astonishing, picturesque, and so on, to an outsider. To concentrate on them is to give an outsider's view. Stevenson does not put these elements into a context in which they would appear natural and inevitable. The work lacks conviction because it lacks the "human grin" and the "commonplace." The reader is faced with something deliberately strange, to be viewed at a distance like an unengaging grand opera. Stevenson has not expressed Polynesian culture as seen from the inside.

An even greater difficulty is that of the form. Stevenson has changed a Polynesian tale into a European ballad. Stevenson had, of course, picked up the ballad form earlier and used it for Scottish themes as in "Ticonderoga" and "Heather Ale." Significantly, he refers to "The Feast of Famine" as "a ballad." Stevenson’s purpose is clear: "there is something in the ballad form—perhaps its limitations—which hides the literary defect of the subject that would be quite conspicuous in more comprehensive prose." The ballad form should in itself set the reader into such a frame of mind that the unusual becomes believable. Stevenson is looking for a non-classical European genre with which to express a non-classical subject. The question is then whether the ballad is the most appropriate form for that purpose. Ballads have a very different esthetic from Polynesian poetry and poetic epic, which do not narrate a story, but rather allude elliptically to it. A plot-centered story, as given in the two ballads discussed, would be told in prose. Stevenson must really impose the verse on a good narrative. Significantly, he distinguishes very clearly between the two in the passage quoted above. Moreover, the heavy, insistent ballad rhythms and long lines are very unpolynesian and could not satisfy an esthetic aim of Stevenson’s observed elsewhere: to give in English an impression of the Polynesian languages themselves.

"The House of Tembinoka" is a definite advance. As in "The Feast of Famine" and "The Song of Rahéro," Stevenson clearly states his aims:

111 Stevenson 1911a: 285.
112 Stevenson’s realization of the importance of such a context is clear from his desire to do more scholarly research before publishing his travel book on the South Seas. Johnstone 1905: 101, quotes him: “I found my matter would not work up even into readable travels (from the public’s point of view).” Cf. Stevenson 1895: 20.
113 Stevenson 1911a: 83.
114 Johnstone 1905: 103.
“it is hoped, by their pictures of strange manners, [the following lines] may entertain a civilised audience. Nothing throughout has been invented or exaggerated; the lady herein referred to as the author’s muse has confined herself to stringing into rhyme facts or legends that I saw or heard during two months’ residence upon the island.”

Stevenson’s method in this work combines elements of his previous two solutions. He will write of “strange manners,” “facts and legends.” But, unlike “The Feast of Famine,” “Nothing ... has been invented”; and, unlike “The Song of Rahéro,” he does not confine himself to one story.

Stevenson invokes European poetic genres. He refers to himself and Binoka as “bards” and includes an *envoi*; but the dominant section is termed “The Song,” a more malleable form than the ballad and easier to approach to native forms. The lines are shorter; the rhythm, less insistent. The style cannot be considered an attempt give an impression of the language, except perhaps in the arrangement of verses in couplets, but it is at least unobtrusive.

More significant, the poem is expressly related to a native literary genre, the genealogical chant of praise: “My muse relates and praises his descent.” The mythical beginnings of the family are given, then intervening generations ending with the present chief, who is praised and blessed. This is the reason, I believe, that Stevenson referred to the poem as a “barbaric piece.”

Like “The Bottle Imp,” this poem was meant primarily for a native audience, particularly Binoka himself, for whom genealogy was a preoccupation. The poem enjoys the same naturalness found in “The Bottle Imp,” even in the mythological episode of the mating with the shark, which is related very directly.

“The House of Tembinoka” successfully integrates Stevenson’s own observations and native materials within a literary framework that is a combination of European and native genres to produce a whole in which the native views and feelings appear natural and therefore understandable.

