Island, Highland, and "Undecipherable Blackness": Natural Landscape Imagery in the Novels of Robert Louis Stevenson

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
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ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON
b. Edinburgh, Scotland, November 13, 1850
d. Upolu, Samoa, December 3, 1894
ABSTRACT

Little has been written about Robert Louis Stevenson’s use of natural landscape imagery in his work, and how he differed in this respect from the Romantic and Victorian traditions with which he is associated. In Stevenson’s portrayal of landscape in his fiction, a movement towards modernist themes and techniques is apparent, particularly in relation to the development of character consciousness. In this study I will focus on Treasure Island, Kidnapped, and The Master of Ballantrae, and trace an increasing complexity and richness of resonance in the way that Stevenson uses landscape, at first simply to establish mood and foreshadow action in Treasure Island, but later relating it to the achievement of maturity and independence in an environment presented as morally relative. In Kidnapped, these themes are specifically politicized even in the use of landscape as David Balfour, moving through the rugged Highlands, changes from a boy to a man as he realizes his ties to his Scottish homeland as well as to the Highland people and traditions. Finally, in The Master of Ballantrae, nearly every image related to the natural landscape serves to further complicate the blurring of good and evil in the “incubus” figure of the Master. Thus Stevenson is extending and in some ways subverting the Romantic-Victorian tradition of landscape imagery, which aimed to inspire contemplation, illuminate setting, and foreshadow the action. What Stevenson does is integrate natural landscape imagery with a sense of character more complex, ambiguous, and modernist than Romantic-Victorian, an achievement anticipated and contextualized by the author’s other fiction, long and short, as well as his many travel writings, poems, essays, and letters.
I would like to thank the Inter Library Loan Services Department at the Robarts Library at the University of Toronto, particularly Jane Lynch, and the Scott Library at York University, which provided me with the excellent source text of the Vailima Edition of Collected Works; finally, without the assiduous editing and critical skills of my thesis supervisor, Professor Henry Auster, this work would not have been possible, and it is to him that I owe the most thanks for the completion of this thesis.
A NOTE ON THE SOURCE TEXT

While there has been a small renaissance in Stevenson studies of late, including, most notably, Booth and Mehew's eight-volume *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson* (1994-5), this resurgence – due primarily to the centenary of the author's death in 1894 – has produced neither an exhaustive bibliography nor a collected works. The first exhaustive edition of Stevenson's collected works is the 1921-22 Vailima Edition (the set I used is No. 676 of 1030, from the Scott Library at York University), which I have used as my source text – all references cite the appropriate volume number – because it is more readable and better edited than the 1922 Tusitala Edition. The edition, best distinguished by the watermark on each verso page depicting a palm tree above a R.L.S. monogram, is by no means complete – certain articles from *The Monterey Californian*, attributed to Stevenson, are missing, as are a few short stories, and the letters are merely a small, selected sample of the thousands Stevenson wrote. Thus I have been forced to refer to A. Grove Day's *Travels in Hawaii* for some of Stevenson's Pacific writings, and to microfilm copies held at Stanford for Stevenson's two-part article "Hidden Treasure" (attributed to him) in *The Monterey Californian*. Any reference to a letter by Stevenson appears as "Letter" and then the appropriate number afterwards – these refer to the complete collection of letters, each one numbered and dated, in Booth and Mehew's collection. Unless otherwise specified, all dates concerning stories, letters, novels or other writings by Stevenson refer to his time of composing such works, not their date of publication, as set forth in Roger Swearingen's *The Prose Writings of Robert Louis Stevenson* (1980), pp. v-xviii.
“A man must have thought much over scenery before he begins to fully enjoy it. . . . Every gratification should be rolled long under the tongue, and we should be always eager to analyse and compare, in order that we may be able to give some plausible reason for our admirations.”
- “Roads” (1873)

“It is a difficult matter to make the most of any given place, and we have much in our own power. . . . We learn, also, to come to each place in the right spirit. . . . Nor does the scenery any more affect the thoughts than the thoughts affect the scenery. We see places through our humours as through differently coloured glasses.” - “On the Enjoyment of Unpleasant Places” (1874)
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INTRODUCTION

"With all my romance, I am a realist and a prosaist, and a most fanatical lover of plain physical sensations plainly and expressly rendered." - Robert Louis Stevenson, May 1, 1892

When he was thirty-six, two years before he would sail the Pacific and spend his last years in Samoa, halfway around the world from his native Scotland, Robert Louis Stevenson “calculated that, in an age when travel had only just become relatively accessible, he had been to America, visited thirty six towns in England, seventy four in France, and forty in the rest of Europe. He had slept in sixty-six of these places more than once. In Scotland he had, he calculated, visited fifty towns” (Stott 1). By the time of his death in 1894, at 44, Stevenson had written almost as many travel books as novels, ranging from an account of a canoe trip through French rivers (An Inland Voyage) to the story of his honeymoon in a California mountain range (The Silverado Squatters), and the story of his hike in the Alps with an ass called Modestine (Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes) to narratives of his various visits to Pacific islands (In the South Seas). While these works are replete with descriptions of the natural landscape, from forest glades to tropical beaches, Stevenson did not confine his landscape imagery to his travel writings. Even in his poems for children, A Child’s Garden of Verses, one can discern a preoccupation with the river and sea (v. 8, 19-20, 39-40), the night sky (20, 37-8, 44-5), stars (29-30), the wind (32), and the winter landscape (41-2), all aspects of the natural landscape which play a large part in Stevenson’s novels, particularly Treasure Island, Kidnapped, and The Master of Ballantrae. For the purpose of my thesis, I henceforward mean “natural landscape” imagery in Stevenson’s work (as opposed to a

1 See the bibliography of the author’s works in Swinnerton 213-16 or the more complete list of the writings of Stevenson in Swearingen v-xviii.
general sense of ‘place’ or setting, terms used more often by critics who regard Stevenson as part of the romantic-adventure tradition) as any metaphor, simile, or other trope related to any of the four natural elements (fire, earth, air, water), any description of night or day in general, as well as moonlight and sunlight, and any depiction, in whole or in part, of the physical geography of a spatial area, be it land, sea, or sky.

Much has been noted in biographies of Stevenson on the influence of the Scottish landscape on him in his youth. Looking back at his childhood, Stevenson relates his remarkably early preoccupation with ‘place’ in this recollection:

I remember with particular distinctness, how [my nurse] would lift me out of bed, and take me, rolled in blankets, to the window, whence I might look forth into the blue night . . . These were feverish, melancholy times; I cannot remember to have raised my head or seen the moon or any of the heavenly bodies; my eyes were turned downward . . . to where the trees of the garden rustled together all night in undecipherable blackness; yet the sight of the outer world refreshed and cheered me . . . (v. 26, 209-10)

This memory is an apt example of both Stevenson the boy dreamer inspired by the spirit of a place and Stevenson the adult writer as a careful crafter of landscape imagery. The darkness parallels the boy’s “feverish melancholy” (Stevenson suffered a bronchial respiratory affliction his entire life, often bringing him near death; on the basis of the little medical evidence available, he was assumed to have had either bronchiectasis or tuberculosis); this is emphasized by the boy’s neglect of the light-giving, heavenly elements of the sky above. For one critic, this passage shows how the “night for Stevenson was always to be sinister . . . Darkness and evil are entwined” (RLS: A Life Study 36). Yet surely the dark elements are selected by the older Stevenson, in retrospect, to echo the boy’s gloom and perhaps even to anticipate his declared agnosticism (no light, no God); this is not a subconscious foreshadowing of how the night would come to obsess the author with its Gothic, evil
connotations. The passage is fitting proof of how Stevenson, as a master stylist of landscape imagery, applied his own observation that "It is a difficult matter to make the most of any given place, and we have much in our own power. . . . We learn, also, to come to each place in the right spirit. . . . Nor does the scenery any more affect the thoughts than the thoughts affect the scenery. We see places through our humours as through differently coloured glasses" ("On the Enjoyment of Unpleasant Places," v. 24, 331). Animated by such beliefs in his fiction, Stevenson, with increasing skill, learned to show places through the humours of his characters, selecting aspects of the scenery to suit a character's moods, and vice versa, in the process making the landscape itself a central element of the book, illuminating character and advancing the plot.

When he was thirteen, Stevenson was fascinated by Magus Moor, a place he associated with the murder of an archbishop, thus combining the two main preoccupations which would run through his fiction: landscape and the dark moral duality and ambiguity inherent in human nature (RLS: A Life Study 47-8). Between 1863 and 1870, Robert Louis accompanied his father on a series of trips to inspect the lighthouses of the Scottish coast with which the Stevenson name had been so closely associated (many of the signal-towers around the Scottish coast were designed and planned by Stevensons). As Malcolm Bradbury writes, the boy thrilled "to the rock girt, jagged Scottish coastline, devouring the lores of tides, winds and shipwrecks, storing atmosphere, topography, and the telling detail, all of it to be deployed in retrospect, and with scintillating clarity, in the later fiction" (142). Stevenson's letter to his mother about his journey through the Orkney Islands in 1869 is one of his longest (Letter 76) and contains descriptions of the seascape and even includes drawings of the rocks and islands around two lighthouses. When he was older, he would stay Swanston Cottage, among the Pentland hills, to read, write, and walk the countryside (RLS: A Life Study 21). "There
can be no doubt,” as Louis Stott states, “that successive visits between 1853 and 1875 to Bridge of Allan kindled, in a child of Edinburgh, an interest in the Highlands” (2). The link between landscape and moral duality and ambiguity in Stevenson’s fiction was perhaps first suggested to him by the geographical and political duality of Scotland (mostly at the time in which many of the novels were set – the 1700s): Highlands and Lowlands, Jacobite and Whig. Stott speculates that “it was perhaps in Stirling and Bridge of Allan that the ambivalent feelings about his Scottish personality which Stevenson sometimes expressed were first developed” (Stott 2). On a vacation in 1870, Stevenson stayed on Earraid, an isle that provides the setting in his short story “The Merry Men” and in a scene in Kidnapped. In another long letter to his mother, Stevenson dwells on the sea and the people he meets on Earraid, showing flashes of what would become carefully controlled, emotionally resonant landscape images: “The waters of the bay were as smooth as a millpond; and, in the dusk, the black shadows of the hills stretched across to our very feet and the lights were reflected in long lines” (Letter 83). According to Jenny Calder, Stevenson “never liked to be far from water and hills” (1), and

the pleasure Louis got from these trips, and the riches he gleaned from them, failed to convince him that engineering was his calling. Perhaps his father had the chance to observe that Louis’s responses were less to the challenge of harbour works than to the impressiveness of landscape and seascape and weather and the discovery of remote areas of Scotland. Whatever Louis failed to learn in the one profession the experiences provided sustaining nourishment for another. The impressions he came home with, physical and emotional, were to serve him well” (RLS: A Life Study 52).

Islands, Calder suggests, held a particular interest for Stevenson, the boy and the man: “his Scotland was a country of islands, from the tiny island in the pond in Queen Street Gardens [across

from an early childhood home in Edinburgh] to the Bass Rock off North Berwick, to little stony loch islands, to the islands of the Hebrides and the treacherous rocks and shoals that his father studied and built on. Louis’s experience of islands was extensive. He knew what it felt like to be surrounded by water” (RLS: A Life Study 170). Stevenson’s interest in islands can be linked, as Hubbard suggests, to his obsession with moral duality and ambiguity in his writing: “The island was a place of promise - and of menace. Promise for the wanderer seeking new adventure, or a safe haven, or even a final home. Menace as a seeming paradise that turned out to be a hell . . . Promise and menace, or simply sheer menace, are characteristic of Stevenson’s islands - from the Atlantic Seaboard of ‘The Merry Men’ and Kidnapped, to more exotic locations of Treasure Island” (77).

