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MIUR DIPARTIMENTO DI ECCELLENZA

(Un)natural Stevenson: Wild Transgressions across Literature, Ecology, Science and Gender,

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BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

PANEL 1: Waters, Oceans & Blue Humanities

Chair: Shaul Bassi (Ca' Foscari University of Venice)

Julie Gay
Université du Littoral Côte d'Opale

(Un)natural Shores: Stevenson's Amphibian Coastal Poetics and their Wild Transgressions

In recent years, maritime spaces have garnered increased critical attention, as the rise of Blue Humanities has led to a shift from a terrestrial to an oceanic focus in the humanities, including literary studies (Frank 12). Critics such as Mentz have even called for more "inclusive" blue humanities, which would be open to multiple forms of water such as rivers, coastal spaces, ice or even vapor (143), encouraging the development of a "poetics of planetary water" (140). In the same line, Margaret Cohen notably delineates a typology of what she calls the "chronotopes of the sea" and argues that "the shore is a place where the boundaries are tested, only to be reaffirmed rather than dissolved" (661). However, it is my contention that in Stevenson's fiction, coastal spaces are conducive to much more than a simple testing of boundaries, which are in fact wildly transgressed around these waterside chronotopes. This paper thus aims to show that in texts such as "The Pavilion on the Links", "The Merry Men" and *The Master of Ballantrae*, the erosion of the littoral in contact with water not only fluidifies the distinction between land and sea but also between the natural and the human realms, through seemingly "unnatural" or supernatural phenomena that turn these spaces into eminently haunting coastscapes. This in turn challenges the realist and Naturalist ideal of a

strict adherence to "nature" in fictional representation, as realism becomes hybridized with other genres such as folk tales and adventure, but also with other media such as music, leading to a synesthetic reading experience blending vision and sound. The impressionistic quality of Stevenson's coastscapes thus enables "wild transgressions" of geological but also of aesthetic and sensory boundaries, highlighting the creative potential of such terraqueous spaces that seem to call for what Soren Frank calls *amphibian comparative literature*, which according to him "is characterized by its capacity to accommodate 'both kinds of life' […]: life above water and life under water, the human and the nonhuman, even the organic and the inorganic".

Julie Gay is a senior lecturer in British literature at the Université du Littoral Côte d'Opale and a member of the research team HLLI. She explores the relationship between space and literary form at the turn of the 19th century, focusing on authors such as R.L. Stevenson, Joseph Conrad, and H. G. Wells. Her PhD thesis was published with L'Harmattan Editions and was awarded the SELVA book prize. She has also published several articles in peer-reviewed journals as well as chapters in collective volumes by Brill, Cambridge Scholars, Paradigmes Editions and Routledge. She co-organised the 2022 Stevenson Conference in Bordeaux, and is co-editing a collective volume on *Stevenson and Pleasure*.

Jean-Pierre Naugrette
Université Sorbonne-Nouvelle

“Like A Doubtful Bather”: Stevenson and the Ethos of Swimming

There is little evidence, in both Stevenson’s life and fiction, of a happy, desired apprehension of bathing and swimming, of what Alain Corbin, in his ground-breaking book *The lure of the sea : the discovery of the seaside in the Western world, 1750-1840* (1988, transl. University of California P, 1994), calls this “new harmony of the body and the sea”. A rare description of youthful bathing, in “The Lantern Bearers” (1888), mentions a refrigerating, repellent experience compared to the exploration of tidal rocks, while the Bass Rock is described as “tilted seaward like a doubtful bather”. Surely Stevenson’s ill health precluded such pleasures, but his own fictional characters rarely swim : in *Kidnapped*, David Balfour says “I had no skill of swimming”, while at the end of *The Merry Men*, the fact that neither the black man nor Uncle Gordon can swim clearly announces a death by drowning. In the story, Uncle Gordon, who appears haunted by the Bible and the Psalms, defines the sea as “a muckle yett to hell” whose bottom is full of bones and bodies, like Israel Hands in *Treasure Island*. From Scotland to the South Seas, Stevenson uses similar recurrent, apotropaic images in “The Isle of Voices” (*Island Nights’ Entertainments*, 1893) when Keola falls into “the Sea of the Dead” : “He swam indeed, but he swam as puppies swim when they are cast in to drown...” It is only in *The Ebb-Tide* (1893) that bathing becomes “immersion” and swimming a choice when Herrick tries to commit suicide by drowning. After a Hamlet-like interior monologue, Herrick claims “ the act of swimming” not as a pleasure or mode of living (see Bonnie Tsui, *Why We Swim*, 2020), but a reluctant ethos, a mode of not dying.

Jean-Pierre Naugrette is Emeritus Professor of Victorian literature at the University Sorbonne-Nouvelle. A Stevenson scholar and specialist, he has written a book on Stevenson's fiction (*Robert Louis Stevenson, l'aventure et son double*, PENS) and a number of critical essays. He has co-organized a conference on Stevenson & Conan Doyle at Cerisy-la-Salle. He has also translated Stevenson into French (*Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *A Child's Garden of Verses*, *The Merry Men*, *Olalla*, *The Master of Ballantrae*, *Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes*). In his first novel, *Le Crime étrange de Mr Hyde* (Actes Sud), he provides Mr Hyde's version of the story.

Matthew P. M. Kerr
University of Southampton

Wasted Stevenson: Shipwrecks, Champagne Bottles and Tinned Salmon in R. L. Stevenson's South Sea Writings

The 'litter of pans and dishes' in the shop in 'The Beach of Falesá' (1892). The shocking amount of rubbish produced aboard the *Farallone* in *The Ebb-Tide* (1894)—'"There's been more waste on this twopenny ship than what there is to an Atlantic Liner,'" remarks Captain Davis grimly. The visitor to Stevenson's home in the Pacific who described the man himself as 'a bundle of sticks in a bag'. Trash is everywhere in Robert Louis Stevenson's work and life. Paying close attention to this neglected pattern, this paper uses Stevenson's South Sea writings to explore the cultural origins of a significant contemporary ecological problem—marine waste—in the nineteenth-century British imperial world. Focusing on Stevenson's two collaborative novellas with his stepson Lloyd Osbourne, *The Wrecker* (1892) and *The Ebb-Tide,* as well as the role of tin cans in his life writing, I show how Stevenson represents salvaged (or dismantled ships), discarded bottles and used tins not only as the necessary apparatus of coastal or shipboard life, but also as rubbish – as trash. Questions for the paper include: what are the connections between waste and the sea in Stevenson's writings and nineteenth-century culture more broadly? How is the sea a vector not only for communication and travel in the nineteenth century, but also for ecological disaster as waste (and the cultures and technologies that produce waste) migrate across borders? And what is lost to the interdisciplinary field of waste studies when nineteenth-century sources are neglected? Moreover, my discussion of tins of salmon as significant waste objects in Stevenson's oeuvre sheds new light on the complex

interface between his Scottishness, which is metonymically linked to the salmon he eats in the Pacific (Scots were vital to the salmon canning industry in the Pacific Northwest), and his time in the South Seas.

Matt Kerr is Associate Professor of British Literature, 1837 to 1939, at the University of Southampton, UK. He is author of *The Victorian Novel and the Problems of Marine Language: All at Sea* (Oxford University Press, 2022) and editor, with Matthew Ingleby, of *Coastal Cultures of the Long Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh University Press, 2018). He is currently editing Captain Frederick Marryat's nautical novel *Mr Midshipman Easy* for Oxford World's Classics. The present paper is part of a larger project mapping how nineteenth-century maritime imperialism produced and disseminated sea waste, and how coastal communities imagined, resisted, and used marine trash.