A Western genre very near and appropriate in both form and thought world to Polynesian stories is the folk tale, fairy story, or fable, loosely identified for the purpose of this essay. Stevenson shared the interest of his period in this form. In a letter from Tahiti, he gives his address as “Tautira (The Garden of the World), otherwise called Hans-Christian-Andersen-ville.” He describes “The Song of Rahéro” as “a perfect folk-tale.” He refers to “The Bottle Imp” and “The Isle of Voices” as “*Märchen.*” He even finds his own rejuvenation in the Pacific “like a fairy story.” Curiously, Stevenson discovered early in his Samoan studies a book of Aesop’s Fables translated into Samoan:

“I assure you we have one capital book in the language, a book of fables by an old missionary of the unpromising name of Pratt, which is simply the best and the

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116 Stevenson 1912b: 245.
117 Stevenson 1911a: 181.
118 Stevenson 1911a: 160.
119 Stevenson 1911a: 86, 285.
120 Stevenson 1895: 126; 1907b: 206; Menikoff 1984: 28. There are many similarities between his problems with South Seas materials and those of the writers of *Kunstmärchen*, such as Ludwig Tieck.
121 Stevenson 1911a: 307.
most literary version of the fables known to me. I suppose I should except La Fontaine, but L. F. takes a long time; these are brief as the books of our childhood, and full of wit and literary colour . . ." 122

The genre of the tale worked easily and well with native materials. "The Bottle Imp" is in fact based on a German folk tale; "The Isle of Voices," on Hawaiian tales. 123 That neither of these stories falls perfectly into European or Polynesian genres is the result of their forms being, in fact, original amalgamations of genres from both cultures, as is "The House of Tembinoka."

Stevenson's work in this form is the most probable reason why he took up again his unpublished, even secret, work on his own fables, perhaps his most original writings. 124 The originality of "Something In It" can be understood only when the influence of Polynesian tales is recognized. In fact, the missionary episode in "A Story from 1890" may have been a direct inspiration for this fable. Johnstone calls it "a perfect example, in modern form, of the short Polynesian fairy-tale." 125 However, the phrase "in modern form" marks the creative activity of Stevenson, as described above.

Stevenson's fable "The Song of the Morrow" is unique in his own work and, in fact, in literary history. The background of its composition is, I would argue, Stevenson's continuing creation of original forms from both Western and Polynesian bases. Most important, this is an indication that his philosophical and literary work on South Seas materials had an impact even on those of his works that do not have ostensible South Seas subjects or themes.

Polynesian literary genres must be recognized as one of the liberating factors Stevenson encountered in the Pacific. While Stevenson and his party were dining with the great Samoan chief, Mata'afa,

"old Popo inflicted the Atua howl (of which you have heard already) right at Lady Jersey's shoulder. She started in fine style.—'There,' I said, 'we have been giving you a chapter of Scott, but this goes beyond the Waverly Novels.'" 126

The Atua cry is literature. Being able to move into new genres, and even more to create them, was a solution to Stevenson's dissatisfaction with the forms he had been using. 127

A further influence on Stevenson was his own experiences in the South Seas, experiences that often overlapped those of the natives, especially in Sāmoa where he lived a considerable time. For instance, Stevenson's experience of ceremonies doubtless influenced his Samoan oratory, such as the Road of Gratitude speech. 128

Stevenson adapted himself quickly and enthusiastically to the idea of belonging to an ex-

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122 Stevenson 1895: 41 f.
124 Furnas 1952: 353. "The Cart-Horses and the Saddle-Horse" is clumsy and obvious enough an allegory to be a new beginning after a long pause. "Something In It" is related in theme to "The Isle of Voices," which was written at the end of 1892, Stevenson 1907b: 206.
126 Stevenson 1895: 160; see the important passage 144, cited above, text and note 64.
128 See above, note 96. Also Strong and Osborne 1902: 152, 159 f., 162, 220. Johnstone 1905: 265 f. Stevenson began to have very Samoan feelings about titles in Sāmoa, but these were expressed only in his letters, e.g., Stevenson 1895: 161, 244; 1911b: 29, 320. Such feelings began apparently in Tahiti, 1911a: 93, 96 f. See also his experience of war in Sāmoa and the feelings inspired by it, above, notes 15, 16.
tended family in Tahiti. In Sāmoa, he himself became the head of his own 'āiga or extended family, a time-consuming but instructive station. A probable outgrowth of this was his projected novel Sophia Scarlet, the story of a family living on a South Seas plantation. Another project about a European family might have been influenced by Samoan multigenerational stories, although this is not necessary. Stevenson’s historical research into his own family might have been influenced by Polynesian and especially Samoan preoccupations, particularly in its racial and genealogical turn and religious tone: “I have a strange feeling of responsibility, as if I had my ancestors’ souls in my charge, and might miscarry with them.”