Some of Stevenson’s books – most famously Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde – arose from dreams in which landscape, as Hennessy notes, was a frequent element, especially as Stevenson “grew a little older, and could observe more of the world, scenery – that is to say landscapes and buildings – came to play a prominent part in his dreams, which now also seemed to be more sequential and took on the succinct shape and style of short stories . . . he came to rely on such dream-sequences to supply him with some of his plots” (Hennessy 20).

Despite the profound importance of the landscape for Stevenson, there has been no study devoted to his use of the natural landscape in his novels.³ Some critics in articles and brief sections

³ Cf. 191 of Kadish, The Literature of Images: Narrative Landscape from Julie to Jane Eyre and Chapter 1 for an outline of the ways to analyze landscape in a nineteenth-century novel, including the relations of landscape to the narrative point of view, to other descriptive passages in the work, and to socio-political themes of the work, in addition to how the narrative landscape of the work relates to the pastoral tradition of early nineteenth-century literature. Landscape in modernist works relates more abstractly to the narrative and to characters; a good example is Raymond Carver’s recently discovered short story, “Kindling” (Esquire, July 1999), wherein the landscape of the Pacific Northwest is detailed in separate paragraphs, seen detachedly by the central character, and the reader senses that the landscape relates to the character’s mood and actions in a
of books did attempt, in the period between Stevenson's death and the 1960s, to ascertain the real-life inspiration for Treasure Island (cf. especially Harold Francis Watson's *Coasts of Treasure Island: A Study of the Backgrounds and Sources for Robert Louis Stevenson's Romance of the Sea*, 1969). But these works offer scant analysis of the role of landscape in Stevenson's fiction. Louis Stott's *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Highlands & Islands of Scotland* (1992) traces the inspirations for and depictions of the various Scottish landscapes in Stevenson’s fiction, but does not examine these depictions to explain, for example, why Stevenson altered the true landscape of a place at various points in the narrative, or why he used a specific metaphor or image to depict an aspect of the landscape. Probably the best analyses of landscape in Stevenson’s work can be found in two detailed examinations of the man-made city-scape in *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, by Vladimir Nabokov (cf. Jefford in *Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. Andrew Noble) and Alan Sandison, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism: A Future Feeling*, pages 222-33.

Most writers on Stevenson do not go beyond noting that natural landscape is important in his work. In a recent biography, Ian Bell, for example, says that "points in time and space are keys to Stevenson’s life, more so than with most writers. It is a hard map to plot, but the characters of Edinburgh, the Cévennes, Silverado and Samoa are actors as important as any of the people in Stevenson’s story. It is in those places that you find him, in buildings and skylines, climate and wholly subconscious, narratively unconnected, and vaguely felt way. Carver’s minimalist use of landscape, however, is not so far removed from Stevenson’s increasingly carefully stylized and crafted use of selected aspects of the natural landscape to relate to the consciousness of a character, best exemplified in *The Master of Ballantrae*.

4 The proper, original title of the story, as published in January 1886.
language, sometimes unexpectedly. His response to place - always immediate, invariably honest - was his autobiography" (16). Bradbury, too, is aware of this: "place becomes incident, topography becomes adventure" (143). Stevenson, it is clear, distilled memories of the landscapes he had seen in his travels and incorporated them in later fiction: "Swanston entered St. Ives; early East Lothian holidays resurfaced in *Catriona*; tramping out to Queensferry laid down a store of material for *Kidnapped*; the Pentlands beyond Swanston fed tales of the Covenanters into his imagination; trips north with his father gave him a surveyor's skill in recalling and describing natural features. Each detail would return later, when, as though of artistic necessity, he was somewhere else entirely" (Bell 68). In "A Gossip on Romance," Stevenson himself, however, seems to go much further, suggesting that memories of landscape serve as a prime trigger of, if not motive for, his writing:

> there is a fitness in events and places. The sight of a pleasant arbour puts it in our mind to sit there. . . . Something, we feel, should happen; we know not what, yet we proceed in quest of it. And many of the happiest hours of life fleet by us in this vain attendance on the genius of the place and moment. It is thus that tracts of young fir, and low rocks that reach into deep soundings, particularly torture and delight me. Something must have happened in such places, and perhaps ages back, to members of my race; and when I was a child I tried in vain to invent appropriate games for them, as I still try, just as vainly, to fit them with the proper story. Some places speak distinctly. Certain dark gardens cry aloud for a murder; certain old houses demand to be haunted; certain coasts are set apart for shipwreck. (v. 12, 189-90)

Most writers have interpreted Stevenson in this passage as referring to atmospheric effects. Carol Mills, for example, in "The Master of Ballantrae: An Experiment with Genre" typifies this view. After quoting the above passage, she observes that "romances require an appropriate setting. If the

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5 Famed Italian writer Italo Calvino notes early in a piece on Stevenson's "The Pavilion on the Links" that it "is a story that emerges from a landscape. From the desolate dunes of the Scottish coasts the only story that can emerge is one of people who hide and seek," then disappointingly neglects to elaborate on these statements (170).
events are unusual, or fantastic, their impact is heightened by the appropriateness of the setting - its 'fitness' amplifies and reflects the events taking place" (119) and Robert Kiely, in Robert Louis Stevenson and the Fiction of Adventure, talks of “the natural landscape . . . [with] all its atmospheric importance in Kidnapped” (84). In the same view, placing Stevenson in the romantic-adventure tradition of fiction, Edwin M. Eigner, in Robert Louis Stevenson and Romantic Tradition, says that “[m]any writers of romances require not only strange circumstances and abnormal psychology to portray their visions but exotic scenery, as well. . . . the serious romancer seeks a never-land where his mind will be released from the common sense of his neighbors and the truths of the sociologists. Visions often require a clean canvas” (17-18).

In this study I try to go beyond the mere acknowledgement of ‘place’ or setting in Stevenson by means of a careful analysis of descriptions of landscape in Treasure Island, Kidnapped, and The Master of Ballantrae. The landscape imagery in Stevenson’s writing shows increasing complexity and his anticipation of modernism. Landscape in these three major novels is not simply present, as in most Romantic or Victorian works, to contribute to the exotic atmosphere of a fabulous adventure, or to better suit a writer’s grand, fantastic vision. In Chapter One, I deal with Treasure Island and show how at first Stevenson simply uses the natural environment around Jim Hawkins to establish mood and foreshadow action in the novel, but then relates the topography of the island to Jim’s maturity and independence forced by his struggle for survival in a morally relative environment. In Chapter Two, I examine Kidnapped and demonstrate that the themes of maturity, rebellion, and authority are specifically politicized in the use of landscape as David Balfour, travelling through the rugged highlands, changes from a boy to a man, realizing his ties to his Scottish homeland as well as to its people and traditions. Finally, in Chapter Three, my analysis of
Stevenson’s most thoroughly crafted novel, *The Master of Ballantrae*, reveals how nearly every description of landscape serves to complicate further the blurring of good and evil in the “incubus” figure of the Master, questioning not only moral authority, but any clear-cut dichotomy of good and evil. Stevenson is extending and in some ways subverting the Romantic-Victorian tradition of landscape imagery that aimed merely to inspire contemplation, illuminate setting, and foreshadow action. He integrates natural setting and description with a sense of character more complex, ambiguous, and modernist than Romantic-Victorian, an achievement that is predicted, contextualized, and advanced in his other fiction, long and short, as well as his many travel writings, poems, essays, and letters.
CHAPTER 1: ISLAND

Treasure Island (1883)

TREASURE ISLAND, some ten miles long and five miles wide, off the coast of Mexico. Near its southern point lies a cluster of rocks known as Skeleton Island; the two are joined by a spit of sand at low tide. There are three hills on Treasure Island, running north to south in a row. They are known respectively as Fore-mast Hill, Mizzen Mast Hill and Main Mast or Spy-Glass Hill. The latter is the highest, rising two to three hundred feet above the others. A natural harbour, known as Captain Kidd’s Anchorage, lies on the south coast. It is almost landlocked, with trees coming down to the high-water mark. Two swampy streams or rivers empty into this sheltered bay; the foliage around their mouths has an almost poisonously bright appearance. Travellers have one alternative anchorage, the North Inlet, a narrow estuary with thickly wooded shores.

The south-west coast of the island around the point known as Haulbowline Head, is made virtually inaccessible by cliffs between forty and fifty feet high. To the north, the cliffs give way to sandy beaches and then to the tree-clad Cape of the Woods. The tides and currents are dangerous, particularly along the west coast. ... Much of the island is covered in grey woods, with occasional clumps of taller trees of the pine family. Low evergreen oaks are common. Flowering shrubs and clove trees are found on the rising ground above Captain Kidd’s Anchorage. The fauna of the island has not been studied in any detail, although sea-lions are seen on the coast.

- The Dictionary of Imaginary Places (Manguel and Gaudalupi), pp. 377-8

While little has been written regarding the narrative function of natural landscape in Treasure Island, many articles and sections of books have been dedicated to solving the mystery of the inspiration for Stevenson’s fictional atoll. This search is not altogether irrelevant to my analysis of natural landscape in the novel, for the most likely original inspiration for Treasure Island serves to illuminate Stevenson’s use of such imagery in the book.

Some have claimed that Stevenson used aspects of the Scottish coast and the islands of the
Inner Hebrides as his model; others, with more convincing proof, have insisted that Dead Man’s Chest Island (Isla de la Juventud, off the south coast of Cuba) is the real-life basis for the most infamous isle in literature. The origin of the Caribbean island theory can no doubt be traced to Stevenson himself, who wrote to Sidney Colvin in late May, 1884, from Hyères, France: “T.I. came out of Kingsley’s At Last; where I got the ‘Dead Man’s Chest’ - and that was the seed - and out of the great Captain Johnson’s History of Notorious Pirates. The scenery is Californian in part, and in part chic” (Letter 1278).

It is this last statement which was elaborated upon by Anne Issler in her 1939 book Stevenson at Silverado: “I like to play with the pleasant notion that the germ idea of Treasure Island - published, you will remember, simultaneously with The Silverado Squatters – was conceived in this happy moment of rediscovered boyhood, before the ‘treasure grotto’ of Silverado [a mine shaft which Stevenson happened upon]” (170). Issler adds that “[s]everal writers have recognized the Monterey Peninsula and its shoreline here and there in Treasure Island” and makes a case for Stevenson having based the landscape of that fictional cay on the area around Mount Saint Helena, ________________

6 Cf. England 18, an anonymous piece in Living Age 315 which asserts that the “Fifteen men on The Dead Man’s Chest” song refers to the same Dead Man’s Chest Island (by then called Dead Chest Island) in the Antilles, and Watson (124, 126-8, 191), who contradicts both of the other articles in his claim that the islet lies “about half way along the southern coast of Puerto Rico, called on modern maps Isla de Caja de Muertos, i.e., Coffin Island” (124). Booth and Mehew further cloud the issue in their footnote to Stevenson’s reference to Kingsley’s At Last (see Letter 1278, above): “In Ch. 1 of his travel book about the West Indies (1871), Charles Kingsley refers briefly to The Dead Man’s Chest as the name given by buccaneers to one of the islets in the Virgin Islands. The name is in fact Dead Chest Island; there is a Deadman’s Bay on the nearby Peter Island.”

7 In footnotes 1 and 8 to Letter 844, Booth and Mehew explain that Stevenson possessed the 1814 edition of Captain Charles Johnson’s A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the most Notorious Pyrates (1724; in fact written by Defoe), a book which gave Stevenson material for the first paragraph of Chapter 11 of Treasure Island (Silver’s history of the ships of and voyages with Captain Flint), along with other details, including the name ‘Israel Hands’.
with its tall pines, comparable vegetation, and the similarity of the mount to Spy-glass Hill (235-6). In *Our Mountain Hermitage: Silverado and Robert Louis Stevenson* (1950), Issler again asserts that Stevenson was “drawing upon his memories of Silverado for description and incident in *Treasure Island*, where not only the Monterey Peninsula but the Mount Saint Helena country furnished setting after setting” (102). Watson, too, is convinced that the scenery is almost all Californian, and very little chic: “anyone comparing the descriptive passages would I am sure be easily convinced that the Silverado neighborhood is reproduced in the strangely shaped hills, tall pines, live oaks, fog, bright sunshine, changing vistas, poisonous green, sandy slopes, rattlesnakes, and chirping insects of *Treasure Island*” (160).