Paola Della Valle
Università di Torino

R.L. Stevenson's *In the South Seas*: A Study on the Pacific Ecosystem

In May 1888 Stevenson sailed from San Francisco with his family and began a nomadic life in the South Pacific, which included several long stays on numerous islands (the Marquesas, Tahiti, the Paumotu, the Hawaii, and the Gilberts). The Stevensons finally settled down in Samoa, where the writer died in 1894. Stevenson's South Sea correspondence appeared in some magazines but did not meet the readers' expectations. People reclaimed a new *Treasure Island* whereas Stevenson had discovered a vocation for research in human and natural sciences. The letters gradually came to be considered by him as chapters of a longer text: the most comprehensive book on the South Seas ever written. What remains today is the essay *In the South Seas*, published posthumously in 1896: a chronological collection of most of his South Sea letters edited by his mentor Sidney Colvin. Despite its fragmentariness, due to the lack of the author's final supervision, the book is very different from the usual travelogues from the South Pacific. Stevenson's approach does not conform to the so-called "panoptic gaze" of the Western explorer, who wants to classify and control everything from a fixed (Western) perspective (Spurr 1993). His attitude is one of openness to listening and learning. For example, Stevenson realized that the balance of the Pacific region was based on a sophisticated eco-system elaborated throughout centuries of interconnection between humans and the environment. His shrewd observations led him to conceive of the Pacific as a complex network of relationships between peoples, cultures and the natural world, which was totally ignored by the

Western imperialist powers at the time. Stevenson also anticipated the view of the sea as a means of connection rather than separation, later highlighted by Tongan sociologist Epeli Hau‘ofa in his seminal essay “Our Sea of Islands” (1993). My contribution will analyze Stevenson’s essay from an eco-critical perspective, underscoring his brilliant insights into many matters that have been confirmed by today’s studies in Pacific environmental history.

Paola Della Valle is Associate Professor at the University of Turin. She specializes in New Zealand and Pacific literature, postcolonial criticism, gender studies, and environmental humanities. She is the author of numerous articles and three monographs: *From Silence to Voice: The Rise of Maori Literature* (2010), *Stevenson nel Pacifico: una lettura postcoloniale* (2013) and *Priestley e il tempo, il tempo di Priestley* (2016). She has contributed to the volumes *Antroposcenari: Storie, paesaggi, ecologie*, (2018), *Trees in Literatures and the Arts: HumanArboreal Perspectives in the Anthropocene* (2021), *The Bloomsbury Handbook to Ageing in Contemporary Literature and Film* (2023), and *Reframing Souths. Ecological Perspectives on the South in Literature, Film, and New Media* (2025). She is a member of the International Advisory Board of the *Journal of New Zealand and Pacific Studies* and member of the AISCLI Board.

PANEL 2: Landscape, Setting and Ecology

Chair: **Nathalie Jaëck** (Université Bordeaux Montaigne)

Martin White
Independent scholar

The Geopoetic Stevenson – An Unnatural Marriage?

A few weeks past was the 90th anniversary of the birth of Kenneth White, Poet and Academic. Highly lauded in his lifetime, he died in 2023. A man with some remarkable parallels to the life of Stevenson, he created the concept of 'Geopoetics'. Amongst his enormous collection of works sometimes in English but more often in French, is the beautifully illustrated book *Le chemin des cretes – Avec Robert Louis Stevenson a travers les Cévennes* written c1999, and an English version of it in c2001 – *The High Line*, that marked his virtual Fellowship in the Edinburgh College of Art. The books make a number of claims: that White is an authority on Stevenson, after 'a complete and thorough reading of his work', and that Stevenson was a forerunner of Geopoetics (who could have done better had he not wasted his time writing novels).

The study provides some context to White and his writing styles. It identifies a set of criteria for assessing whether writing might support Geopoetics and applies them to the Stevenson writing that White uses in his books. It concludes that the Stevenson texts do indeed tick Geopoetic boxes. It highlights why, for Stevenson, this could never be the whole story. For a single-minded philosopher and poet, White, it became a different and more radical routemap.

Perhaps surprisingly, and despite their separation by a century, their love of landscape (including seascapes) provides new possibilities for

exploration along with much stimulation from the differences in their perspectives.

Martin White is a retired IT Strategist and Architect. He has a BSc from Edinburgh University in Mathematical Physics. He is the President of the European Cultural Route 'In the Footsteps of Robert Louis Stevenson' and is a Trustee of the RLS Club. He curated the exhibition about the Young RLS running at the Coastal Communities Museum in North Berwick. He has written several books on Local History and on Architecture and Design. He develops and runs the website www.mrrls.com (including a growing number of imaginary conversations involving RLS). He completed Stevenson's intended book *The Wreckers* [under the title of *The Wreckers Tale*] in the style of the 12 year old Stevenson.

Burkhard Niederhoff
Ruhr University Bochum

Stevenson's Natural History: Settings in *Kidnapped*, "The Pavilion on the Links" and *Weir of Hermiston*

Stevenson is an eloquent theorist of setting. In "A Gossip on Romance", he writes: "Some places speak distinctly. Certain dank gardens cry aloud for a murder; certain old houses demand to be haunted; certain coasts are set apart for shipwreck." Stevenson is also aware that the role of setting changes with time. In "Victor Hugo's Romances", he points out that settings are less important in the eighteenth than in the nineteenth century. In a novel by Fielding, the setting is minimal, a bare stage with a few props that enable the characters to act. In a novel by Scott, the setting is suggestive and symbolic, and it evokes the social and ideological forces that influence the characters. The rise of the setting is related to a loss of human agency. In Fielding, characters are autonomous, "great to the full stature of a perfectly arbitrary will", while in Scott, they are "no longer thrown out in unnatural isolation, but […] resumed into [their] place in the constitution of things". Interestingly, Stevenson's awareness of these historical changes informs his own works of fiction. The role of the setting differs depending on the historical period in which a work is set, and this applies to natural settings just as much as to urban or domestic ones. In *Kidnapped*, set in the mid-eighteenth century, Stevenson describes the Highlands in the minimal and pragmatic manner of Fielding. In "The Pavilion on the Links", set in the mid-nineteenth century, the links and the coastline are highly suggestive and symbolic. In *Weir of Hermiston*, set in the early nineteenth century, the moorlands evoke the larger forces that influence the characters. In Stevenson's works, nature is historical.

Burkhard Niederhoff is Professor of English Literature at the University of Bochum (Germany). He was a visiting scholar at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver and at Central Michigan University in Mount Pleasant. He is the author of *Erzähler und Perspektive bei Robert Louis Stevenson* (1994), a narratological study, and numerous articles on RLS. He has edited *The Pavilion on the Links and Other Early Stories* for *The New Edinburgh Edition* (the volume is scheduled for publication in September 2026). Further publications include two books on comedy and articles on modernist fiction, various aspects of the long eighteenth century, and contemporary Canadian Literature. He is also co-editor of *Connotations: A Journal of Critical Debate*.

Mafalda Cipollone
Independent scholar

“Only for the moment during which the effect endures”. Ecology and Impressionism: ‘An Inland Voyage’

The fundamental principles of ecology were established in the 1860s and 1870s. In the same period, impressionist painters began to represent the “economy of nature” as something that interconnects the natural and the human systems: they constructed landscapes that were themselves ecological systems.

Already in the mid-19th century, the Barbizon artists had reacted to the effects of human impact on nature by denouncing the deforestation of Fontainebleau. Among the first, they preferred the *en plein air* technique, immersing themselves in nature.

Stevenson, quoting André Theuriet in the epigraph to his ‘An Autumn Effect’, agreed in asserting that the best description of nature is that through which one strives to express, in a sober and simple manner, the “impression” received. Stevenson further defines this as an “impression”, a fleeting moment that fades if we stop to observe it for too long (‘*only for the moment during which the effect endures*’).

My presentation focuses on ‘An Inland Voyage’, which was written after RLS visited Paris in April 1874, Barbizon and Paris in March-April 1875, and the valley of the Loing in August 1875.