In Sāmoa, Stevenson surprised himself and his friends by entering deeply into politics, a field he ordinarily detested. This uncharacteristic activity can be understood only by one who has experienced how all-encompassing, inescapable, and obsessively fascinating politics are in Sāmoa. The very strangeness of Stevenson’s becoming a political figure is a sign of how deeply this aspect of Samoan life influenced him.

Out of this preoccupation came a number of political and historical works. Had Stevenson lived longer, his fiction would have felt the influence of politics as well, as is indicated in several letters. Part of the fascination of Samoan politics was its small scale: “That is the fun of this place,” observed Lloyd; “everybody you meet is so important.” . . . Here, under the microscope, we can see history at work.” Stevenson writes of his A Footnote to History:

“I think I have never heard of greater insolence than to attempt such a subject; yet the tale is so strange and mixed, and the people so oddly characterized—above all, the whites—and the high note of the hurricane and the warships is so well prepared to take popular interest, and the latter part is so directly in the day’s movement, that I am not without hope but some may read it; and if they don’t, a murmur on them! Here is, for the first time, a tale of Greeks—Homeric Greeks—mingled with moderns, and all true; Odysseus alongside of Rajah Brooke, proportion gardée; and all true. Here is for the first time since the Greeks (that I remember) the history of a handful of men, where all know each other in the eyes, and live close in a few acres, narrated at length, and with the seriousness of history. Talk of the modern novel; here is a modern history. And if I had the misfortune to found a school, the legitimate historian might lie down and die, for he could never overtake his material.”

The reference to Homer is significant, as can be seen from the following passage:

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130 Stevenson 1895: 109 f.; see also 13, where he signs himself “The Planter.” Johnstone 1905: 246 f.
131 Stevenson 1895: 45 f. For Samoan multigenerational stories, see, e.g., Stuebel 1896: 68 ff., 168 f., and the references in note 102, above.
134 Stevenson 1895: 56.
135 Stevenson 1911a: 375 f.
“it has been a deeply interesting time. You don’t know what news is, nor what politics, nor what the life of man, till you see it on so small a scale and with your own liberty on the board for stake. I would not have missed it for much. 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. I could never be induced to take the faintest interest in Brompton qua Brompton or a drawing-room qua a drawing-room. I am an Epic Writer with a k to it, but without the necessary genius.”

Stevenson felt that with South Seas material, “Everybody else who has tried, that I have seen, got carried away by the romance, and ended in a kind of sugar-candy sham epic, and the whole effect was lost . . .”

In his conversation with Johnstone, Stevenson spoke of “what I intend shall be my complete story of Polynesia.” He wished to “raise the story out of the ordinary by making its dramatic bearing national as well as individual”; “. . . it will take somewhat of the form of a prose-epic—if the term is allowable . . .”

Stevenson is again broadening his literary aims and forms “out of the ordinary” under the influence of his experience in Sāmoa. His direction is, as before, toward greater wholeness and completeness. Significantly, in a quotation given above, Stevenson links politics and “the life of man.” His interest in the individual and psychology is not abandoned; it is rather given a wider context. One of Stevenson’s primary problems with his South Seas material had been precisely to articulate the context in which a Polynesian’s views, feelings, and actions were natural and therefore understandable.

Although the primary influence in this particular broadening is clearly Stevenson’s experience of Samoan politics, Samoan literature is also a proximate influence. Politics and especially political change is one of the most important settings-in-life of Samoan literature; genealogies, histories, tales, and myths bear an essential political imprint and purpose. Stevenson was acquainted with at least one of the clearest examples of this: “A Story from 1890.” Stevenson’s project of a national prose-epic, “if the term is allowable,” is, I would argue, another example of his creation of a new genre under the influence of Samoan literature.