Stevenson is known to have searched in the Point Lobos area for treasure in a blowhole with a Chinese man named Tim (“Stevenson in Monterey” 318, Nickerson 114). The December 16 and 23, 1879 editions of *The Monterey Californian* contain articles on “Hidden Treasure” which Issler attributes to Stevenson (“Stevenson in Monterey” 319), as he wrote a number of anonymous articles for that paper. The first piece relates a local story about treasure supposedly buried near some willow trees, and the second is a follow-up item concerning a man who apparently came upon an empty treasure box left in a hole after an excavation (like the empty chest found at the end of the novel). And in “The Old and New Pacific Capitals,” Stevenson wrote: “The one common note of

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8 George Rippey Stewart, Jr. carefully compares Stevenson’s description of the sea off the Monterey coast with the sea imagery in the novel, likening the inland marshy, willow-strewn districts to a landscape noted by Jim Hawkins, and so on (207-12). Barnett feels that Stevenson “has left no doubt as to [Treasure Island’s] topography, having utilised to a considerable extent Californian scenery” (10). In a recent book, Roy Nickerson sides with those who believe Point Lobos to be the primary inspiration for the landscape of Treasure Island, and notes that the Caribbean “has no sea lions or other such beasts as described, no pines or cypresses, and RLS himself had never been there” (112-13).
all this country is the haunting presence of the ocean. A great sound of breakers follows you high up into the inland canons; the roar of water dwells in the clean, empty rooms of Monterey as in a shell upon the chimney; go where you will, you have but to pause and listen to hear the voice of the Pacific" (403). The similarity of this passage to imagery in Treasure Island is noteworthy: "the surf roared along the cove and up the cliffs" (v. 5, 14), "the surf that we could both see and hear foaming and thundering on the steep beach" (118), and "the worst dreams that ever I have are when I hear the surf booming about its coasts" (317).

What makes the identity of the model for the island interesting is its most probable answer – Stevenson "relied for the details of the scenery on his memories of California, together with his literary sources and his own imagination" (Hammond 108). In 1879, Stevenson, smitten with Fanny Osbourne, a married American mother of two whom he met in Europe in 1876, left Edinburgh and his parents – his father was already trying to cope with Stevenson's announcement of his agnosticism – for the United States. Fanny had divorced her abusive husband, and after a feverish, cramped journey across the country by train to join her, Stevenson, near death, arrived in California and married Fanny in San Francisco in May 1880. They spent their honeymoon in the mountainside, an experience which resulted in The Silverado Squatters (1883), published in the same year as Treasure Island. The trip to and across the United States was a maturing experience for Stevenson, and perhaps the single most important of his many journeys, starting him off on a future of travel and writing outside Scotland – writing that would enable him to earn a financially independent living thereafter. In ignoring advice of family and friends, as well as seriously risking his health to marry an American divorcée and mother of two, Stevenson flouted authority and all rules of conventional restraint and prudence. It is significant, therefore, that not long after this grand act of
self-assertion, he wrote his first novel, which dealt with a boy's achievement of maturity through rebellion against adult authority that was full of risk and daring. Issler quotes Swinnerton as saying that ""those of us who never take these voyages out into the unknown . . . cannot realize with what sudden effect the stubborn impact of realities can work upon those who actually venture forth’’ and goes on to remark that The Silverado Squatters marks ""the emergence of a new Stevenson,' chastened, experienced, matured” (Stevenson at Silverado 232). These statements apply just as well to Treasure Island, a novel which, in landscape imagery taken mainly from a land which marked a coming-of-age for the author, illuminates the maturity of Jim Hawkins, a maturity which arises from the assertion of independence in foreign surroundings and the adaptation to a morally relative adult world.

Treasure Island, written from September to November 1881, was born of landscape – landscape remembered and imagined – and a map. Back in Scotland now with his wife and her children, Stevenson was forced out of the Scottish moors by “native air” (“My First Book,” v. 5, xxi) that had long affected his health, and moved to Braemar, where he was kept indoors by squalls. For both his own entertainment and his stepson Lloyd Osbourne’s, he explains that he made the map of an island; it was elaborately and (I thought) beautifully coloured; the shape of it took my fancy beyond expression; it contained harbours that pleased me like sonnets; and with the unconsciousness of the predestined, I ticketed my performance Treasure Island. I am told there are people who do not care for maps, and find it hard to believe. The names, the shapes of the woodlands, the courses of the roads and rivers, the prehistoric footsteps of man still distinctly traceable up hill and down dale . . . No child but must remember laying his head in the grass, staring into the infinitesimal forest, and seeing it grow populous with fairy armies. Somewhat in this way, as I pored upon my map of Treasure Island, the future characters of the book began to appear there among imaginary woods; and their brown faces and
bright weapons peeped out upon me from unexpected quarters, as they passed to and fro, fighting, and hunting treasure, on these few square inches of a flat projection. ("My First Book," xxi-xxii)

Thus Stevenson created a blank slate on which he could design his own landscape (primarily influenced by Silverado country); from this landscape, the characters arise. A careful analysis reveals that Stevenson’s development of natural landscape imagery in the novel is increasingly modernist, as he uses it to shape characters’ psychology and communicate to the reader the underlying themes of Jim Hawkins’ independence and maturity in an environment without clear moral codes.

The beginning of the novel, however, rather than anticipating a “future feeling,” as Sandison puts it (3), clearly harkens back to romanticism. Employing a basic feature of Gothic fiction, and perhaps recalling the sound of the sea on the Californian coast, Stevenson has Jim Hawkins suffer nightmares of the one-legged man about whom he has been warned by Billy. These nightmares, the usual expression of dread or terror in Gothic romance, are accompanied by the typical Gothic trope of “stormy nights, when the wind shook the four corners of the house, and the surf roared along the cove and up the cliffs” (v. 5, 14). Hawkins is clearly a boy at this stage of the book, living at home with his mother and father, and imagining a peg-legged figure in different “monstrous” forms, a sort of bogeyman about whom he has many “abominable fancies” (14). To an extent, then, the use of a crude Gothic trope here by Stevenson suits the fanciful adventurous tone of an opening chapter which introduces a juvenile protagonist. As Jim matures, however, Stevenson’s use of landscape evolves, becoming more subtle and complex in its illumination of the complicated ideas of maturity and forced independence.
The first step towards Jim’s maturity is a rather offhand plot device – his father dies. This demise is foreshadowed by another relic of romanticist landscape writing – winter as harbinger of death: “It was a bitter cold winter, with long, hard frosts and heavy gales; and it was plain from the first that my poor father was little likely to see the spring” (20). What follows, however, is a subtle foreshadowing: “It was one January morning, very early – a pinching, frosty morning – the cove all grey with hoar-frost, the ripple lapping softly on the stones, the sun still low and only touching the hilltops and shining far to seaward” (20). Stevenson has, without the reader realizing it, quickly moved from the minor sub-plot involving the death of Jim’s father back to the main pirate story. The landscape, still in stasis and indicating doom or death, with the tide ominously quiet and the sun low in the sky, suggests disruption in the form of the sea. For the sun is “only touching the hilltops and shining far to seaward” (20), indicating not only that the action will soon leave the shore and unfold on the sea, but that there is something of importance “far to seaward” (20). More immediately, it predicts the arrival of the pirate Black Dog from the sea, who appears a paragraph later to warn Billy of his approaching death.

Stevenson’s use of a wintry coastal scene becomes more sophisticated in Chapters 3 and 4, where it is the first of successive landscape images which illuminate and emphasise the importance of sight and being seen. It is a “bitter, foggy, frosty afternoon” when Hawkins makes out Blind Pew – the most haunting, surreal figure in the book – tapping his way towards him (35). Later, running with his mother to the hamlet, which is “out of view, on the other side of the next cove,” for help, Jim is hidden by “the gathering evening and the frosty fog” (40). The fog, associated with blindness
and concealment, is then threatened by the "full moon [which] was beginning to rise and peered redly through the upper edges of the fog" (42). Thus the moon is associated with the watching eyes of inimical pirates, "for it was plain, before we came forth again, that all would be as bright as day, and our departure exposed to the eyes of any watchers" (42). This image-association recurs in Jim's and his mother's eventual escape from the besieged inn at the end of Chapter 4, when the fog was rapidly dispersing; already the moon shone quite clear on the high ground on either side; and it was only in the exact bottom of the dell and round the tavern door that a thin veil still hung unbroken to conceal the first steps of our escape. Far less than half-way to the hamlet, very little beyond the bottom of the hill, we must come forth into the moonlight. Nor was this all; for the sound of several footsteps running came already to our ears, and as we looked back in their direction, a light tossing to and fro and still rapidly advancing, showed that one of the new-comers carried a lantern. (46-7)

Moonlight, previously associated with and anticipatory of the pirates' watching eyes and thus discovery, again predicts pursuit and possible capture, but is now also linked to a new light – that of a searching lantern. During the return to the cottage, however, earlier in the chapter, the "low wash of the ripple" had been emphasized (40; also 20 – see above) in order to imbue the scene with a spooky, suspenseful mood, typical of Gothic romance, but Jim's detection of "the croaking of the

9 Stevenson dedicated an entire chapter of description to "sea fogs" in California in The Silverado Squatters (v. 2), 455, 527-34. Cf. also Barnett 11.

10 From Diogenes of Greek lore to the policeman's bulls-eye lantern in Dickens' Bleak House, the lantern is commonly associated with the roving, searching eye. Stevenson uses such an image in "A Winter's Walk in Carrick and Galloway" – "As the moon flashed a bull's-eye glitter across the town between the racing clouds" (v. 24, 382) – and again in The Ebb-Tide: "The moon shone, too, with bull's-eye sweeps" (v. 18, 12) The presence of lunar imagery in Treasure Island may be derived from the substantial section on the moonlit sky in The Silverado Squatters (v. 2, 544-7). The moon as both seeing-eye and guide or protector appears also in "The Moon" in A Child's Garden of Verses (v. 8, 37-8).
inmates of the wood” ("inmates," not crickets or frogs or crows, etc.) likened him and his mother to prisoners of the weather and environment. The fogbound, gloomy landscape, then, usually so threatening and evil in Gothic romances or Victorian mysteries (e.g., the poisonous fog of Bleak House or the hound-concealing misty moor of The Hound of the Baskervilles), becomes both a prison, dangerous beyond certain boundaries, where the pirates wait, and a safe environment for Hawkins and his mother to travel in, within those boundaries, concealed from enemies. Stevenson also turns the light of the moon into a threatening sentinel, associating it with the spying buccaneers — thus making the darkness of the night the friend of the protagonist here, an uncommon reversal of the typical trope of Gothic romance, where night threatens and terrifies. (There are, of course, two characters here, Jim and his mother, but the entire scene is so carefully focalized through Jim, the narrator, that it often seems as if only Jim is going for help; already, his father gone from his life, Jim seems to be gaining independence in the narrative from his mother as well, another sign of his developing maturity in the novel.) Such ambiguity of the landscape imagery in relation to atmosphere and foreshadowing — both prison and haven, enemy and friend, watcher and protector — is soon to be exploited in representing the psychological development of Jim on Treasure Island.

Much like the Sherlock Holmes “dog in the night-time” incident, it is important to note here what is absent from the chapters concerning the voyage to the island (Chapters 10 and 11). Given the much exaggerated identification of Stevenson as a great “sea-writer,” it is surprising that there are no detailed seascapes during the voyage of the Hispaniola; indeed, Stevenson — narrating through Hawkins, of course — actually says that “I am not going to relate that voyage in detail” (91).