I will explore how Stevenson, when describing those landscapes, was influenced by the pre-Impressionist environment of Barbizon, and how he evolved in an ecological Impressionist sense, describing the interconnection between man and environment, between culture and nature during his canoe trip.

In ‘An Inland Voyage’, I will analyse the landscapes, encompassing nature and humanity, with particular attention to the role played by water, and life and nature along the banks of rivers and canals: the active life at the locks, the dangers of flooding in an impetuous stream, the great variety of weather at different hours, the osmosis between sky and water, the positioning of the protagonist (the artist) within the painting, the different points of view and perspectives.

Mafalda Cipollone is an Italian independent scholar from Perugia. She is an archaeologist and archivist, now retired, who in 2011 joined the volunteer team transcribing RLS’s manuscripts for the New Edinburgh Edition. She also volunteers for the Immigrant Ships Transcribing Guild, transcribing 19th century passenger lists from Europe to America. Transcription being a voyage into the past, Mafalda has created a blog, called “The Letters and Travels of RLS”, supplying Stevenson’s texts with illustrations mostly from that era, allowing the reader to take a journey with the writer, through different times and places. Mafalda also collaborates with Italian cultural institutions as a translator of Italian texts into English.

Richard Dury
Università di Bergamo

Ecology and Impressionism: Stevenson's 1870s essays

As Mafalda Cipollone has dealt with Impressionism and Ecology, I will first look at Stevenson's historical contacts with paintings of the Barbizon school and the Impressionists and the affinities of style, both in an representational technique (alluded to and imitated) and in an understanding of an environment of interconnected natural systems.

After this, I will look at three walking tour essays from the 1875 and 1876, 'An Autumn Effect', 'Forest Notes' and 'A Winters Walk', together with his annotations in pocket notebooks taken on two of the walks.

My aim will be to see how Stevenson was seeking inspiration from the developments in painting in the recording of immediate perception, through deliberate imitation or allusion to Impressionism, and through a representation of immersion in the wider natural context, a passive record of experience rather than documentation, guide or map. The title 'Forest Notes' and the reference to 'my "Autumn Notes"' shows an aim to capture sketch-like annotations and the fleeting moment of change, and his notebooks contain examples of attempts to directly record momentary impressions as he travelled through the landscape.

Richard Dury, a retired Associate Professor of English Language at the Università di Bergamo, has published a critical edition of *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (EUP, 2004), and edited collections (with Richard Ambrosini) of selected papers from two Stevenson conferences:

Robert Louis Stevenson, Writer of Boundaries (2006), and *European Stevenson* (2009). He has also edited two volumes of essays for the New Edinburgh Edition (awaiting publication): *Stevenson's Early Essays* and (with R.-L. Abrahamson) *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*. He founded the RLS website and issues an *RLS Newsletter*. His transcription of the *Inland Voyage Notebook* is on sale during the conference.

PANEL 3: Travelling, Travelogues and Crossings

Chair: **Emma Sdegno** (Ca' Foscari University of Venice)

Peter Arnds
Trinity College Dublin

Wild Transgression and Slow Travel with a Donkey in Stevenson's Journey in the Cévennes

Robert Louis Stevenson's journey with a donkey named Modestine in the Cévennes mountains is an early example of "slow travel" predating modern eco-tourism. His 1878 book *Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes* chronicles a trek that focuses on the journey itself rather than the destination, highlighting the immersive and sometimes challenging nature of slower, self-powered travel. The experience is now celebrated by hikers on the Stevenson Trail in France, which promotes eco-tourism by having visitors wander at a more deliberate pace.

Slowing down by means of an animal is very much a French tradition, for as Rebecca Solnit tells us in *Wanderlust* Parisians used to walk with tortoises in the Tuileries, deliberately to slow down. My paper analyses Stevenson's reactions to nature in this slow-travel narrative and his interaction with the donkey as part of the natural and the two sides in man, the human and non-human. Stevenson's relationship with Modestine evolved from initial frustration at the extreme slowness of the animal to a deep, albeit late-realized, affection. He acquired the donkey for practical reasons to carry his luggage and initially found her stubborn and annoying, but through mutual struggle and adjustment increasingly came to see her as a companion species, By the end of the journey he was deeply saddened to part with her.

Drawing on theories by Donna Haraway and Rebecca Solnit (among others), on slow travel, walking, and travel as transgression, I want to explore the notion of 'wild transgression' in Stevenson's travelogue and specifically in his relationship with his donkey. At the end of this paper, I also briefly want to address Stevenson's impact on another slow-travel narrative, Lotta Lubkoll's *Wandern, Glück und lange Ohren: Mit Esel Jonny von München bis ans Mittelmeer* (2021), to highlight aspects of gender in walking with animals.

Professor Peter Arnds directs the Comparative Literature program and teaches German and Italian literature at Trinity College Dublin, where he is also a Fellow. He has held visiting positions in Kabul, Delhi, Adelaide and Salamanca, and is a member of the PEN Centre for German-Speaking Writers Abroad and of Academia Europaea. His publications include books on Wilhelm Raabe, Charles Dickens, Günter Grass, and most recently *Wolves at the Door: Migration, Dehumanization, Rewilding the World* (Bloomsbury, 2021). His novel *Searching for Alice* was published by Dalkey Archive Press in 2019. His book *Like Animals to the Slaughter: An Eco-Literary Approach to Genocide* is forthcoming with New York University Press.

Kate Ashley
Acadia University

Stevenson's Uncouth Beginnings in the Cévennes

This paper proposes "uncouthness" – in its English and Scots meanings of the foreign, the strange, and the unfamiliar – as a lens for reading *Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes*, one of Stevenson's earliest published works and an important text in the emergence of his aesthetic interest in adventure and the wild. In the dedication, addressed to Sidney Colvin, Stevenson describes the start of his journey as an *"*uncouth beginning*",* signalling from the outset a trip that involves disorder, unfamiliarity, and thresholds between civilization and wilderness. In the excised opening chapter, "A Mountain Town in France," Stevenson uses "uncouth" twice to describe local people: first, to capture the manners of the inhabitants of Le Monastier, and second, to mark residual traces of old "lawlessness" in their hesitant, defensive behaviours. As such, the text's "uncouth beginnings" mark not only a rough start to a pedestrian journey but a threshold into a landscape that resists civilizing perspectives. "Uncouthness", I argue, becomes a deliberate aesthetic strategy that enables Stevenson to experience the Cévennes not as a scenic backdrop but as a palimpsest of conflict, memory, and historical rupture. Throughout the journey, he repeatedly reads the natural world through its pasts, imagining Camisard skirmishes, sensing traces of religious dissent, and feeling the lingering presence of earlier inhabitants. By framing uncouthness as a refusal of settled perspectives, this paper argues that *Travels with a Donkey* draws attention to the frontiers where landscape, history, and imaginative perception intersect. The uncouth becomes generative, enabling Stevenson to see terrain as unruly, uncanny, and alive with its own histories. In this way, it

establishes the foundations for his later aesthetic of adventure, which is attentive to uncertainty, imaginative reconstruction, and encounters with otherness.

Dr. Kate Ashley is Full Professor of French at Acadia University in Nova Scotia, Canada, where she is Vice-Provost Academic Policy and Graduate Studies. She is the author of *Robert Louis Stevenson and Nineteenth-Century French Literature: Literary Relations at the Fin de Siècle* (EUP, 2022) and has published articles on Stevenson in *Nineteenth Century Studies*, *Revue de littérature comparée*, and *Connotations*. Dr. Ashley is also a lawyer.