A very clear example of the liberating, broadening influence of Polynesian, especially Samoan, life and literature on Stevenson can be found in his statements on sex. Sāmoa in particular has a very obvious and dense sexual atmosphere, as strong as that of politics. Stevenson was becoming very dissatisfied with his asexual heroines. In the poem “Mother and Daughter,” he praised his wife and daughter-in-law as being different from “European

136 Stevenson 1911b: 156 f.
138 Johnstone 1905: 102 f.; 246 f., considers correctly, I believe, the Sophia Scarlet project to be an earlier step in this direction. Stevenson’s experience of culture conflict in the South Seas is also a formative influence on his project.
139 Stevenson 1911b: 156. Cf. his criticisms of Orme’s History of Hindostan, 1895: 264 f.
140 Charlot, in press. For some examples of Samoan political literature, see the references to Stuebel 1896 in notes 102 and 130, above.
141 Stevenson 1895: 93, 111, 120; 1911a: 327 f.; 1971: 263. Moors 1986: 100, emphasizes that Stevenson was no prude; he apparently told sex stories.
142 Stevenson 1895: 114, 149 f., 169; 1911a: 207.
womankind” in having “the free limb and wider mind,” “The indiscreeter petticoat”; they were women more like Eve.\textsuperscript{143}

Stevenson gave such qualities to the native heroine of “The Beach at Falesā,” whom he did like: “there is quite a love affair—for me . . .”\textsuperscript{144} Strong objection was taken to the invalid marriage contract in the story: “it seems it’s immoral and there’s a to-do . . .” Stevenson refused to change the story, declaring it “realism à outrance,” “nothing extenuated or coloured.”\textsuperscript{145} Stevenson had a basis for the contract in one he had seen in the Gilbert Islands. He was bitter about the reception of the story by “fools and hypocrites.”\textsuperscript{146} He regarded such thinking as a cultural problem: “This is a poison bad world for the romancer, this Anglo-Saxon world; I usually get out of it by not having any women in it at all . . .”\textsuperscript{147}

The sexual content of his work was going to increase, as in Sophia Scarlet and Weir of Hermiston.\textsuperscript{148} The most concentrated experiment with sex in his literary work was The Young Chevalier, “a story of sentiment and passion.”\textsuperscript{149} Again, his experience in Sāmoa influences works with Western subjects.

This development is clearly connected to the broadening direction found in other phases of Stevenson’s thought and writings:

“I cannot get used to this world, to procreation, to heredity, to sight, to hearing; the commonest things are a burthen. The prim obliterated polite face of life, and the broad, bawdy, and orgastic—or maenadic—foundations, form a spectacle to which no habit reconciles me . . .”\textsuperscript{150}

The connection to his criticism of Western civilization is also clear:

“If I had to begin again . . . I believe I should try to honour Sex more religiously. The worst of our education is that Christianity does not recognise and hallow Sex. It looks askance at it, over its shoulder, oppressed as it is by reminiscences of hermits and Asiatic self-tortures. It is a terrible hiatus in our modern religions that they cannot see and make venerable that which they ought to see first and hallow most.”\textsuperscript{151}

\textsuperscript{143} Strong and Osbourne 1902: 17 ff.;

“From European womankind
They are divided and defined
By the free limb and wider mind,
The nobler gait, the little foot,
The indiscreeter petticoat;
And show, by each endearing cause,
More like what Eve in Eden was—
Buxom and free, flowing and fine,
In every limb, in every line,
Inimitably feminine.”

\textsuperscript{144} Stevenson 1895: 59, 78. Menikoff 1984: 82–89.
\textsuperscript{145} Stevenson 1895: 109, 133; also, 109, 134, 164. Menikoff 1984: 11, 96 ff.
\textsuperscript{146} Stevenson 1895: 169; 1971: 268.
\textsuperscript{148} Stevenson 1895: 134; 1956: 313 f.
\textsuperscript{149} Stevenson 1895: 134; also, 136 f.
\textsuperscript{150} Stevenson 1911b: 353 f. The occasion of these remarks is his racial and genealogical research into his own family.
\textsuperscript{151} Stevenson 1911b: 357 f.; cf. 378.
Of course, contemporary Western literature was moving in the same direction, but Stevenson was to a certain extent cut off from it. Zola seems to have been more of a negative influence:

"... *La Bete humaine*, perhaps the most excruciatingly silly book that I ever read to an end. And why did I read it to an end, W. E. G.? Because the animal in me was interested in the lewdness. Not sincerely, of course, my mind refusing to partake in it; but the flesh was slightly pleased. And when it was done, I cast it from me with a peal of laughter, and forgot it..." ¹⁵³

Of himself, he writes: "age makes me less afraid of a petticoat, but I am a little in fear of grossness." ¹⁵⁴ Stevenson wanted to bring sex into his more fully human and indeed religious view. Zola "is a beast; but not human, and to be frank, not very interesting." ¹⁵⁵

A more proximate literary influence on this aspect of Stevenson's work, I would argue, is Polynesian literature, in which sex is treated with great openness and naturalness and has a central role in religion and mythology. ¹⁵⁶

Stevenson's perceptions and views overlapped important Samoan ones in his experience of the religious dimension in landscape. Some of Stevenson's finest passages articulate his sensitivity to the Vaea bush where his property Vailima was located and which was considered haunted or inhabited by gods. ¹⁵⁷ He himself felt the fear that gripped Samoans in the bush. The experience "weigh[ed] upon the imagination," appeared in his dreams, and seems to have crystallized around the sensitive plant. ¹⁵⁸ His own view of nature is expressed vividly:

"I wonder, if any one had ever the same attitude to Nature as I hold, and have held for so long? This business fascinates me like a tune or a passion; yet all the while I thrill with a strong distaste. The horror of the thing, objective and subjective, is always present to my mind; the horror of creeping things, a superstitious horror of the void and powers about me, the horror of my own devastation and continual murders. The life of the plants comes through my finger-tips, their struggles go to my heart like supplications. I feel myself blood-boltered; then I look back on my cleared grass, and count myself an ally in a fair quarrel, and make stout my heart." ¹⁵⁹

In "The Woodman," the narrator is working in the bush from which his laborer has fled complaining of ghostly presences. The narrator looks vainly for "the upcoming shade," while he clears a path, "A Golgotha," through the plants. Coming on the sensitive plant:

"I saw him crouch, I felt him bite;
And straight my eyes were touched with sight.

¹⁵² Stevenson 1911a: 194, 196, 204.
¹⁵³ Stevenson 1911b: 211; also, 214.
¹⁵⁴ Stevenson 1895: 136.
¹⁵⁵ Stevenson 1911a: 205; also, 204.
¹⁵⁶ E.g., Charlot 1979; 1983: 49-52.
¹⁵⁹ Stevenson 1895: 49. For another of Stevenson's unconventional views on nature, see 200.
I saw the wood for what it was..."

The wood is "The deadly battle..."

"Thick round me in the teeming mud
Briar and fern strove to the blood.
The hooked liana in his gin
Noosed his reluctant neighbours in:
There the green murderer throwed and spread,
Upon his smothering victims fed,
And wantoned on his climbing coil.
Contending roots fought for the soil
Like frightened demons: with despair
Competing branches pushed for air.
Green conquerors from overhead
Bestrode the bodies of their dead;
The Caesars of the silvan field,
Unused to fail, foredoomed to yield:
For in the groins of branches, lo!
The cancers of the orchid grow.
Silent as in the listed ring
Two chartered wrestlers strain and cling,
Dumb as by yellow Hooghly's side
The suffocating captives died:
So hushed the woodland warfare goes
Unceasing..."

Stevenson concludes that man's nature is also that of a warrior, in battle with nature and other men. He would claim for man also the glory due to a warrior.

The similarity of Stevenson's view to Polynesian ones goes beyond the general religious element in the land. The view expressed in "The Woodman" is based, I would argue, on a certain Samoan literary genre. Samoans usually depicted the development of the universe according to the genealogical model. Each generation mated and gave birth to the next, through the rocks, the plants, and so on. That same process could, however, be depicted according to a war model: instead of being produced by sexual generation, the later generation conquered the immediately preceding one; the plants conquer the soil, the soil conquers the rocks.¹⁶⁰ That is, Stevenson's "Samoan" experience of the fear of the bush could best be expressed by a Samoan genre. More precisely, Stevenson had at last found people who shared his own feeling for the land and had developed a literary form to express it.