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11 Cf. in particular Ernest Richards’ “R.L.S. as a Sea-Writer,” an article which offers no worthy examples of Stevenson’s sea imagery.
Advocates of Stevenson as romance-adventure writer cite this to show him making a quick transition from one ‘setting’ for adventure – the coast where pirates chased Hawkins and his mother – to Treasure Island, the central setting of the novel. Thus Kiely claims that Stevenson, “with shameless dispatch . . . [gets] rid first of geographical place and time present and all the demands that go with them” (69); he goes on to say that “chronology is presented through the highly omissive mind of a child and an island is a place where treasure is buried, not an actual piece of land a given number of miles off the coast of England” (81). Even Diana Loxley, intent on relating Treasure Island to imperialism in her work of post-colonial criticism, Problematic Shores: The Literature of Islands, sees the island merely as a “setting . . . significant only in so far as it functions as the harbour for that treasure” (165).

It may be, however, that Stevenson simply wants to immediately immerse the reader in the environment of the island, because the landscape of Treasure Island is crucial in illuminating and shaping Jim’s independence from conventional moral codes and his maturing experiences of isolation and violent death. Unlike Kidnapped or The Master of Ballantrae, where the landscape is associated with the ambivalent, ambiguous psychologies of a pair of characters (David Balfour and Alan Breck, Henry and James Durie), the landscape in Treasure Island is linked only to Jim, who focalizes the narrative. Perhaps this is why Treasure Island, more than any other Stevenson novel (excepting Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, which is more of a novella), is looked at by some critics as an example of Freudian landscape, associated with the Oedipal tensions of the pubescent protagonist. Alistair Fowler, in a brief overview of Stevenson’s work, talks of the author “as an ur-existentialist and early modern writer” (105), citing Treasure Island as a book that deals with Jim’s growth and the stages of authority, duty, and loyalty through which he passes, and shows
him succeeding in a quest for identity (111). The sea on the way to the island is of little significance to this quest – it is the island, and its seascape and landscape, where he confronts both natural dangers and moral dilemmas that will make a man of him. Sandison states: “As a psychological archetype the island is a lonely place, and those who venture upon it will either emerge from the trial triumphant against all the forces that would seek to deny selfhood and sustain the authority of the patriarchy; or . . . be marooned in their sense of existential worthlessness, abject and malleable before the forces of authority” (68-9). Jim chooses the former path when, after landing on the beach, he escapes from both the supposedly virtuous moral code of Captain Smollett et al. and the wily, selfish, cutthroat principles of Long John Silver and his pirate crew into the depths of the island (Chapter 13). “The island [is] for Jim a challenge to his own nascent self-sufficiency and he must meet that challenge alone,” concludes Sandison (69). The island as the setting for the process of Jim’s maturation necessitates such a quick transition from mainland to island. The island landscape is a crucial dimension of the setting and an integral link to the development of character consciousness in the book. Modernists such as Conrad, Lawrence, Greene, and even Borges would exploit this link between landscape and character more fully (Greene – a distant relation of Stevenson – and Borges in fact acknowledged Stevenson as a major influence).

Jim’s first clear view of the island suggests an inner foreboding as Stevenson abandons the typical, plot-related conventions of romantic landscape imagery that he has used until now to connect the island inextricably with Jim’s maturing consciousness. Jim’s description of the island as he sees it is at first simply topographical: “Grey-coloured woods covered a large part of the surface. This even tint was indeed broken up by streaks of yellow sandbreak in the lower lands, and by many tall trees of the pine family, out-topping the others – some singly, some in clumps; but the
general colouring was uniform and sad. The hills ran up clear above the vegetation in spires of naked rock” (117). Then, description changes to haunting perception:

Perhaps it was the look of the island, with its grey, melancholy woods, and wild stone spires, and the surf that we could both see and hear foaming and thundering on the steep beach – at least, although the sun shone bright and hot, and the shore birds were fishing and crying all around us, and you would have thought anyone would have been glad to get to land after being so long at sea, my heart sank, as the saying is, into my boots; and from that first look onward, I hated the very thought of Treasure Island. (118)

Stevenson at first clearly suggests, with the woods and birds, Jim’s growing sadness, but the increasing length of the sentence intensifies the gloomy introspection of the narrator, so that by the end, when Jim states his hatred for an island he has not yet visited, this strong feeling is both startlingly strong and plausible, given the stormy mood built up by the images and length of the sentence. Again, a critic who espouses the view of Stevenson as a writer of adventure-romances might argue that he is heightening the reader’s anticipation of the heated battles and daring escapades which will take place on the island, but there is something more to this passage. Unlike in a typical romance, the island is not idyllic – Jim feels that it cannot be before he has even set foot on shore. His heart “sinking,” and the mirroring of “melancholy woods” and birds crying with his inner despair – these hint at some overwhelming, subconscious dread of what is to transpire on the island, a deeply personal fear of something that will befall Jim, and only Jim. As Sandison writes, this is “not the reaction we expect from this adventurous youth and we won’t find an explanation in the superficialities of a boy’s adventure-story. Stevenson’s islands are, by and large, traps for the self-tormented where the traveller’s moral adequacy (usually that is reflected in his aspirations to manhood) is put under severe stress with results which are often less than flattering . . . If the sight of such islands as Soledad, Earraid and Treasure Island sends the hearts of these youths into their
boots (which is how Jim puts it), it is because they instinctively realise that they are a tightly-contained theatre of action which they must enter if they are to prove their fitness for the adult world" (70, 72).12

Jim himself sees the island as a kind of theatre. As he looks out at the atoll from the ship, he notes: “The place was entirely land-locked, buried in woods, the trees coming right down to high-water mark, the shores mostly flat, and the hilltops standing round at a distance in a sort of amphitheatre, one here, one there” (119). More than just dramatic foreshadowing, this is his subconscious realization of landscape as a dramatic forum for self-maturity. Interestingly, in a fable called “The Persons of the Tale,” probably written after the novel, Stevenson has “two of the puppets” of Treasure Island, Captain Smollett and Long John Silver, engage in a conversation “in an open place not far from the story,” between Chapters 32 and 33 (v. 25, 183). They discuss their non-existence, the Godlikeness of the “Author,” their possible fates, depending which of them the Author prefers, and even their own relative and ambiguous moral merits as characters in the narrative (183-7). While it may be a stretch to claim that Stevenson is anticipating an important element of postmodernism here – after all, metafictional narratives were not suddenly born with the advent of postmodernism – he is expanding upon his propensity for finding stories in landscapes.

12 Sandison also sees the island as a harbinger of the “active involvement of the subconscious,” which is signalled here “by the draining away of colour from the landscape and by the association of the landscape with dreaming. Jim first sees the island ‘almost in a dream’ and then describes the ‘grey, melancholy woods’” (71). Sandison goes on to to say that Jim’s first, seemingly objective topographical description of Treasure Island “runs strikingly true to psychoanalytical form and is heavily imbued with Freudian symbolism” (71), with the “almost painfully-truncated Spyglass [Hill]” suggesting Jim’s anxiety about his “psychosexual development and . . . a troubled awareness of a highly vulnerable masculine identity” (72). Such a view of two of Stevenson’s works (including Treasure Island and especially Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde) as having an affinity with Freudian theory serve to encourage the view of Stevenson as a precursor of the modernists who was rapidly breaking away from the romantic-Victorian influence.
For we see him here using the page as a narrative landscape, removing two characters to "an open place not far from the story," just as, within the story, Hawkins is isolated in an amphitheatre of natural landscape which will reveal his relative and often amoral virtues, in the process of his maturity. This Hamlet play-within-a-play structure - natural landscape as dramatic forum for Jim's maturity, within a narrative landscape where the author's control over all the characters is emphasized - is implied by Jim's subconscious recognition of the island as amphitheatre. Throughout Stevenson's oeuvre, one can see his constant perception of landscape as dramatic forum, with the story emerging from the surroundings, much as the plot of Treasure Island formed itself for him from the map he had drawn for his stepson. In The Silverado Squatters (much of which came from a journal he kept in California), Stevenson writes: "in front the place was open like the proscenium of a theatre, and we looked forth into a great realm of air, and down upon tree-tops and hill-tops, and far and near on wild and varied country" (v. 2, 488-9). The passage in Treasure Island continues, just like the passage in The Silverado Squatters, by suggesting that the place looks as if no one had ever been there before: as a blank page on which the narrative - Jim's journey of self-discovery - is to be written by the "Author." The concept of landscape as a theatre for action can also be seen in one of Stevenson's stories, "Edifying Letters of the Rutherford Family" (1876-7), where a character stands "in the bottom of a vast amphitheatre of highlands" (The Complete Short Stories v. 1, 64). Stevenson continued to employ such imagery while in the Pacific: the "scuppers of the mountain" formed "the sides of the amphitheatre" (In The South Seas, v. 16, 91); "the dark amphitheatre of the Atuona mountains and the cliffy bluff that closes it to seaward" (142); "[t]o the seaward end of the isle the theatre of low hills inclines some third part of its surface; the amphitheatre has much the air of an old crater" ("Tutuila," v. 25, 395); "[t]he floor of the
amphitheatre was piled with shattered rock, detritus of the mountain” (“The Lazaretto,” v. 26, 456); on the landward side, cliffs made a quadrant of an amphitheater [sic], melting on either side into the general mountain of the isle” (Travels in Hawaii 25-6). Stevenson’s repeated use of the amphitheatre image in his writing is combined with the clear realization of the relation between natural landscape and narrative landscape, as in Treasure Island. He is clearly going beyond a romancer’s “clean canvas” that “[v]isions often require” (Eigner 18) to a modernist, self-reflective, metanarrative use of landscape.

Jim literally plunges into the natural landscape to begin his quest for mature selfhood, braving the foliage “of poisonous brightness” (v. 5, 120) to rush “into the nearest thicket”; although Silver and the others call out to him to come back, he runs headlong into the depths of the island – an adolescent rushing towards adulthood. Perhaps mirroring this impatient, uncertain embrace of growth, the landscape becomes less clear-cut, with sandy, undulating areas, contorted trees, twisted evergreen oaks, bramble-like thickets, and a steaming marsh (125-6). In the midst of this tangle, Long John Silver, one of the story’s ambiguous authority figures, speaks in a voice that “runs in a stream” (127), and when Jim doubles back to eavesdrop on the pirate and his crew, he sees them sitting in a “little green dell” as the “sun beat full upon them” (127). So, after painting a forbidding, portrait of a landscape full of sharp edges and blurred surfaces which Jim may have to negotiate alone, Stevenson outlines one alternative to independent exploration: the ruthless pirate mutineers observed in an idyllic, radiant setting. Thus the narrative begins to show the ambiguity of the moral choices in Jim’s mind.

To add to the ambiguity of moral codes, Jim has still not decided against following Silver even when he sees him savagely kill Tom, the rebellious mate. Much like Jim’s description of his
first view of the island, Tom's death is at first rendered in a most unromantic way, with no moralistic point about honour among thieves, and the elaboration on the callous and violent death is expressed in a neutral tone. Then, however, using landscape, Jim relates how seeing this death breaks in on his sheltered, morally clear-cut, boys' world: "I do not know what it rightly is to faint, but I do know that for the next little while the whole world swam away from before me in a whirling mist; Silver and the birds, and the tall Spy-glass hilltop, going round and round and topsy-turvy before my eyes" (130). The association of Silver with the birds and central spire of the island is interesting, suggesting perhaps that Silver's ruthless, selfish amorality is as natural to the world which Jim is entering as the landscape is to the island. After "Tom lay motionless upon the sward . . . the murderer minded him not a whit, cleansing his blood-stained knife the while upon a wisp of grass. Everything else was unchanged, the sun still shining mercilessly on the streaming [sic\(^{13}\)] marsh and the tall pinnacle of the mountain, and I could scarce persuade myself that murder had been actually done, and a human life cruelly cut short a moment since, before my eyes" (130-1). This is no romantic retelling of pirate exploits, but a vivid re-immersion into a boy's mindset – illuminated by the constancy of landscape – which is confronted with the seemingly natural mundane and remorselessness of violence and death in the world of men that become pervasive as the book progresses. It is primarily this aspect of human society, as predicted and emphasized by the natural landscape, that opens Jim's eyes to human society, challenges him to choose between Silver's way and the path of Captain Smollett and his company, and is thereby the primary catalyst in Jim's maturation from naïve boy to disillusioned man.