Vanessa Smith
University of Sydney

The Volcano and the Insect: High and Low Islands in Stevenson's *In the South Seas* and *Island Nights' Entertainments*

No distinction is so continually dwelt upon in South Seas talk, wrote Robert Louis Stevenson in *In the South Seas*, *as that between the 'low' and the 'high' islands, and there is none more broadly marked in nature. The Himalayas are not more different from the Sahara.* Where in high islands he finds lofty peaks, abundance of food and *picturesque and solemn scenery*, Stevenson describes the atoll as *a thing of problematic origin and history, the reputed creature of an insect apparently unidentified;* […] *often rising at its highest point to less than the stature of a man— man himself, the rat and the land crab, its chief inhabitants; not more variously supplied with plants; and offering to the eye, even when perfect, only a ring of glittering beach and verdant foliage, enclosing and enclosed by the blue sea.* While the opposition here seems to present a Jekyll and Hyde of Polynesian geology and botany; lofty pre-eminence versus low stature and problematic origin– Stevenson learns in the Polynesian islands to nuance binary thinking. Taken, as the quote shows, from Oceanic oral cultures ('South Seas Talk'), the low-high island opposition does not map easily onto those cruder taxonomies used in the nineteenth century to distinguish cultures in the Pacific (such as the Melanesia/Polynesia distinction); nor does it tally with prevailing European discourses of sublimity or the picturesque. Rather, it seems to offer a way of reflecting upon a viewing position and state of mind, offering a novel sense of distance, interiority and exteriority that is at once material and psychic. In this paper I will suggest that the embodied and interlocutory experience of travelling

offered Stevenson a counterpoint to the stereotypes of alterity that more often prevailed when bodies were thought about in relation to other bodies rather than the natural world.

Vanessa Smith is Professor of English at the University of Sydney. Her book *Literary Culture and the Pacific: nineteenth-century textual encounters* (Cambridge UP, 1998) used Stevenson's Pacific writings as a case study through which to consider the transition to literate culture in the Pacific islands. Her books include *Intimate Strangers Friendship, Exchange and Pacific Encounters*. (Cambridge UP, 2010), and *Toy Stories: Analyzing the child in nineteenth-century literature* (Fordham UP, 2023). She is editor of the OUP series *Approaches to the Novel*. Her most recent article on Stevenson is 'Wasted Gifts: Robert Louis Stevenson in Oceania'. *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 75(4), 2021, 527-551.

Caroline McCracken-Flesher
University of Wyoming

The Surveillance of Things: Looking Back at Stevenson, from the Cévennes to the South Seas

Anticipating Robert Louis Stevenson's account of his American travels, the *Athenaeum* in 1880 looked forward to "a third set of his charming *impressions de voyage*." Stevenson, they thought, had the access, the insight, and the disposition to engage sympathetically and pleasingly with new places and different people. However a backward look at *Travels with a Donkey* (1879), and a forward look at *In the South Seas* (1896) reveals a complex dynamic between the traveller and the places and peoples he encounters. It is one in which Stevenson is not just gazing, but gazed upon. Moreover those who return the gaze often remain impenetrable. For a writer who is much appreciated for his sensitivities, and celebrated for his fraternity in the South Seas, Stevenson often reads others through the language of objects, as things, and inherently hostile. Misrecognized as objects, they necessarily impede the author. Villagers and islanders become plot points rather than people; animals become obstructions; the natural is "unnatural."

From Modestine the donkey to the Pacific islanders half hidden by their coconut palms, the world through which Stevenson travels resists his gaze and compromises the interpretations the Athenaeum naïvely celebrated. It is a phenomenon increasingly recognized by the author, and deployed as a problematic within fictions like *Kidnapped* and, most extensively, *The Ebb-Tide*.

This paper will invoke Object Oriented Ontology, and particularly Bill Brown's Thing Theory, alongside theories of the tourist gaze, its mutuality and its shifting powers, to situate Stevenson differently in the landscapes and cultures he describes for his Anglo and American audience. Discussion will likely entangle him even more problematically in the "unconcealed vitality" not just of the vegetables, but of landscapes from Scotland to the Cévennes to Samoa.

Caroline McCracken-Flesher is Professor of English at the University of Wyoming. Publications include *Possible Scotlands: Walter Scott and the Story of Tomorrow* (Oxford, 2005), *The Doctor Dissected: A Cultural Autopsy of the Burke and Hare Murders* (Oxford, 2012); numerous scholarly editions; the edited collections *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Robert Louis Stevenson*, *Culture, Nation and the New Scottish Parliament,* and *Scotland As Science Fiction*; the co-edited anthologies *Looking Forward: Walter Scott at 250* (with Matthew Wickman) and *The International Companion to Nineteenth-Century Scottish Literature* (with Sheila Kidd and Ken McNeil). Her edition of *Kidnapped* is forthcoming with EUP.

PANEL 4: Unnatural Communities

Chair: **Burkhard Niederhoff** (Ruhr University Bochum)

Lee Spinks
University of Edinburgh

Inhospitable Nature: Kith, Kin and Monstrosity in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*

Donna Haraway famously argued for 'making kin not babies,' in part at least to disrupt patriarchal lines of filiation and to create different lines of alliance. This is in accord with a general liberal expansion of fraternity, a hospitality to those not already within one's kind and – more importantly – an undoing of the figure of 'man" who is in command of nature (including his own nature). Against this Mackenzie Wark argued for the less fraternal project of 'making kith not kin'. This would not be simply hospitality to those whom one might one day call one's own but a dwelling with the monstrous and the radically queer: queerness, that is, not as a minor inflection, expansion or solicitation of the natural, but a relation towards that which has no nature. Nowhere is this refusal of kinship more powerfully imagined that in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* where the undoing of the self takes place along the monstrous lines of money, inheritance and the tramping of futurity. The event that opens Stevenson's tale is the villainous trampling of a child, cutting off the figure of futurity. The true horror of the tale is not, on this reading, Hyde himself but the very possibility that inheritance might be squandered, lost, denaturalised or taken beyond all kinship.

Lee Spinks is Senior Lecturer at the University of Edinburgh. He is the author of *Friedrich Nietzsche* (Routledge, 2003), *James Joyce: A*

Critical Guide (EUP, 2009) and *Michael Ondaatje* (Manchester UP, 2009)

Glenda Norquay
Liverpool John Moores University

‘Beholding with your natural eyes’: Robert Louis Stevenson and Communities of Perception

Stevenson frequently uses the trope of seeing something ‘in my mind’s eye’ when describing figures or scenes that had imprinted themselves on his memory, synthesising synchronic and diachronic visual perceptions in order to curate personal and national pasts. In the Dedication to *Kidnapped*, however, the writer imagines his old friend Charles Baxter in the familiar locations of their youth: ‘I think I see you, moving there by plain daylight, beholding with your natural eyes those places that have now become for your companion a part of the scenery of dreams.’ The eyes of his friend are represented as more ‘natural’ than those ‘optical metaphors of recollection’ (Colley, 2008) crafted by the author yet at the same time they enable a complicated performance of vision and revisioning. Such a striking engagement with inhabiting the sight of a close other while also analysing it is not confined to Stevenson. This paper suggests that the exchange or transference of ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’ seeing, so compellingly deployed by Stevenson, is also a more widespread trope in the close circle of his family and friends. Tracing the layered configuration of visualising in Stevenson’s writing and that of those around him, it examines the connections, intimacies and disjunctions that are expressed through reference to acts of seeing.

Glenda Norquay is Professor Emerita of Scottish Literature at Liverpool John Moores University. Publications include *Critical Lives: Robert Louis Stevenson* (2026); *Robert Louis Stevenson and*

Transatlantic Literary Networks in the 1890s (2020); *Robert Louis Stevenson and Theories of Reading* (2007).

Penny Fielding
University of Edinburgh

Enmity and Fraternity in *The Master of Ballantrae*

The Master of Ballantrae is set in a world at war but it is hard to tell whose side anyone is on. Espionage and deception structure its political sphere. The novel rejects the liberal ideal of friendship as social equality (James and Burke toss a coin to decide 'whether we were to cut each other's throats or be sworn friends'). Instead, Stevenson explore a world that cannot sustain distinctions between friends and enemies. My paper will look at the implications of this for *The Master of Ballantrae* as a historical novel: how are human relations formed in the absence of identifiable groups, alliances, fraternities or friendships? What happens to friendship and enmity when they cannot find a purchase in the political order?