The inspiration for "The Beach at Falesa" "just shot through me like a bullet in one of my moments of awe, alone in that tragic jungle..."¹⁶¹ The story was originally to have had a supernatural ending.¹⁶² Right away, Stevenson found the story "very strange, very extravagant" and began to feel uneasy about it: "a deception of the devil's," "too fantastic and far-fetched," "the story is craziness; that's the trouble," "the story is so wilful, so

¹⁶¹ Stevenson 1895: 18.
¹⁶² Stevenson 1895: 75; 1907b: 205.
steep, so silly—it’s a hallucination I have outlived . . .” Stevenson did want to save the completed beginning of the story, which was naturalistic, so he changed the ending: “the yarn is cured . . . No supernatural trick at all; and escaped out of it quite easily; can’t think why I was so stupid for so long.”

Although Stevenson always liked “The Beach at Falesá,” he recognized that it was an artistic failure in one respect:

“When I began I allowed myself a few liberties, because I was afraid of the end; now the end proved quite easy, and could be done in the pace; so the beginning remains about a quarter tone out (in places); but I have rather decided to let it stay so.”

This is important. Stevenson writes Barrie:

“If you are going to make a book end badly, it must end badly from the beginning. Now your book began to end well. You let yourself fall in love with, and fondle, and smile at your puppets. Once you had done that, your honour was committed—at the cost of truth to life, you were bound to save them.”

“The Beach at Falesá,” in its final form, leads one to expect something out of the ordinary and ends in conventional, naturalistic claptrap, a failure observable in other of Stevenson’s endings. Perhaps he felt he could not include the supernatural element in a work of the length of “The Beach at Falesá,” “comprehensive prose,” as he could in a shorter form. Perhaps he doubted his ability to join a supernatural ending to the first section of the story as he had completed it.

In any case, Stevenson was clearly being untrue to his original experience, the inspiration for the story, which did include a supernatural dimension. In fact, enough supernatural atmosphere remains in the beginning of the story to render its ending unsatisfactory, even without background information on its composition. True realism, in this case, demanded a non-naturalistic dimension, in which the actions and views of the characters would appear natural and believable. As it is, the natives appear simply fooled and benighted. The story has the same fault, with the same result, found in “The Song of Rahéro” and “The Feast of Famine.” Stevenson is more successful when he treats the religious dimension self-evidently, as in “The House of Tembinoka,” “The Bottle Imp,” “The Isle of Voices,” and “Something In It,” to mention only the South Seas works. His struggles with “The Beach at Falesá” reveal the difficulties he had liberating himself from his received conventions and how much his successes were arduous achievements.

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163 Stevenson 1895: 18, 22, 59, 70.
164 Stevenson 1895: 75; see also 59, 70 f., 77 f.; cf. his remark on The Wrecker having “interesting, plain turns of human nature,” 102.
166 Stevenson 1911b: 144.
167 Johnstone 1905: 103. Stevenson apparently had doubts also about the success of “The Isle of Voices.”
168 “The Isle of Voices,” for which the most religious of three versions of a Hawaiian story was chosen as a basis, bears especially the character of a deliberate experiment, Johnstone 1905: 201. My appraisal diverges from Stevenson’s own, as found in Johnstone, 100–103, 199 f., in its higher estimation of “The Isle of Voices,” lower estimation of “The Song of Rahéro,” and easier acceptance of the religious element in the stories. Stevenson’s statements in Johnstone should not, of course, be considered a full exposition of his views. For instance, his opposi-
Similar to the experience of the bush in Sāmoa was that of the rain, which also reminded Stevenson of Scotland. "Tropic Rain" has even more explicit religious elements than "The Woodman," as well as themes that were occupying Stevenson generally. The setting is in all likelihood Vailima; it is on or near a mountain, and the roof of "my cabin" is metal. The poem addresses "the angel-spirit of rain," "Angel of rain," perhaps based on the female god believed to dwell in Vaea. The human reaction is analogous to that of the man in the bush: "the sleepers sprang in their beds, and joyed and feared as you fell." The conclusion is philosophical:

"And methought that beauty and terror are only one, not two;
And the world has room for love, and death, and thunder, and dew;
And all the sinews of hell slumber in summer air;
And the face of God is a rock, but the face of the rock is fair.
Beneficent streams of tears flow at the finger of pain;
And out of the cloud that smites, beneficent rivers of rain."