It is not surprising, then, that the one man who seems to arise fully-formed from the natural

\(^{13}\) Other editions have "steaming"; "streaming" is probably an error.
landscape of Treasure Island – Ben Gunn, the marooned pirate and true keeper of the treasure – is a “new apparition” to Jim, more terrifying (133) than the murderers he has left behind in a dell now forever transformed for him from a sunlit spot to a symbol of darkness. All signs of Ben Gunn’s presence originate in the natural landscape: “The air, too, smelt more freshly than down beside the marsh . . . And here a fresh alarm brought me to a standstill with a thumping heart [my emphasis]” (132); “From the side of the hill . . . a spout of gravel was dislodged, and fell rattling and bounding through the trees. My eyes turned instinctively in that direction, and I saw a figure leap with great rapidity behind the trunk of a pine” (133). After the indifference of the sunlit dell during Silver’s murder of Tom, Jim is terrified by the possibility of a man born of the landscape, as it were: “Silver himself appeared less terrible in contrast with this creature of the woods” (133). Yet Stevenson again plays with the reader’s expectations and further complicates Jim’s weighing of the relative moralities contesting the island by showing Ben Gunn to be Silver’s antithesis, a man who has been resourceful in ensuring his own preservation on the island by using the landscape for food and shelter, but is also willing to help others, starting with Jim. Recalling that he must be “a man, however wild” (134), Jim approaches Ben Gunn for help and soon finds him to be a pious, cheese-obsessed, and yet rewarding man – a kind of lunatic combination of Robinson Crusoe and Magwitch, but certainly not the clichéd or two-dimensional castaway figure one might expect in an island romance-adventure.

Jim is soon separated from Ben Gunn by a cannonade from the Hispaniola, now taken over by the pirates. Jim thus cannot seek refuge with Gunn and must continue to scramble for survival – which contributes to his maturing process – and to visit the third (after Silver and Gunn) moral alternative. When he enters the log-house where Captain Smollett, Squire Trelawney, Doctor
Livesey, and the loyal crew members are holed up, it is clear that Jim is not necessarily better off than he would be with Silver. The landscape descriptions help to present this quandary. The log-house, sunk in sand, is merely a dilapidated framework made from timber of the “slopes of the knoll and all the inside of the stockade . . . we could see by the stumps what a fine and lofty grove had been destroyed” (170). Thus Jim’s boyhood fancies of idyllic dells and groves suffers another blow. While Silver’s men are ill with fever in the marsh, the group of “good men and true” sits idle in a place that is being slowly swallowed up by the island environment:

the soil had been washed away or buried in drift after the removal of the trees . . .
The cold evening breeze . . . whistled through every chink of the rude building, and sprinkled the floor with a continual rain of fine sand. There was sand in our eyes, sand in our teeth, sand in our suppers, sand dancing in the spring at the bottom of the kettle . . . but a little part of the [chimney] smoke . . . found its way out, and the rest eddied about the house . . . (170-1)

Ironically, the clearing of the grove to make the log-house has led to soil erosion, causing the gradual submersion of the log-house in sand. Any remaining illusions about fortune favouring the righteous are shattered by the island’s natural landscape, which is harsh, remorseless, and utterly separate from the world of men, as Jim realizes the next morning:

The sky was bright and cloudless overhead, and the tops of the trees shone rosily in the sun. But where Silver stood with his lieutenant all was still in shadow, and they waded knee deep in a low, white vapour that had crawled during the night out of the morass. The chill and the vapour taken together told a poor tale of the island. It was plainly a damp, feverish, unhealthy spot . . . (175)

Jim must overcome this sinister landscape to advance towards maturity, gain the treasure, and return home.

Fittingly, the forbidding landscape also spurs Jim to strike off on his own. As he sits in the log-house “grilling” in the hot sun, the adult world of violence and bloodthirstiness sickens him:
with “so much blood about me, and so many poor dead bodies lying all around . . . I took a disgust of the place that was almost as strong as fear” (197). He wants to escape to the idyllic fancies associated with his childhood, which are again evoked through landscape: “What I began to do was to envy the doctor, walking in the cool shadow of the woods, with the birds about him, and the pleasant smell of the pines” (197). “The cool shadow of the woods” and “the pleasant smell of the pines” are like the sunlit dell earlier, and the “fine grove” cut down to build the log-house. Jim thus takes “the first step towards my escapade,” after “this disgust and envy kept growing stronger and stronger” (197). He takes pistols and food; he has a plan in mind, but feels still “only a boy” (198). Yet his two impetuous follies – of first joining the expedition and now leaving the log-house protected by only two men – lead him not only to “help towards saving all of us” but also to his own manhood (198).

The presentation of the natural landscape now both echoes and diverges from the early passages describing the setting of the “Admiral Benbow.” The sea lies “blue and sunny to the horizon,” the afternoon is “still warm and sunny,” and Jim “walked along beside the surf with great enjoyment” (199), but Stevenson keeps calling attention to the noise of the sea. Even as Jim “continued to thread the tall woods” (199), the sound of the sea weaves its way throughout the passage, lending a sobering and eerie feel to what might otherwise be a cathartic release for Jim, now ostensibly free in his imagined boy’s idyll:

I could hear from far before me not only the continuous thunder of the surf, but a certain tossing of foliage and grinding of boughs which showed me the sea breeze had set in higher than usual . . . I came forth into the open borders of the grove, and saw the . . . surf tumbling and tossing its foam along the beach.

I have never seen the sea quiet around Treasure Island. The sun might blaze overhead, the air be without a breath, the surface smooth and blue, but still these great rollers would be running along the external coast, thundering and
thundering by day and night; and I scarce believe there is one spot on the island
where a man would be out of earshot of their noise. (199)

This passage recalls Jim’s early nightmares about the man with one leg (this was before he met Silver) as the waves crashed into the cove near the inn (14), and is in turn recalled in the final sentence of the book, where we read that in his “worst dreams” of “that accursed island,” Jim hears “the surf booming about its coasts” (317). It was upon first seeing and hearing the surf “foaming and thundering on the steep beach” that his heart sank and he “hated the very thought of Treasure Island” (118). This image of the seascape culled from Stevenson’s time in Silverado (see above, p. 13) is so frightening to Jim because, as he narrates the events of the book in retrospect, the sea represents his utter isolation: it is where he went from childhood to adulthood, especially when he acts boldly and independently to steal the ship, sailing it around the island, harbouring it safely, and rescuing the others, who had given up on him. To do this, Jim braves the treacherous sea, his great trial and his baptism. Only a boy could be reckless enough to sail out to the _Hispaniola_ singlehanded in Ben Gunn’s coracle and cut it adrift to prevent the pirates from leaving on it. But the challenges that follow can only be met by an adolescent; in meeting them the adolescent becomes a man. Refusing to remain with either Silver or the Squire, determined to act alone, Jim takes advantage of the darkness (“a night out of ten thousand for my purpose,” 202) to float out on the coracle to the ship at anchor. At the beginning of the story, when he and his mother had hidden from the pirates, fog and darkness had helped Jim run for help; now he is boldly acting alone to prevent the pirates from escaping and is himself rescuing some of those to whom he had once run for help.

The reason why the sea around the island haunts Jim long after is made abundantly clear now. Upon cutting the hawser, Jim is swept by the wind and waves against the ship, has to fight the
current, and then must hoist himself up onto the ship by a trailing rope. But while still in the coracle, which is tied to the ship, he fears the *Hispaniola* will drag him into "some bar of raging breakers, where all my troubles would be ended speedily" (210). He lies

in the bottom of that wretched skiff... for hours, continually beaten to and fro upon the billows, now and again wetted with flying sprays, and never ceasing to expect death at the next plunge. Gradually weariness grew upon me; a numbness, an occasional stupor, fell upon my mind even in the midst of my terrors; until sleep at last supervened, and in my sea-tossed coracle I lay and dreamed of home and the old 'Admiral Benbow'..." (210).

The parallelism here is noteworthy: as an adult years later Jim has nightmares about his ordeal at sea as the *Hispaniola* circled Treasure Island, but during the adventure itself, the boy-come-man Jim dreams of his childhood, and leaves himself to the mercy of the elements; sheer endurance is required in dealing with the dangerous sea, just as with adolescence and life itself. But as Jim finds when he wakes, initiative, intelligence, and courage are also needed. He cannot swim to shore because "[a]mong the fallen rocks the breakers spouted and bellowed; loud reverberations, heavy sprays flying and falling, succeeded one another from second to second; and I saw myself, if I ventured nearer, dashed to death upon the rough shore, or spending my strength in vain to scale the beetling crags" (211). Overcoming his terror, Jim analyzes the seascape, and notices "how it was [the coracle] managed to slip so quietly through the rollers" (214). Metaphorizing the sea as land, he sees that the daunting seascape is in fact negotiable and surpassable: "I found each wave, instead of the big, smooth glossy mountain it looks from shore, or from a vessel’s deck, was for all the world like any range of hills on the dry land, full of peaks and smooth places and valleys" (214). As the coracle, twisting and turning, threads its way through the waves, avoiding "the steep slopes and higher, toppling summits of the wave" (214), Jim astutely judges the rapidly changing conditions
and manages to come quite near the land. But when he discovers the Hispaniola tossing in the sea with only two men on board, he paddles the coracle to the ship and, helped by the wind, which turns the ship towards him, he grabs the jib-boom and hauls himself up just as the Hispaniola strikes the coracle and sinks it.

The central section of Part V, "My Sea Adventure," is the three chapters (22-24) that focus on Jim's haunting, hours-long odyssey at sea. This crucial part of the book is the turning point in Jim's maturity. Not only does he face death and survive, which is a maturing experience in itself, but he overcomes a terror of solitude in a forbidding environment, learning to rely on himself and his wits, reading the landscape and overcoming its challenges. Now the landscape is not a place of idyllic dells or sunlit groves or the remembered coves of home, but an unforgiving, relentless, everpresent force, like life. After this ordeal, Jim is distinctly more confident, assertive, and adult in his reactions. His maturation from boy to man, forged in quickly changing and life-threatening circumstances, causes his dreams long after he has left the island to be haunted by its seascape.

While Stevenson was not given to descriptions of the sea, even in his travel writings, the sea as a metaphor for life and fate is a recurring image in his other works.¹⁴

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¹⁴ Before "The Merry Men" (1881), he had written about his beloved island of Earraid and made much of the raging, booming, destructive breakers of the title (cf. The Complete Short Stories v. 1, 464-5). In Catriona, Stevenson relates the sea to David Balfour's reassurance of "my life" (v. 10, 176), but here too the emphasis falls on the menace of the surf booming around the Bass Rock, mirroring the "merry men": "When the waves were any way great they roared about the rock like thunder and the drums of armies" (191). Later in Catriona the sea is neither reassuring nor "dreadful but merry" (191), but eerie: "there was no sound in all the Bass but the lap and bubble of a very quiet sea" (207-8). These views of the sea are strikingly similar to the sea in Treasure Island. The Bass Rock, of course, is an island prison for Balfour, but in The Ebb-Tide, when the main character first lands at an island, he, like Stevenson himself perhaps, "tortured himself to find analogies" for it (v. 18, 108): the isle "like a deserted theatre" (159), much like the amphitheatre in the landscape of Treasure Island. When the title of the novel is explained, the ocean itself is also seen as symbolic of inexorable fate and inevitable death: "He had complied with the ebb-tide in man's affairs, and
What makes Treasure Island so different from these works in its representation of the seascape is the vivid, dramatically integrated way that the sea, as a site of both life and death, and constant reminder of the underlying potential of harsh fate, shows us Jim being forced to “read” and interpret its waves and tides to save his life, proving his mettle as a seaman, coping with isolation, hardship, and danger. The real treasure he finds on the island is his selfhood. When Jim fortuitously shoots the murderous Israel Hands as the Hispaniola comes to rest in the estuary on the north shore of the island, the pirate falls into the bay, and Stevenson again employs the seascape to chilling effect, stressing its implacable indifference to human needs and desires and rendering it, in these respects, like life itself:

He rose once to the surface in a lather of foam and blood, and then sank again for good. As the water settled, I could see him lying huddled together on the clean, bright sand in the shadow of the vessel’s sides. A fish or two whipped past his body. Sometimes, by the quivering of the water, he appeared to move the tide had carried him away; he heard already the roaring of the maelstrom that must hurry him under” (141).