Penny Fielding is Grierson Professor of English at the University of Edinburgh and a general editor of the New Edinburgh Edition of Stevenson. Her books include *Scotland and the Fictions of Geography* (CUP 2008), *Literature in Transition: the 1880s* (CUP 2019) , and *The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Louis Stevenson* (EUP, 2010).

PANEL 5: Hauntings

Chair: **Penny Fielding** (University of Edinburgh)

Lesley Graham
Université Bordeaux Montaigne

The Shadow of Henley in Stevenson's 1888 Writing

The quarrel between Robert Louis Stevenson and W. E. Henley, sparked by the latter's suggestion that Fanny Stevenson had plagiarized a short story and Stevenson's subsequent robust defence of his wife, has been well documented. The unpleasantness produced by the rift and the moral dilemma that it created continued to rankle in Stevenson's mind for many months. This paper proposes to examine the shadow that Henley cast on Stevenson's work composed around that time, particularly on the essay "A Christmas Sermon", published in *Scribner's Magazine* in December 1888. In this much-quoted essay about the importance of kindness and honesty in a life well-lived, Henley's presence is discernible in various ways not least through the inclusion in full of his recently published poem, "Margaritae Sorori" as a conclusion. Stevenson's lightly veiled "protestations of friendship" elsewhere in the piece were ultimately rejected by Henley and although there was a reconciliation of sorts later, their previous intimacy was never recovered. This initial approach opens the possibility of identifying the presence of additional hauntings and hypocrisies in Stevenson's other writing from this period.

Lesley Graham is a senior lecturer at the University of Bordeaux in France where she teaches in the Department of Languages and Culture. Her research interests centre on nineteenth-century Scottish literature

and in particular on travel writing and other non-fiction genres. She has published widely on Robert Louis Stevenson, his entourage, and his afterlives. She is the editor of the New Edinburgh Edition of *Robert Louis Stevenson's Uncollected Essays 1880–94* (EUP).

Emlyn David
Université Bordeaux Montaigne

Folklore and the Unnatural in Stevenson's Scottish Fiction

This paper examines the ways in which references to folklore destabilise the seemingly well-defined categories of the natural and the unnatural in "Thrawn Janet" (1881), *Kidnapped* (1886), and *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889). Folkloric elements – references to superstitions, customs, and traditional material such as ballads or songs – often break into the narrative as disruptive elements. They interrogate an established order of things, one that would be deemed natural on the surface, for instance by shedding light on the perversion of familial bonds. In *Kidnapped*, Jennet Clouston's curse exposes Ebenezer Shaw's theft of David's heritage. In the *Master of Ballantrae*, the association of James Durie with a demonic figure underlines the moral corruption of this « unnatural brother », while James's furious revenge reactivates associations between the return of a haunting past with irrational and wild transgressions. References to Scottish folklore in these texts will be looked at in the context of the association of superstitious beliefs with a more barbaric state than that of the rational subject of enlightened modernity, an opposition staged prominently in "Thrawn Janet". This paper thus explores how Stevenson appropriates and subverts the Romantic association of folklore with a more primitive state, a state that would be closer to nature. Going against the laws of nature, supernatural elements blur the boundaries between the possible and the impossible, thus threatening the positivist epistemic framework that Stevenson's Victorian readers so strongly embraced. Examining the connections and distinctions between the supernatural and the unnatural in these works, this paper demonstrates that the unnatural cannot be reduced to the

workings of an unsound brain. Folkloric elements are used as a way to interrogate the concepts of the natural and the unnatural and transgress the boundary between the two, aiming to explore the notion of human nature in all its complexity.

Emlyn David is a third-year British Literature PhD candidate at Université Bordeaux Montaigne, working under the supervision of Professor Nathalie Jaëck. Her PhD research focuses on the representation of folklore and popular culture in the works of James Hogg, George MacDonald and R.L. Stevenson, which aims at examining the connections between folklore and literature in Romantic and Victorian literature. Other research interests include Romantic poetry, Scottish literature, and the representation of oral storytelling in eighteenth-and nineteenth-century literature. She is a member of the editorial board of *Essais*, a biannual journal published by Université Bordeaux Montaigne.

Elena Zavaglia
Università Cattolica Milano

"Terrors of the Conscience": The 'Unnatural' as the Embodiment of Post-Murder Guilt in "The Merry Men" and "The Body Snatcher"

This paper examines the representation of guilt following murder in Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Merry Men* (1882) and *The Body Snatcher* (1884). By considering murder as a violent rupture of the 'natural' order, I argue that this act generates 'unnatural' encounters that can be read as embodiments of the murderers' guilt. In *The Merry Men*, Uncle Gordon murders a survivor of a shipwreck while drunk and is tormented by remorse. When a mysterious black figure appears, he believes he is seeing the ghost of his victim. Similarly, in *The Body Snatcher*, Macfarlane and Fettes are haunted by the murdered Gray when he 'returns' in the just-exhumed body of a woman. In both cases, the 'unnatural' emerges from within – as a manifestation of guilt – and functions as an externalisation of their moral and psychological turmoil rather than merely a narrative or sensational device. While scholars have examined the theme of criminal responsibility in *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Ganz; Lacey) and the tortured conscience of a murderer in *Markheim* (Vanon Alliata), *The Body Snatcher* has only received partial attention in this regard (Sborgi), and *The Merry Men* has yet to be examined in this respect. Ultimately, this paper contributes to a broader understanding of how Stevenson's use of the 'unnatural' operates not merely as a narrative device but as a vehicle for exploring the moral and psychological consequences of crime.

Elena Zavaglia is a PhD student in English Literature at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan. Her research explores popular

criminal narratives in Victorian London, focusing on the portrayal of crime in literature and the influence of these narratives on public perceptions of crime and morality. Her research interests include the depiction of crime in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English literature; eighteenth- and nineteenth-century popular literature, with a particular focus on penny dreadfuls; and the role of illustrations in the reception of Victorian literature.

Shari Sabeti
University of Edinburgh

Kindred Spirits: Living with the Dead in Robert Louis Stevenson's Sāmoa.

Stevenson's *Vailima Letters* are rich with descriptions of solitary encounters with the more than human world of plant and animal life. But in the dense forests of Mount Vaea the possibility of meeting an 'aitu' or spirit, also hangs in the air. Whilst Stevenson himself never formally acknowledged a sympathy with beliefs such as spiritualism (unlike Arthur Conan Doyle, for example), his long-held interest in folklore, both in a Scottish and Pacific context, has been well documented. His travels and settlement in the Pacific also led to the development of a proto-ethnographic/culturally relativist disposition (Reid 2006; De Capitani 2023) which would have placed him in empathy (if not sympathy) with the beliefs of those around him.

Drawing on excerpts from Stevenson's letters, literary re-imaginings of his last days (in particular, the plays of Victoria Kneubuhl), as well as ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Sāmoa between 2023-25, this interdisciplinary presentation explores the ways in which both Stevenson's writing and his (after)life question the traditional boundary between the living and the dead. In what ways was Stevenson's closeness to death enabling of the porousness of this boundary? How do current communities in the Pacific continue their relations with Stevenson? In what ways are inhabitants of Vailima village, the staff at the RLS Museum nearby and those who look after Mount Vaea and Stevenson's grave engaged in relations of care and kinship with him? Vinciane Despret's posthuman analysis (2021) of the ways in which the dead continue to act on the living and the ways in which the living

continue relations with the dead provides a lens through which to illuminate these questions.

Shari Sabeti is Reader in Arts and Humanities Education. Her work explores the nature and value of education in the arts and humanities, in particular, the theory and practice of teaching literature and visual art. She combines a background in literary criticism with ethnographic approaches and anthropological theory, in order to interrogate the creative practice of artists, the artistry of teachers, as well as relationships between texts, readers and writers. She is currently a co-investigator on the AHRC funded Remediating Stevenson project where she has been undertaking an ethnographic inquiry into Robert Louis Stevenson's contemporary legacy in the Pacific.