Certain of Stevenson's general tendencies can be observed in this very dense passage. His tendency toward wholeness and a completeness inclusive of those elements usually considered negative, is clear in line 2. Line 3 is reminiscent of his contrast between the prim, civilized superfluities and the savage foundations. In line 1, the unity of beauty and terror, as "joyed and feared," recalls the experience of awe in the bush and before nature in general; as well as Stevenson's remarks on beauty and grimness in his own writing.

Line 4, extraordinarily imagistic for Stevenson, is best understood against that religious feeling for nature in Polynesia that extends even to rocks. Rocks are in fact the foundation of the universe, as in the important Samoan genealogies of rocks in origin myths. Moreover, in Sāmoa, unworked rocks could be considered gods or could be used as god images, which Stevenson seems not to have appreciated.

However, this image, like Stevenson's original literary forms, is inspired, but not exhaustively explained, by Sāmoan culture. It is one of Stevenson's greatest creations. With it, I would argue, he offers an alternative to those whose received nineteenth century

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169 Stevenson 1895: 212 f., 273 f. He never wrote up his experience of the wind, 34 f., 103 f., 198.
170 "In Time of Rain" in Stevenson's Prayers Written for Family Use at Vailima uses rain conventionally as a negative opposed to "the excellent face of Thy sun."
171 E.g., Stuebel 1896: 59 f., 161 f. The tradition of the genealogy of the rocks can be traced into later Tahitian and Hawaiian literature. Stevenson's image can be interestingly compared to the use of rock in Ellen Wright Prendergast's Hawaiian protest song, Kaulana No Pua, Charlot 1985: 27 f.
172 The Vailima prayer "Another in Time of Rain" contains the sequence trees-fish-men, which is influenced, I would argue, by Sāmoan origin myths. Very near "Tropic Rain" are: "Teach us the lesson of the trees," and "... teach us, Lord, the meaning of the fishes." The designation of groups in nature as "clans" is an interesting example of a concept of both Sāmoan and Scottish inspiration. Other possible influences of Sāmoan religious myths, especially origin myths, have been observed above.
173 Stevenson 1911a: 76; 1912b: 213; 1973: 196. He did appreciate other aspects of Polynesian art, e.g., 1895: 130 f., 143, 161 f., 245; 1971: 330-333; 1973: 29 f. (?). Johnstone 1905: 277. His house, however, was decorated mostly with European art, Stevenson 1895: 172. Strong and Osbourne 1902: 165; Sāmoan tapa was used on the walls as seen in the photograph, 157.
transcendentalist religion was no longer viable; he offers an immanentist religion based on a feeling of primeval awe before the universe in its completeness and power. The image works on two levels. The metaphor of God’s face as a rock evokes the unresponsiveness, even the nullity, of the traditional God felt by many Westerners who were seeking him through their doubts. Rock is merely a metaphor applied to God’s face. But when “the face of the rock” is then described as fair, the rock stops being a mere metaphor and turns back, so to speak, into a real rock. Returning then to the first half of the verse, “the face of God” is now seen as a quality of the rock itself; that is, the rock has exactly that religious element that people are seeking vainly in the traditional God. The disappointment in one form of religion is turned, so to speak, to the reappointment of an older, more fundamental form of religion. What seemed negative is revealed as positive, just as from pain come “Beneficent streams of tears,” “And out of the cloud that smites, beneficent rivers of rain”: an evocation of the Polynesian, indeed worldwide view of the rain as fertilizing.

In this extremely dense image are concentrated the trends observed earlier in Stevenson’s thought and work. In the first stanza, he offers powerful, complex images of the unity between so-called natural and supernatural elements in the religion he proposes. The entire passage expresses a strength and optimism based on the broadest recognition and experience of life.