Even before Treasure Island, in his travel writing Stevenson had used the symbolic link between rushing water and human fate. After the flooding Oise river almost claimed his life, he wondered: “Would the wicked river drag me down by the heels, indeed? and look so beautiful all the time? Nature’s good-humour was only skin deep after all” (An Inland Voyage, v. 1, 77). Later, when ladies on the shore call to him and his companion in a canoe to come back, he writes: “Come back? There is no coming back, young ladies, on the impetuous stream of life. . . . There is a headlong, forthright tide, that bears away man with his fancies like straw, and runs fast in time and space. It is full of curves like this, your winding river of the Oise” (96). And in the collection A Children’s Garden of Verses, in the poem “Keepsake Mill” a mill wheel and a churning river are also symbolic of time passing:

Years may go by, and the wheel in the river
Wheel as it wheels for us, children, to-day,
Wheel and keep roaring and foaming for ever
Long after all of the boys are away. . . .
Still we shall find the old mill wheel in motion,
Turning and churning that river to foam (v. 8, 33).
a little, as if he were trying to rise. But he was dead enough, for all that, being both shot and drowned, and was food for fish in the very place where he had designed my slaughter.

I was no sooner certain of this than I began to feel sick, faint, and terrified. The hot blood was running over my back and chest. The dirk, where it had pinned my shoulder to the mast, seemed to burn like a hot iron; yet it was not so much these real sufferings that distressed me, for these, it seemed to me, I could bear without a murmur; it was the horror I had upon my mind of falling from the cross-trees into that still green water beside the body of the coxswain. (239-40)

Here, as when Silver wiped the blood off his knife on the grass, the sea is connected with blood and death, but now Jim, matured by his near-death experience of the sea and sights of death on land, retains his poise because he knows the wretched fate of Hands might easily have been his own, and because he is now accustomed to the brutal, senseless violence that seems to be a natural part of the adult world. Far from being boyishly emotional, such a reaction is detached and logical, arising from Jim’s instinct for self-preservation. Ignored by the fish, Hands grotesquely seems to rise from the shallow bottom, but Jim is not only certain of his death, but does not fall prey to any childish fancies or terrors about death; he only feels faint and scared not because he is afraid of falling next to Israel Hands, but because he fears falling in “that still green water beside the body” (240).

Hands’ name is not even mentioned, for he is depersonalized as merely “the coxswain” (240). It is the stagnant water, symbolic of death, that Stevenson emphasizes in order to maintain his stress on Jim’s fear of the sea around the island as a place of death and utter solitude. Adult enough now to handle corpses without fear – “as the habit of tragical adventures had worn off almost all my terror for the dead” (241) – Jim takes Hands’ victim and former crewmate, O’Brien, and dumps his body overboard.

He went in with a soundless plunge; the red cap came off, and remained floating on the surface; and as soon as the splash subsided, I could see him
and Israel lying side by side, both wavering with the tremulous movements of the water. O’Brien, though still quite a young man, was very bald. There he lay, with that bald head across the knees of the man who had killed him, and the quick fishes steering to and fro over both . . . (241)

Jim refers to O’Brien merely as a “sack of bran” (241), calmly speaks of the dead man’s youth and baldness, and remarks on the irony of O’Brien lying across the knees of the man who had killed him. The two bodies “wavering with the tremulous movement of the water” reflect this equality, yet the motion of the water with “the quick fishes swimming to and fro over both” also mirrors the fleetingness of human life, reminding Jim that landscape and nature remain even as individuals perish.

Throughout Treasure Island, Stevenson reminds us that landscape can inspire both death and life. As Jim realizes he is alone on the ship, the shadows of pines fall “in patterns on the deck” (241), and after cutting the halyards, he fondly recalls the sunset, with “the last rays . . . falling through a glade of the wood, and shining bright as jewels, on the flowery mantle of the wreck” (242). This romantic mental picture of the sunset, occurring just after his violent encounter with death, illuminates for him the precious nature of life and his own fortuitous survival.

As he leaves the ship and makes his way across the island to find the Squire and the others, the moon, previously experienced as a seeing-eye for spying pirates and his foe, now rises to become his guide: with the “pale glimmer of moonbeams . . . to help me, I passed rapidly over what remained to me of my journey; and, sometimes walking, sometimes running, impatiently drew near to the stockade” (245).15 But inside, instead of his friends, he is startled to find himself among the

15 It may not be a stretch to connect the moon and moonlight with Long John Silver. Not only was the moon linked with the pirates earlier, but here the lunar crescent is twice described as “silvery” (244, 245), as Jim unwittingly enters the log-house. Silver then has one of his men fetch a torch, recalling the bulls-eye lantern that is linked with the moon early in the book.
pirates again, for they have seized the fort in his absence. In the next section of the narrative – Part VI: Captain Silver (Chapters 28-33, essentially) – Jim is forced to stay close to Silver, as Captain Smollett and the others are incensed by Jim’s apparent desertion. Jim now regards Silver with a mixture of repulsion for the man’s amorality and awe of his wiles, resourcefulness, and overwhelming confidence, while Silver still treats Hawkins as a sort of son, varying between calling him “lad” and “Mr. Hawkins” (254) but allowing him the choice of staying with him and his treacherous fellow pirates, or setting off alone. In a show of bravery which demonstrates how much Jim has matured and learnt to cope with death, he offers the pirates a choice in return – kill him or spare him; if the latter, he will do his best to keep them from the gallows. Such courage impresses upon Silver that Hawkins is not only a man now, but “more a man than any pair of rats of you in this here house” (258). When Silver’s daunting defense of Jim is complete, the others congregate in one corner and discuss whether or not to kill Jim. To Jim, “the low hiss of their whispering sounded in my ear continuously, like a stream” (259); again, he sees death in terms of water, an image that can remind us that the grace he shows under pressure is associated with his escapade at sea, from his nearly fatal isolation in the coracle, to his violent confrontation with Israel Hands, whose body, together with his victim’s, still lies in the shallow green water of the north estuary.

In his shrewd bargaining with the pirates, Jim deals with the even shrewder Silver on equal terms, man-to-man, but the whole transaction fills him with misgivings. He cannot help admiring the consummate villain, who in turn treats him with respect and almost affection – indeed he comes across as somewhat fatherly in his attitude to the young man, as Jim can now be called. Stevenson seems to be saying that no moral positions are clear-cut in life; crucial decisions often involve hedging one’s bets and bargaining with devils. As Jim himself puts it:
It was long ere I could close an eye, and Heaven knows I had matter enough for thought in the man whom I had slain that afternoon, in my own most perilous position, and, above all, in the remarkable game that I saw Silver now engaged upon – keeping the mutineers together with one hand, and grasping, with the other, after every means, possible and impossible, to make his peace and save his miserable life . . . . my heart was sore for him, wicked as he was . . . (271)

None of the men on the island is more moral than another in their pathetic, desperate attempts to survive and return home. The next day, the landscape makes the Doctor appear to Jim as Silver once did: “when I ran to a loophole and looked out, I saw him standing, like Silver once before, up to the mid-leg in creeping vapour” (272).

When the hunt begins in earnest, it first takes Jim, Silver and the others through “heavy, miry ground,” but the scenery soon becomes more idyllic, with thickets, fresh air, and stirring sunbeams belying the eventual outcome of the expedition (287). The discovery of a skeleton is jarring, but it points to the treasure (288). Then, just before the surprise of the empty treasure chest, Stevenson shrewdly gives Jim and the reader one long last look at the island:

The plateau being somewhat tilted towards the west, this spot on which we had paused commanded a wide prospect on either hand. Before us, over the tree-tops, we beheld the Cape of the Woods fringed with surf; behind, we not only looked down upon the anchorage and Skeleton Island, but saw – clear across the spit and the eastern lowlands – a great field of open sea upon the east. Sheer above us rose the Spy-glass, here dotted with single pines, there black with precipices. There was no sound but that of the distant breakers, mounting from all round, and the chirp of countless insects in the brush. Not a man, not a sail upon the sea; the very largeness of the view increased the sense of solitude. (292)

While the pirates look at the landscape simply for clues that will lead them to the treasure, Jim reacts to with a profound sense of isolation as he observes the Cape “fringed with surf” and then into “a great field of open sea.” As always in Stevenson, the prospect of the sea is accompanied by the
haunting sound of the “distant breakers.” Thus this passage not only looks ahead to the eventual journey home but also – and more importantly – it continues Stevenson’s modernist exploration of Jim’s progress towards maturity and the worldly knowledge it brings, through experience as well as the natural landscape, of life as harsh, precarious, and amoral. And when the treasure-seekers reach the grove where the chest is buried, he thinks of the grove as a haunted place where the buccaneer Flint had killed six of his companions: “This grove, that was now so peaceful, must then have rung with cries, I thought; and even with the thought I could believe I heard it ringing still” (299). Much earlier, of course, Jim thought of the groves and dells as idyllic.

After the treasure chest has been found empty, the doctor, Gray, and Ben Gunn ambush Silver and his accomplices, and it is revealed that Gunn had the treasure all along, Jim sails back to the north inlet on a “smooth sea” (306). He does not feel isolated or distressed now and knows he will soon be returning home. But to the end, Stevenson stresses the landscape’s shaping of Jim into a man. As they sail away from the atoll, the crew, along with Silver, see the three men they have marooned on the island, a fate which Jim had often been terrifyingly close to suffering. Heightening the horror, Stevenson has Jim focus on the “spit of sand” on which they are last seen: “when I next looked out they had disappeared from the spit, and the spit itself had almost melted out of sight in the growing distance. That was, at least, the end of that; and before noon, to my inexpressible joy, the highest rock of Treasure Island had sunk into the blue round of sea” (314). The sea that had almost swallowed him up finally rids him of his most hated sight – the landscape that metamorphosed him into an adult weary of violence and death. Jim’s emphasis on the vanishing island extends to his narration, as he says with rueful understatement that the receding view is “at least, the end of that” (314). He waits for the tallest point of the island to disappear, but that hated
spot and the three abandoned men who reminded him of what might easily have been his own plight haunt his memories and dreams and decisively affect his tone as narrator.

Although the ship, on what ought to be a triumphal return voyage, stops at a “beautiful land-locked gulf,” anchors for a time at such an idyllic place in the best tradition of an adventure-romance, and Silver escapes with a bag of gold, the lasting effect of the novel is to show Jim’s psychological obsession with the island and his “dark and bloody sojourn” on it (315): “Oxen and wain-ropes would not bring me back again to that accursed island; and the worst dreams that ever I have are when I hear the surf booming about its coasts” (317).

There has been much speculation as to both the literary origins of Treasure Island and the romanticism of islands in general as a setting. Stevenson’s book drew (particularly with the character of Ben Gunn) from a book he knew well, Robinson Crusoe (Rankin 43), soon after a time when “versions of the Crusoe story spread over Europe” (Bradbury 150). Watson talks of Poe’s “The Gold-Bug” as an influence (which Stevenson admitted he borrowed the skeleton-pointer from – cf. “My First Book,” xxiv, xxix), among others.