PANEL 6: Transgressing Categories, Dichotomies, Identities

Chair: **Lesley Graham** (Université Bordeaux Montaigne)

Robert-Louis Abrahamson
University of Maryland

"The Gross, Coloured and Mobile Nature at Our Feet": Impossible to Impose Order on Nature

The natural world, Stevenson argued in "A Humble Remonstrance" presents us with a "welter of impressions". We confront a "gross, coloured and mobile nature at our feet", which can never be accurately measured or defined. This sense of the absurdity of calculations of whatever kind runs through all of Stevenson's works.

My proposed paper examines the way Stevenson addresses the failure of calculations in several areas of life:

- *Scientific calculations.* Even the most meticulously gathered statistics will prove inconclusive*,* as seen in his early paper to the Royal Society of Edinburgh "On the Thermal Influence of Forests". Jekyll's formula for his transformation goes unpredictably wrong. Tables and maps of genetics and astronomy mean very little until translated into literary images.

- *Financial calculations. The Wrong Box* plays with the futility of insurance schemes, as, in a different way, does *The Ebb-Tide.* Billy Bones' coins of various kinds cannot be translated into useful money for Jim and his mother in *Treasure Island*, but the map

becomes an unexpected treasure. Ebenezer Balfour's gift of £40 to David in *Kidnapped* means one thing if calculated as pounds Scots, another as pounds Sterling.

- *Travel calculations*. Items carefully calculated as essential for the walk in the Cevennes become burdensome and discarded. The map in *Treasure Island* is accurate in all but the most essential numbers.

- *Moral calculations*. *Lay Morals* shows that rules of conduct set out in doctrine and dogma are too abstract have any meaning in daily life.

- *Literary calculations.* Literature, existing on a different plane from nature, can and often must require precise calculation, but any attempt to express thoughts and feelings in words is ultimately doomed to frustration and failure, as Stevenson expresses in "Walt Whitman", "A Humble Remonstrance", "My First Book", "A Note on Realism".

Robert-Louis Abrahamson, Emeritus Professor, University of Maryland, has read and studied and written about his namesake Stevenson over the course of his career. Besides numerous published articles, he has edited *Virginibus Puerisque* for the Edinburgh Edition of Stevenson's *Works,* and with Richard Dury is co-editing *Familiar Studies*. *Aesop in the Fog,* his edition of the *Fables* with commentary, appeared in 2022; an edition of the *Fables* for advanced students of English is in preparation in China. His *Evening under Lamplight Podcasts* broadcast a series on the *Fables,* and three further episodes on "A Christmas Sermon".

Robert Irvine
University of Edinburgh

Violence and Tact in "The Story of a Lie" (1879)

'Tact' has in recent years emerged as a key term in critical thinking on liberal culture at the juncture of ethics and aesthetics. In this paper I will place Stevenson's tale 'The Story of a Lie' in this context. This was published in the *New Quarterly Magazine* in October 1879, not long after Stevenson had drafted his thoughts on ethics posthumously published as *Lay Morals*, which will provide this paper with a touchstone for Stevenson's ethical thinking at this period. 'The Story of a Lie' tells the tale of the relationships of the protagonist, Dick Naseby, with two father-figures, one of whom, a disreputable old fraud, several times boasts of his 'tact'. Dick becomes estranged from his actual father because he does not tell him of his intention, in the event deflected, to beat up the editor of a liberal newspaper in retaliation for giving his father some bad press; they are reconciled at the end of the story when the editor confirms to the father his son's violent intentions. This paper will look into the relation of tact and violence as they are interwoven in the moral choices made by Dick and their relation to the aesthetic 'tact' of Stevenson's prose style in this early fiction.

Bob Irvine is Reader in Scottish Literature at the University of Edinburgh. He mostly writes about eighteenth-century Scottish poetry and early nineteenth-century Scottish fiction. His previous work on Stevenson includes his edition of *Prince Otto* for the New Edinburgh Edition (2014), and an essay in *Victorian Review*, 'Stevenson in the Third Republic: Fiction and Liberalization' (2013).

Struan McCorrisken
University of Glasgow

Dichotomies of Wellness in RL Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883): Healthy Heroes and Sickly Seadogs

Considerable attention has been given to Stevenson's portrayal of physical disability in *Treasure Island*, but this paper will assert that it is not lack of limbs that characterises Stevenson's villains - but disease.

Written during a period of ill-health for Stevenson, within *Treasure Island* we can detect his own resistance to illness. A tale of adventure, resistance to corruption, and honesty and courage overcoming malignance. In her work, *Illness as Metaphor*, Sonntag remarks that, "In the nineteenth century, the notion that the disease fits the patient's character, as the punishment fits the sinner, was replaced by the notion that it expresses character."

From Billy Bones to Captain Flint, disease goes hand-in-hand with villainy. Pirates are characterised as disease, infecting the healthy body of the Hispaniola and her crew. Even the Black Spot, the pirates' calling-card, evokes images of Bubonic Plague, and is the symptom of the pirate's deadly approach.

The Island is infested with fever - conflating the moral malignance of pirates with medical peril. Dick, the mutinous crewman, soon becomes afflicted, symbolising his moral decay after joining the pirates. Even Jim Hawkins is at risk, becoming violently seasick during the voyage, presaging his risk of corruption by Long-John Silver.

The Pirates' association with disease contrasts with the heroes of *Treasure Island.* They are the antibodies of the novel. Doctor Livesey is

the embodiment of resistance to infection – administering medical and moral inoculation to Jim.

The paper will explore disease in *Treasure Island* as a medical-moral dichotomy, examine commentaries on amputation and blindness, and how we might explore these alongside the representation of disease as the primary symptom of moral decay.

Struan McCorrisken is a PhD student at the University of Glasgow, researching primarily on the commemoration of Robert Burns, but with wide-ranging research interests in Scottish history and literature. Struan is a member of the Eighteenth-Century Scottish Studies Society and the Centre for Scottish and Celtic Studies. Struan has worked with the Glasgow Hunterian Art Gallery and Museum to provide Scots language translations of their guides as well as to organise events featuring Scots poets; and has provided Scots content for their blog. A native of the town of Paisley, he recently supported Paisley Abbey's 'Cluny In The North' project.

Benjamine Toussaint
Université Sorbonne

"Of all Mysteries of the Human Heart, This Is Perhaps The Most Inscrutable:" The (Un)naturalness of Scottish Identity in *The Master of Ballantrae*

This paper examines evolving nineteenth-century conceptions of national identity—particularly the tension between natural and constructed nationhood—and argues that Robert Louis Stevenson offers a distinctive contribution that resists both Romantic essentialism and late-Victorian constructivism. Whereas early-nineteenth-century Romantics tended to treat national identity as an organic outgrowth, later Victorian thinkers increasingly regarded the nation as an artificial formation, a view that was later influentially theorised by Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities."

In essays such as "The Foreigner at Home", Stevenson complicates this trajectory by simultaneously acknowledging the historical and sociological forces that produce a distinctly Scottish identity—one markedly different from its English counterpart—while also insisting that Scottishness contains an irreducibly irrational dimension: an affective, almost instinctive attachment shared by Highlanders and Lowlanders despite their profound historical and cultural divisions. This paper argues that *The Master of Ballantrae* dramatizes this paradox with particular intensity. Its opening historical framework establishes a symbolic fracture that sets the stage for a narrative in which national and familial divisions become progressively entangled with the uncanny. Critics have observed that Stevenson's Highland–Lowland dichotomy functions not merely as a socio-political distinction but also as a

psychological one, embodying fundamental tensions between motion and stasis, reason and impulse. As the novel increasingly turns to Gothic and supernatural registers, it explores national identity in ways that elude straightforward historical or sociological explanations. Scottishness emerges as at once constructed—subject to performance, manipulation, and chance, as James's shifting self-presentation demonstrates—and yet powerful and enduring. Even in death, James is identified foremost through his Scottish lineage, a detail that mirrors both Stevenson's own persistent sense of Scottishness and his assertion in "The Foreigner at Home" that a Scotsman will always retain "a strong Scotch accent of the mind."