The influence of Polynesian thought and literature on Stevenson clearly extends beyond his treatments of South Seas subjects. I would argue that his pioneering literary work on those was a liberating influence on his treatments of Scottish subjects. This is to be expected in view of the many similarities he saw between Scotland and Polynesia. Moreover, in treating his most intensely Scottish subjects, he used some of the techniques employed also in his South Seas works. “Thrawn Janet” begins with a non-Scots introductory passage that can be recognized as the civilized element needed to lead into the savage story, as in the introductory passage in “The House of Tembinoka” or the formal introduction to “The Song of Rahéro.” Similarly, the Tod Lapaik story in David Balfour is a clearly marked insertion with a long passage provided to set the scene for the telling of the tale by one of the characters. Just as with South Seas material, Stevenson restricted himself to short literary forms for his most intensely Scottish material.

Weir of Hermiston marks a clear departure, a full-length novel in which the Scottish element would be both more intense and more permeating than in any of Stevenson’s previous novels. Stevenson does use some of his earlier techniques: the story begins in the more civilized city; a long, ethnic family history is told by one of the characters. But the Scottishness of the novel as a whole could not be thus framed and contained, and Stevenson had worries about it similar to those he had had about “The Beach at Falesa”:

“It is pretty Scotch... and some of the story is—well—queer. The heroine is seduced by one man and finally disappears with the other man who shot him. Now all this, above all after our experience with Falesā, don’t look much like serial publication... But it has occurred to me that there is one quarter in which the very Scotchness of the thing would be found a recommendation and where the queerness might possibly be stomached... Mind you, I expect [Hermiston] to be

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173 Cf. the passage from The Ebb-Tide quoted above. Also Stevenson 1895: 125; a cloud is “a thing to worship.”
174 See Johnstone 1905: 100 f., 103.
my masterpiece.  

Whether Stevenson would have conventionalized Weir of Hermiston as he had "The Beach at Falesá" is a question left open by his death.

The influence of Stevenson’s pioneering literary experience in the South Seas is especially clear in his fable "The Song of the Morrow." The ethnic inspiration of that work is evident, but it is nevertheless not simply Scottish, as "Thrawn Janet" or the story of Tod Lapraik. Rather, it is similar to Stevenson’s fables based on, but not exhaustively explained by, Polynesian materials and literary forms. In his Polynesian-type fables, he would find a basis and inspiration in ethnic material, but would then create an original form. He does precisely that in "The Song of the Morrow," which is a unique final result, but one of several examples of a literary method; a method developed on Polynesian materials and used, in this one instance, on Scottish. This explanation accounts for the similarities of "The Song of the Morrow" to both Stevenson’s Scottish and Polynesian-type stories; and also the differences between it and the other Scottish stories.

Stevenson is one of the first Western creative writers to work in Polynesia and is still the one who has attempted most systematically to understand and interpret Polynesian culture for the West. His Pacific career is instructive in the problems he faced, the solutions he essayed with varying degrees of success, and, not least, in the fructifying influence Polynesia had on his thought and work; an influence Stevenson wished to transmit to Western culture as a whole.

Interestingly, some Polynesian writers were working at the same time along the same lines, but from the opposite direction. The Hawaiian S.N. Hale’ole’s Laielkawai is an attempt "to awaken in his countrymen an interest in genuine native story-telling based upon the folklore of their race and preserving its ancient customs ... and by this means to inspire in them old ideals of racial glory"; "... it represents the single composition of a Polynesian mind working upon the material of an old legend and eager to create a genuine national literature. As such it claims a kind of classic interest." The writer of "A Story from 1890" tried to construct a mental framework in which Western and Polynesian views could be accommodated.

These writers are among the spiritual ancestors of all those who work today to realize the potential and crucial contribution of Polynesia to world culture.

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176 The cyclical theme of the fable could be related to Samoan thought; e.g., the proverb, Manuia le masina, ua alu ma sau, "Happy the moon. It goes and comes." But cyclical thinking is, of course, found elsewhere.
178 Beckwith 1919: 9 f.
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