It is Stevenson’s treatment of the natural landscape that truly sets Treasure Island apart, not only from other island adventure-romances of the time, but from the spirit of romanticism itself and how it views the sea. “Like the mountains, the sea is antisocial,” one critic of Romantic poetry writes, “it is a type of sublime wilderness that provides a particularly good testing ground for the romantic hero” (Fletcher 28); “Such landscapes of refuge and retreat are isolated but are not

16 Such as Johann Wyss’s Swiss Family Robinson (1814), Ballantyne’s The Coral Island (1858), and various Jules Verne works (Bradbury 150).
themselves hostile to man, and even their solitude may be modified” (4). It is striking, however, that Stevenson does not treat the sea as such a sublime wilderness that inspires contemplation; rather, the seascape most often fills Jim with fear, forcing him to act to survive, to experience hardship, and thereby achieve maturity. The sea is indeed a testing ground for him, but he is no romantic hero – indeed, any notion of a hero is absent from the book, which emphasizes instead how the desperation of men in life-and-death circumstances can blur seemingly clear-cut moral positions – Jim becomes a man who knows how to survive in a morally relative world. Sandford talks of the pre-Romantic view of islands as illustrative of “isolation as a manly virtue rather than a curse,” while in nineteenth-century literature, the island setting is seen as a prison (82). But in Stevenson’s novel, the island and the sea are neither wholly liberating nor wholly imprisoning: Jim loses his boyhood innocence and is hardened in his dealings with the adult world he enters, thus helping his own survival. The sea and island make a man of him and haunt him ever after.

Neither, however, is Treasure Island as modernist as recent critics have suggested. Hubbard talks of “sheer menace” as “characteristic of Stevenson’s islands” (77). Yet the island itself is not particularly menacing to Jim: he cannot forget the hardships, fear, and close calls indelibly associated with its seascape and its landscape, but he also registers images of sunbeams falling around him and the panoramic prospects that occasionally open up before him. Sandison writes that, central to Stevenson as well as modernism is “antagonism towards the father” (15), and talks also of the Freudian symbolism of the island landscape. Silver, while a threat to Jim for much of the book, at first wins the boy’s admiration but repels him after he discovers the one-legged pirate’s bloodthirsty and treacherous nature. By the end of the book, however, after having joined with Silver for mutual protection (Silver saves Jim from the pirates, and Jim vows to keep Silver from the
gallows), his feelings are ambivalent, and he is satisfied with the eventual escape of "that formidable seafaring man," and hopes that he lives in comfort in this world, for he will not in the next, Jim is certain (317). In this I find little of the "antagonism towards the father" that Sandison focusses on, nor do I agree with his Freudian observations about Jim's reactions to the landscape of the island. Stevenson does not use the hills and spires of rock to dwarf Jim's manhood, and uses his adventures on the sea in order to show him learning how to endure hardship and read the landscape, as the means of his acquisition of adult experience - harsh, violent, unheroic and mean but also gritty and determined.

In discussing the island motif in Stevenson's fiction, too, I think that critics have missed the point. With regard to Treasure Island, Rankin and Calder, for example, talk of the many islands in Stevenson's childhood, and Rankin goes on to write of how, to a child, an island is "a place where it can be safely isolated, as it once was, in the womb. . . . An island encloses, but it also excludes, like a charmed circle" (43-4). In a similar vein, the less psychologically oriented Calder writes:

> An island suggests a perfect territory of the imagination, especially a distant, barely charted island. Isolated, hard to find, cut off, a world unto itself, it is the perfect territory to exclude, not necessarily reality, unless one chooses to, but any aspect of life that one does not want to intrude. An island was a place where child or adult could forget any part of the adult world that challenged or distorted fantasy . . . (RLS: A Life Study 169-70)

Such notions may sound nice in the abstract, but I think my analysis of the landscape imagery in the novel shows that Jim is not safely ensconced in an amniotic Caribbean atoll. Isolation, violent death, and amoral acts contribute decisively to his achievement of selfhood. The island setting is neither idyllic nor contained. In Treasure Island Stevenson makes a deft transition from using landscape - primarily in the early chapters which are set in England - for the foreshadowing and atmosphere
usual in the conventional adventure romance, to using landscape imagery in the service of a coming of age story in which life is seen not in a simple upbeat way typical of the genre but as demanding, harsh, and morally relative. The landscape in the book is of vital importance to the development of the consciousness of the main character, which, though a subtext, is in my reading Stevenson's central theme. Stevenson himself perhaps realized the nuances and subtle meanings of his landscape imagery when he talked of how the map "was the most of the plot" ("My First Book," xxix) and that the "author must know his countryside, whether real or imaginary, like his hand" (xxx). Indeed, in the topography of Treasure Island, the "tale has a root there; it grows in that soil; it has a spine of its own behind the words," and it is more true than Stevenson imagined that, as the author studies a map which he will turn into a narrative landscape, "relations will appear that he had not thought upon . . . even when a map is not all the plot, as it was in Treasure Island, it will be found to be a mine of suggestion" (xxxi).
CHAPTER 2: HIGHLAND

*Kidnapped* (1886)

Occasionally other trials than those of the Old Bailey would be included in the package of books we received from London, among these my husband found and read with avidity: –

THE

TRIAL

OF

JAMES STEWART

*in Aucharn in Duror of Appin*

FOR THE
Murder of COLIN CAMPBELL of Glenure, Esq;
Factor for His Majesty on the forfeited
Estate of Ardshiel.

My husband was always interested in this period of his country's history, and had already the intention of writing a story that should turn on the Appin murder. The tale was to be of a boy, David Balfour, supposed to belong to my husband's own family, who should travel in Scotland as though it were a foreign country, meeting with various adventures and misadventures by the way.

- Prefatory Note to *Kidnapped* by Fanny Van de Griff Stevenson, v. 9, pp. 6-7

Dear Davie, On the small map please mark the course of a ship, in red, leaving Queensferry going North – about midway between the Orkney and Shetlands, passing in near Cape Wrath through the Minch, near in by Canna, round Coll and Tiree, close round their S. end and the S.W. end of Mull where, close in by the S. side of Earraid, it is supposed to strike.

On the large map, a red line is to show the wanderings of my hero after his shipwreck. It must be sometimes dotted to show uncertainty; sometimes full. As thus. It begins on Earraid, he crosses at Low Water, and passes along the Ross and across Mull to Torosay; line dotted across Mull. He then goes by
water to Kinlochaline and by road to the shore of the Linnhe Loch to the S. corner of Loch Leven: wood of Lettermhor on the ordnance beyond Rudha Bad Beithe – not at Rudha Mhor: line still full. Thence along the hilltops to Duror: full. Thence up the S. side of the river Duror, and the N. side of the river Creran, and over Ben Maol Chalium and across the Coe below Meanarclach: dotted. Thence round the outside of the hill-tops above the Coe and then above Loch Leven to a place above Coalsinacoan: full. Thence along the hills on the S. bank of the river Leven: full till you get near its fountain. Whereupon the line becomes dotted, and staggers up to Ben Alder. From Ben Alder, full again, across Loch Errocht, and down its east side, and across the head of Loch Rannoch. My hero then takes the hills and turns the head waters of Glen Lyon, Glen Lochy and Glen Dochart; at such obvious points of his itinerary the lines might be full, and between dotted. The line (full again) descends Balquhidder from the top, turns down Strathire, strikes over Uam Var, hits Allan Water above Kippendavie, descends Allan Water to the Forth, along the north bank of Forth to Stirling Bridge, and then by road by Alloa, Clackmannan and Culross, till it issues from the map; for I fear we don't reach Limekilns; which we really should have done, for from that point my hero crosses the Firth to Carriden, and thence to Queensferry. *Terminus malorum.*

If room can be found all the places I have named, might be named upon the map, except Glen Lyon, Glen Lochy, Glen Dochart, and the Duror and Creran Rivers, and Rudha Bad Beithe, and Ben Maol Chalium, and Meannarclach. The improbability of the itinerary is not so great as it appears, for my hero was trying to escape – like all heroes.

My father is pretty well, better than for a long time, and I may say the same of myself. I send a piece of Ordnance with so much of the itinerary rudely shown.

It should be lettered 'Sketch of the cruise of the Brig *Covenant,* and the probable course of David Balfour's Wanderings.'

By which you will see that both my families have been robbed to give a name.

Your affectionate cousin

Robert Louis Stevenson

P.S. Kippen and Balfron should be marked too as they are referred to in the text, and it should have been the Forth and not the Teith (as I falsely directed you) that was marked; but we had incidents, and changed our proposed itinerary.

- Letter to David A. Stevenson, who was preparing the frontispiece maps for the novel, 7 March 1886 (Letter 1580)
heath *n.* 1 (An area of) open uncultivated ground, esp. on acid sandy or peaty soil and covered by heather or related plants (see sense 2 below). OE. 2 Any of various dwarf shrubs of the family Ericaceae characteristic of heathland or moor . . . native heath native country or territory

heather *n.* A dwarf shrub of the heath family, *Calluna vulgaris*, with terminal spikes of small purple flowers, freq. dominant over large areas of heathland and moor; ling. Also, any of several related or similar plants . . . take to the heather Sc. Hist. become an outlaw

- The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary

*Kidnapped*, published in 1886 after about three months of writing (January to March), centres on a map, though it was born of history. Stevenson was inspired by the murder of Colin Campbell on May 14, 1752, a legendary infamy in Scottish history, for which James Stewart was found guilty (unjustly, it is now thought) and hanged. The Highlands were not unfamiliar to Stevenson: “The genesis of *Kidnapped* in Stevenson’s reading of *Rob Roy*, his early visits to Perthshire, and his interest in a *History of the Highlands* is well known” (Stott 50). Graham Balfour, a friend and biographer of Stevenson, asserts that the author went on a week-long trip with his father to Lochearnhead and made inquiries about the murder. “I was taken with the tale from the beginning; no one so dull, but must have been struck with the picturesque details; no one at all acquainted with the Highlands, but must have recognized in this tragedy something highly typical of the place and time. . . . In order to make certain of my local colour, I visited Appin in the early summer of 1880 [a mistake; in fact 1882]” (“Note to *Kidnapped*,” from Stott 51). Stevenson’s note to the novel outlining this visit was never finished, and Stott speculates that the author “would have visited other sites connected with the murder” (53). In a letter to David Stevenson, a cousin and illustrator, he described in detail the map of David Balfour’s route that he wanted as a frontispiece

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to the book.

In addition to the emphasis by Stevenson on landscape and geography for the book, the central theme of the novel, as noted by a number of critics, should have precipitated careful analysis of the narrative landscape long ago. Eigner, in his romanticist reading of Stevenson, states that David Balfour “the lowlander is quite clearly the central character. Moreover, his attitude to the savage world he views is not useful merely as a guide to the author’s opinion on Scotch-English problems; David Balfour’s reaction, and the forming of it, is the very theme of Kidnapped” (84). This world is seen by David while on the run through heather and heath, moor and crag, from the west coast through the Highlands to Edinburgh. The Highlands, a world then largely foreign to the Lowland Scot, are presented not just through landscape, but through landscape which constantly surrounds David, who immerses and hides himself in it with Alan. Daiches writes: “Kidnapped is Stevenson’s great topographical novel, the true vindication of his insistence on a sense of place in certain kinds of fiction. It is also in its way a historical novel and a psychological novel probing the differences between Lowland and Highland mentality and sensibility” (Robert Louis Stevenson and His World 66). Ralph Stewart, in a small gem of an article, “The Unity of Kidnapped,” sums up the book in this way: “The novel turns to focus on the old Highland way of life, which David sees functioning, though mutedly, just before the post-Culloden measures extinguished it. Kidnapped points up what is admirable about the doomed culture, and it is the introduction of this tragic theme that changes the tone of the book” (30). While the landscape in Treasure Island is clearly concocted, the Highlands in Kidnapped are so meticulously depicted as to have inspired numerous literary

18 David focalizes the narrative, and some editions have a sub-title which states, in part, “BEING MEMOIRS OF THE ADVENTURES OF DAVID BALFOUR IN THE YEAR 1751 . . . WRITTEN BY HIMSELF AND NOW SET FORTH BY ROBERT LOUIS [BALFOUR] STEVENSON”.
tourists to retrace Alan Breck and David Balfour’s fictitious cross-country trek, yet no more has been written about the landscape imagery of *Kidnapped* than *Treasure Island*. The landscape introduces not only David Balfour to the Highland world of values foreign to him but, as Bradbury notes, the reader as well:

Eighteenth century Scotland declares its divisions ruthlessly: Gaelic Highlands defying Protestant Lowlands, ancient oral tradition versus bookish Enlightenment, country against city. A reading of Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Kidnapped* (1886) – with its Lowland Whig Presbyterian David Balfour confronted by the Highland Jacobite Catholic Alan Breck – sets it up well. Stevenson’s superb topography revives both his own nineteenth century Highlands, and guestimates those of the eighteenth century: all the better for modern readers, for whom much of both is lost. (Bradbury 53)

Bradbury later says that the “breathless plotting of *Kidnapped*...[testifies] both to the unerring precision of Stevenson’s memory, and to the fact that his historical understanding was, in an important sense, geographical” (143). More importantly, I would add, *Kidnapped* also shows Stevenson’s development as a stylist of narrative landscape. Having used landscape to show the shaping of the protagonist’s consciousness in *Treasure Island*, he employs it now to form and illuminate the protagonist’s awareness of a political, cultural, and social environment different from, yet vital to, his own.