Benjamine Toussaint is a Senior Lecturer in British Literature at Sorbonne Université, where she teaches translation as well as Scottish history and literature. Her research focuses on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Scottish authors, with particular attention to the intersections of national identity and gender. Recent publications include "'A Strong Scotch Accent of the Mind': Le nationalisme romantique dans les contes d'artiste de George MacDonald et Andrew Lang," L'Oiseau Bleu (online, 2024), and a forthcoming chapter, "George MacDonald and the National Tale," in *The Cambridge Companion to George MacDonald.*

PANEL 7: Queerings

Chair: **Carolina Celeste Granini** (Ca' Foscari University of Venice)

Theodore Leane
Cornell University

Inventing the Addict and the Homosexual: 'Unnatural' Victorian Bodies

While discussing willpower in *Edwin Drood,* Eve Sedgwick observes in passing that late-Victorian literary discourses around male homosexuality and addiction show surprising similarities. *Jekyll and Hyde* and *Dorian Gray* "both… begin by looking like stories of erotic tensions between men, and end up as cautionary tales of solitary substance abusers." She suggests both stage broader issues: the masculine virtue of self-control and its loss, and the natural-artificial opposition that determines which substances are "food," which are "drugs," and which sexual practices are "against nature." To this I add that both also center on fear of penetration — a foreign thing entering the body, violating the fantasy of bodily impermeability and wholeness that undergirded Victorian masculinity. From these anxieties, the emerging field of psychology invented the new categories of the addict and the homosexual.

Taking *Jekyll and Hyde* as a case study, I investigate what purpose these figures served for this historical moment. The period saw increased visibility of queer identities, with reformers pushing to repeal sodomy laws, an issue dramatically publicized by the Wilde trials. Medical advances made the interior of the body newly permeable and viewable: Röntgen invented the X-ray in 1895, and discoveries in chemistry made

drugs like cocaine newly available and popularly prescribed. Supplies of opium were also entering Europe from China following the Opium Wars; contemporary discourse around the opium trade frequently imagined a racialized foreign other infiltrating and weakening the strong, healthy body of the imperial center. By the *fin de siècle*, the fantasy of the British male body as a self-controlled, impermeable whole became increasingly hard to sustain. These twin figures, at the center of a matrix of gendered, moral, legal, scientific, racial, economic, and imperial discourses, dramatized anxieties about desire and willpower, natural and unnatural, and maintaining internal-external boundaries of the body.

Theodore Leane is a second-year PhD student in English at Cornell University. He's interested in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century British literature, particularly the Gothic, Decadent, and "weird," queer studies, and digital humanities, and is currently teaching a class on Victorian horror. He has a data paper with Grant Wythoff, "Time Horizons of Future Fiction," recently out with the *Post45 Data Collective*.

Michael Shaw
University of Stirling

Homosexuality and *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* in Press Discourse at the Fin de Siècle

Various queer readings of *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* have been undertaken in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, not least by Vladimir Nabokov and Elaine Showalter. Such readings have highlighted the parallels between dimensions of Stevenson's novella and contextual markers of homosexuality at the *fin de siècle*, with Showalter arguing that *Jekyll and Hyde* can 'most persuasively be read as a fable of *fin-de-siècle* homosexual panic'. But was it the case that, excepting some queer men, 'Victorian and modern readers ignored such messages or evaded them', as Showalter posits? This paper illustrates the ways in which *Jekyll and Hyde* was positioned in queer contexts at the *fin de siècle*. Turning its attention to newspaper coverage, especially of the Oscar Wilde trials and the Sir Hector Macdonald scandal, the paper considers the ways in which the novella was used to help point to 'the love that dare not speak its name' in the Victorian and Edwardian periods. Far from only being placed in queer contexts by the attentive few, the paper illustrates a more popular association between the novella and queerness at the *fin de siècle*, and suggests that Stevenson's contemporary (or near-contemporary) readership may have been more alert to *Jekyll and Hyde*'s queer valences than tends to be supposed.

Michael Shaw is Senior Lecturer in Scottish Literature at the University of Stirling. He is author of *The Fin-de-Siècle Scottish Revival: Romance, Decadence and Celtic Identity* (2020) and editor of *A Friendship in Letters: Robert Louis Stevenson & J. M. Barrie* (2020). Over 2023-24,

he held a Royal Society of Edinburgh Personal Research Fellowship for his project, 'Homosexuality and the Scottish Periodical Press, 1885-1928'.

Clara Battiston
Università di Torino

Jekyll's Case: A Liminal Dual-gendered Generation

Building on contemporary studies into Victorian masculinity (Antinucci, Danahay, Showalter), gender performance (Butler, Laqueur, Mosse, Sedgwick), and queer readings of Gothic fiction (Halberstam), this research explores the liminal position Jekyll occupies between culturally-codified masculinity and femininity, with a particular focus on how his attempt to separate the corporality of human nature turns into the most corporeal – and feminine – acts of all. Specifically, Jekyll tries to overcome the full obligations of his socially-assigned gender – i.e. the male one – through the Victorian tools of science and rational thinking, but embarks on a process that ultimately marks his gender performance as dual-gendered. Through his intellectual efforts, Jekyll aims at a transcendence of gender embodiment that would allow him to separate an ascetic, scientific-minded persona (Shapin 194-195) from an impulse-driven second self. Counterintuitively, his attempt takes the form of a generating process similar to childbirth. Much more than Dr. Frankenstein before him (Hobbs, Moers, Poovey), Jekyll "explicitly likens the experience to birth" (Jackson 74): he generates a new life both from his own mind – "in the agonised *womb* of consciousness" (Stevenson 46, my italics) – and subsequently from his own flesh. Ultimately, ascetic scientist Jekyll becomes a "*metaphorical mother*" (Jackson 74) whose generating process is close to the feminine bloody childbearing: it is painful and convulsing, it causes hysteria, it is "a horror of the spirit that cannot be exceeded at the hour of birth or death" (Stevenson 47), and indeed ends in blood. Thus, Jekyll's embodied experience oscillates between socially-codified genders, and crystallises him in an ill-defined liminal gender position – a liminality that often

emerges in Gothic fiction, a genre where “boundaries [...] dissolve” (Halberstam 126). Indeed, Stevenson’s Gothic novella shows how socially-codified masculinity is much more complex and dynamic than it might appear on the surface.

Clara Battiston is currently enrolled in the MA degree course in English and American Studies (University of Turin), and she will graduate in April 2026. In 2024 she studied at the Université Paris Cité and will continue her academic career with an internship at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History in September 2026. Her research interests include the intersection between masculinities studies, cultural studies and science studies, mainly in Victorian and Modernist English Literature.

Nathalie Jaëck
Université Bordeaux Montaigne

"Oh frolic Fellow Spookist': Spookism and De-identification in R. L. Stevenson's (and Conan Doyle's) De-naturalizing Fiction

In this paper I would like to show that, along with a couple of fellow-writers at the end of the 19th century, singularly Conan Doyle, Stevenson wrote fiction that can be considered as an explicit process of de-identification, as a way to de-naturalize identity: their collective *fin-de-siècle* literary stance aimed both at coming up with a more fluid sense of "the identity of things", as Pip puts it in the first paragraph of *Great Expectations*, and consequently at taking some distance from Naturalism. I will illustrate that process of de-identification in Stevenson's fiction (using Doyle's text as a sort of literary sidekick), both for the representation of personal identity, and for the representation of nature – landscape and what we could call "selfscape".

"O frolic fellow Spookist[1]" – this is Stevenson's address to Arthur Conan Doyle in the first letter he wrote to him on April 5th, 1983, from Vailima, after Doyle had sent him his volume of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. He ventures a neologism that I propose to take seriously in this paper: what does it mean exactly that Stevenson should see them booth as "spookists", how can it be turned into a theoretical tool to illustrate their effort to de-essentialize identity? Stevenson's (and Doyle's) fictions are indeed "Cases of identity[2]" – but very queer cases, that illustrate Jekyll's 1886 very famous "hazardous guess": they both

[1] *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*. Chapter XII: Life in Samoa, January 1893-December 1894. Letter to Conan Doyle, April 5th, 1893.
[2] This is the title of a Sherlock Holmes short-story written by Conan Doyle, that first appeared in *The Strand Magazine* in 1891.

consider literature as a site to explore the multiplicity and queering of identity, and landscapes as well as people become “haunted” unnatural palimpsests.

Nathalie Jaëck is professor of nineteenth-century British literature at Bordeaux Montaigne University, France. She specializes in narratology and fin-de-siècle Adventure. She wrote two books, *Charles Dickens: l'écriture comme pouvoir, l'écriture comme résistance*. Paris: Ophrys, 2008 and *Les histoires de Sherlock Holmes : une affaire d'identité*. Bordeaux: PUB, 2008, as well as numerous articles on Stevenson, Conrad, Dickens, Doyle, Wells.

PANEL 8: Technologies: Education, Machines and Cyborgs

Chair: **Alessandro Cabiati** (Ca' Foscari University of Venice)

Mario Valori
Università di Pisa

Naturally Wild, Properly Schooled: Stevenson, Boyhood, and the Making of the Imperial Subject

This paper considers Robert Louis Stevenson's commercially successful boys' adventure fiction—*Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped*, and *The Black Arrow*—not simply as literary achievement, but as evidence for how late Victorian Britain came to imagine what a "natural" boy might be. Rather than treating these texts as isolated masterpieces, it approaches them as artefacts of popular culture circulating through a mass market, and asks what such fiction quietly disclosed about the boyish qualities—courage, disobedience, violence, loyalty—that were taken to be innately masculine, and which were understood to require careful discipline. At the same time, it asks how the mechanisms of commercial publishing helped to render imperial citizenship less a matter of ideological training, and more a thrilling story of self-discovery that boys might feel they had chosen for themselves.

Stevenson's extraordinary success, the paper suggests, rested on a productive paradox that his readers may only have half-registered at the time.

On the one hand, his stories appear to celebrate boys as "naturally" wild, driven by impulses that seem spontaneous and ungovernable. On

the other, that very wildness is steadily channelled into futures that are class-appropriate and imperially useful. His protagonists embody what we might call controlled transgression: Jim Hawkins's acts of disobedience do not lead to social ruin, but to treasure and a more mature sense of self; David Balfour's adventures in the Highlands become a kind of schooling, in which Scottish turbulence is converted into a lesson in proper Britishness.

The argument, then, is that Stevenson's fiction helps to naturalise a particular model of boyhood in which adventurous energy, once properly directed, serves to transmute savage impulses into the bearing of the gentlemanly imperial subject.

Methodologically, the project looks not only at the stories themselves, but also at the conditions of their appearance and sale. It analyses patterns of serialisation, publishers' paratexts, illustration programmes, and market positioning, setting Stevenson alongside competitors such as G. A. Henty and R. M. Ballantyne. In doing so, it reconstructs how "natural boyhood" was packaged, priced, and commodified.

The study also traces the role of imperial merchandise—maps, toy telescopes, adventure outfits—marketed with, around, or because of such books. These objects, it suggests, made literal the imagined link between boyish play and colonial mastery, so that empire itself came to appear as the obvious, almost inevitable, playground of masculine development.

The paper further engages with ecocritical concerns, arguing that Stevenson's island settings and Highland wildernesses operate as training grounds in which boys learn not simply to survive in "wild"

nature, but to dominate and reorder it—prefiguring future modes of environmental control in colonial contexts. The marked absence, or marginalisation, of female characters in these narratives throws into relief the gendered assumptions about who is entitled to adventurous self-formation, and who is not.

In the end, the paper shows how Stevenson's commercial fiction participates in naturalising a set of hierarchies—of gender, class, and race—through the figure of the boy who is, by narrative fiat, "naturally" wild, yet destined to be properly schooled into the role of imperial citizen.

Mario Valori has an MA in Cultural History (2021), with a thesis on women's emancipation in British clue-puzzle detective fiction; later a double specialisation (2024) in Literature and AI for humanities. Now back at his alma mater, the University of Pisa, he is engaged in digital humanities studies. An ardent advocate of open access, open source, and open culture, his work sits at the intersections of gender studies, cultural history, pop culture, and the cross-border circulation of cultural tropes—tracking how ideas migrate, change shape, and acquire new meanings in unfamiliar settings. If this sounds a broad remit, that is rather the point: the traffic of culture rarely keeps to a single lane.

Angelo Riccioni
Università degli Studi di Cassino e del Lazio Meridionale

Robert Louis Stevenson and the Language of Fiction: A Diachronic Investigation of Fin-De-Siècle AI

The Victorian era saw the development of new technologies, from the telegraph to pre-cinematographic devices, from railways to electroplating. These discoveries, among others, called into question the vision of nature that had traditionally been upheld until that time (Sussman 2009). Robert Louis Stevenson often focuses in his novels on landscape and how it influences the development of his characters; moreover, in works such as 'On Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature', he uses metaphors and expressions related to mechanics that are indicative of his interest in Victorian science (Norquay 1999).

However, he was not the only one to do this: whereas authors such as Vernon Lee and Edith Wharton strove to study the hidden 'springs' behind the craft of fiction (Lee 1923; Wharton 1925), Stevenson in his essays often dissected the writer's activity as if it were a well-oiled machine to be thoroughly analysed. As such, Stevenson seemed close to other *fin de siècle* authors who wrote according to principles that closely resembled those regulating the functioning of modern artificial intelligence (Tennen 2024), whether he is turning to historical novels or adventure stories, essays or gothic tales.

The aim of this paper is to explore the connection between late Victorian culture and literature and early examples of automation in the arts that foreshadow modern artificial intelligence (Tennen 2024). To this end, Stevenson's essays, literary works, and letters are examined with the goal of providing a deeper understanding of an author whose versatility and inexhaustible curiosity about the mechanisms of style place him in a

privileged position for the study of the evolution of AI from the nineteenth century to the present.

Angelo Riccioni is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in English at Università degli Studi di Cassino e del Lazio Meridionale. His research focuses on the evolution of jewellery specialized language and on AI as a tool in ELF and EMI. He has published extensively on *Fin-de-Siècle* British authors, including Vernon Lee, Maurice Hewlett, Walter Pater and Stevenson. His main research interests include Victorian and Edwardian culture, Aestheticism, ESP, ELF and jewellery terminology through a diachronic perspective.

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Cyberpunk and the Neo-Victorian Double: The Afterlife of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) has enjoyed an extraordinary cultural afterlife, evolving from a late-Victorian Gothic tale into a global metaphor for divided identity and moral duplicity. This essay explores the resonance of Stevenson's "double" within the cyberpunk genre—a late twentieth-century form that reimagines Victorian anxieties through the lens of post human technology. From Stevenson's gaslit London to the neon dystopias of *Blade Runner, Ghost in the Shell,* and *Neuromancer*, the duality between Jekyll and Hyde mutates into the division between human and machine, self and avatar, consciousness and code. Drawing on post humanist and cybernetic theory (Haraway; Baudrillard; Botting), this essay argues that cyberpunk inherits the Gothic's fascination with transgression and moral ambivalence, transforming the chemical experiment into a digital one. The result is a reanimation of Stevenson's moral parable in the postmodern world.

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