*Kidnapped* sends both the reader and the protagonist on a journey which will not end until David Balfour returns to Edinburgh on the final page of the book. His parents dead, David takes

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19 Cf. Stott 43 and the articles by Nolan and Simpson, for example.

20 Both *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped* (and *The Master of Ballantrae*) are set in the same decade, the 1750s, and both begin by fairly quickly ridding the central character of his parents, not so that they will be solitary romantic heroes, but so that they will be forced to face moral dilemmas
"the key for the last time out of the door of my father's house" (v. 9, 15), although he does not yet know what he will do. The landscape betokens a bright, even idyllic future for the seventeen-year-old: "The sun began to shine upon the summit of the hills as I went down the road; and by the time I had come as far as the manse, the blackbirds were whistling in the garden lilacs, and the mist that hung around the valley in the time of the dawn was beginning to arise and die away" (15). This cheerful start, however, is "just one of what will be many misleading signs, and a good deal of the protagonist's journey will take place on a vast and featureless moor whose desolation will bring him near to total demoralisation, if not, indeed, to death." (Sandison 180).

The minister of Essendean tells David his fortune, as decreed by his father: he must go to his father's ancestral house, the Shaws, in Cramond, near Edinburgh, and present himself to his uncle Ebenezer Balfour. David's family are Lowland Whigs and this background gives rise to much of the dramatic contrast and tension in the book when he joins Alan Breck. Soon he finds himself, though still in his native Scotland, in a world completely bereft of his kin and far removed from the quiet rusticity of his childhood home. In a scene which provides a significant contrast with a later passage, David beholds a regiment of English soldiers "marching to the fifes" and his Whig sentiments surface: "The pride of life seemed to mount into my brain at the sight of the red coats and the hearing of that merry music" (22). At the start, then, he is loyal to the Crown and by his upbringing unthinkingly opposed to the restoration of the Stuarts in contrast with most Highlanders, who were largely Roman Catholic Jacobites.

As he sets out, the landscape still appears idyllic and wondrous to David: "The more I

and psychological struggles alone. Thus Stevenson can concentrate on showing the protagonists' consciousnesses, especially in response to the worlds in which they are isolated.
looked, the pleasanter that country-side appeared; being set with hawthorn bushes full of flowers; the fields dotted with sheep; a fine flight of rooks in the sky; and every sign of a kind soil and climate” (26). This pleasant pastoral scenery gives way to equally clichéd Gothic imagery after he reaches his dastardly uncle’s house: “a dark night, with stars low down . . . a hollow moaning of wind far off among the hills . . . something thundery and changeful in the weather” (45). This atmospheric use of the nightscape is heightened by lightning flashes (47), which reveal the narrow stairs to which he was directed by his uncle as a death-trap. Stevenson’s use of the Gothic nightscape is expert and unusual in places, with the crash of thunder connoting “God’s voice denouncing murder” (49) and the storm’s fury vividly etching the dramatic tension of the scene in the reader’s mind, precisely as “the poetry of circumstance” should do (“A Gossip on Romance,” v. 12, 188; cf. 186-205). As in Treasure Island, then, the natural landscape is at first presented romantically, in a Gothic as well as idyllic key, and not until the protagonist achieves maturity, betokened by entry into strange territory, can the landscape be seen to engage and shape his consciousness.

David still enjoys his surroundings (61), Edinburgh’s “firth lying like a blue floor” with the ships on it like toys (57), even after he has learned that he is heir to a great fortune which his uncle is trying to keep from him. He is still naïve enough to board Captain Hoseason’s ship and regards the waters with calmness and “pleasure” (69). But in Chapter 7, when he comes to and realizes he has been abducted, the natural landscape becomes the primary device for conveying his thoughts and perceptions, rather than simply acting as a plot device for creating atmosphere, heightening tension, and foreshadowing events.

I came to myself in darkness, in great pain, bound hand and foot, and deafened by many unfamiliar noises. There sounded in my ears a roaring of water as of a huge mill-dam, the thrashing of heavy sprays, the thundering of
the sails, and the shrill cries of seamen. The whole world now heaved giddily
up, and now rushed giddily downward; and so sick and hurt was I in body, and
my mind so much confounded, that it took me a long while, chasing my
thoughts up and down, and ever stunned again by a fresh stab of pain, to realise
that I must be lying somewhere bound in the belly of that unlucky ship, and that
the wind must have strengthened to a gale. With the clear perception of my
plight, there fell upon me a blackness of despair, a horror of remorse at my own
folly, and a passion of anger at my uncle, that once more bereft me of my senses.

In that time of my adventurous youth, I suffered many hardships; but none
that was so crushing to my mind and body, or lit by so few hopes, as these first
hours aboard the brig. (71-2)

In sharp contrast with his previous views of the landscape, David’s thoughts are now dark, brooding,
and full of despair: “The thought of deliverance, even by death in the deep sea, was welcome to me
. . . the misery of my situation drew out the hours to double. How long, therefore, I lay waiting to
hear the ship split upon some rock, or to feel her reel head foremost into the depths of the sea, I have
not the means of computation” (71). When Alan Breck Stewart is brought aboard and joins David
in his imprisonment, they prepare to defend themselves against captain and crew. Much like Jim
Hawkins, David is nervous about “the sea, which I heard washing round the brig, and where I
thought my dead body would be cast ere morning . . . [it] ran in my mind strangely” (102). Then the
eerie silence before the battle is mirrored by the atmosphere: “The sea had gone down, and the wind
was steady and kept the sails quiet; so that there was a great stillness on the ship” (105). In the fight
David acquits himself well, killing in self-defence much earlier in the narrative than Jim Hawkins
in Treasure Island, with the sea, however, reflecting his consciousness just as it mirrored Jim’s: the
attackers break “like water, turning, and running, and falling” (110), and by the morning, when the
battle has been won, “a smooth, rolling sea . . . tossed the ship” (113).

From Alan, David gleans a sense of how important their landscape is to Highlanders, and the
reader is also alerted to the ways that intimate knowledge of the landscape can be used to escape
pursuing English soldiers:

I expressed my wonder how, with the Highlands covered with troops, and guarded like a city in a siege, a man in his situation could come and go without arrest.

‘It’s easier than ye would think,’ said Alan. ‘A bare hill-side (ye see) is like all one road; if there’s a sentry at one place, ye just go by one another. And then the heather’s a great help. And everywhere there are friends’ houses and friends’ byres and haystacks. . . . I have fished a water with a sentry on the other side of the brae, and killed a fine trout; and I have sat in a heather bush within six feet of another, and learned a real bonny tune from his whistling.’ (132)

We see that the landscape is truly a country, linked by a network of homesteads, safehouses, and friendly families, a like-minded community as well as familiar terrain that can offer food, shelter, security, and the relish of outwitting the alien invader (i.e. the English soldier).

When the ship crashes on the Torran Rocks, the moon is a constant presence, lighting the sea and seeming to watch David as he goes under and resurfaces, and revealing the “dots of heather and the sparkling of the mica in the rocks” of Earraid (141). Believing that Alan has not survived the wreck, David soon finds the island a solitary and dreadful place: “The sea was here quite quiet; there was no sound of any surf; the moon shone clear; and I thought in my heart I had never seen a place so desert and desolate” (142), and the next morning, “only the surf broke outside in the distance, which put me in mind of my perils and those of my friend. To walk by the sea at that hour of the morning, and in a place so desert-like and lonesome, struck me with a kind of fear” (143).21

21 Such an effect is totally misunderstood by a contemporary critic of Stevenson, as well. In an unsigned review of *Kidnapped* in the *Athenaeum* (August 14, 1886, No. 3068, pp. 197-8), T. Watts-Dunton (assumed) states: “That [David Balfour] is a landsman to the very marrow is well indicated by his mistaking a tidal islet for a real Robinson Crusoe island, but it is difficult to imagine the veriest land-lubber, gazing at the sea from a lonely land, saying that it strikes the soul ‘with a kind of fear’. On the contrary, it is from a ghostly flat or a range of spectral cliffs that the sight of the sea seems to drive away the superstitious terrors conjured up by some landscapes. Amid superstitious dreads on the loneliest coast on the dimmest night a sense of companionship comes with the smell of sea-weed” (Maixner 245).
Stevenson makes the topography of Earraid, like the daunting, formidable landscape of Treasure Island as first experienced by Jim, a rough, unpleasant challenge as David walks through “a jumble of granite rocks with heather in among” to realize at last where he is: “a little barren isle . . . cut off on every side by the salt seas” (144). Failing to retrieve the yard on which he floated to Earraid, David “came ashore, and flung myself down upon the sands and wept” (146). Stevenson shows the isle at its most rugged, depressing, and isolated to introduce his young protagonist to the Highlands, which ultimately prove more congenial to him than his first impression: “The time I spent upon the island is still so horrible a thought to me, that I must pass it lightly over” (146). It is a bleak and barren place, where “[t]here was no one part of it better than another; it was all desolate and rocky” (147). Through this island landscape Stevenson is thus giving us as well as his protagonist a foretaste of the nearby Highlands, geographically, culturally, and politically so new to David, who feels tantalizingly so near to the salvation of this foreign homeland: “indeed it seemed impossible that I should be left to die on the shores of my own country, and within view of a church tower and the smoke of men's houses” (149). In his need and yearning, just looking at the houses on nearby Iona moves him to his first feeling of sympathy with the Highlands: “I turned in to sleep . . . a little comforted, perhaps, by having said good-night to my next neighbours, the people of Iona” (149). When he loses all his English money, he loses a major token of Lowland Whiggishness. No longer asserting himself as “the rightful heir of an estate” with English money and a title to his name, he feels merely a lad “starving on an isle at the extreme end of the wild Highlands” (150). When David discovers that Earraid is merely a tidal islet that connects with the shore twice daily, we get

22 In failing to enlist the help of passing fishers (151-2), and later explaining to the fishers from Iona that he does not speak Gaelic, which “might have been Greek and Hebrew for me” (154), Stevenson further demonstrates how truly removed David is from the Highlands.
an intimation of the gradual breakdown of his feeling of difference in the world of the Highlands. He will come to realize that his country not only includes, but is epitomized by the Highlands, the heart of eighteenth-century Scotland, which will, by the end of the novel, come to feel more like home to him than anywhere else in Scotland.

After David makes his way from Earraid to the Ross of Mull, he discovers that Alan has survived the wreck and left instructions to meet him in Torosay. When David tells his host how he had imagined himself marooned, he thinks that a "south-country man would certainly have laughed," but "this old gentleman ... heard me all through with nothing but gravity and pity" (158). Given food and shelter and made to feel as if he is supping in a palace, David thinks that "If these are the wild Highlanders, I could wish my own folk wilder" (159). He still feels separate from the northern Scots, but he feels gratitude and admiration for them.

Setting out for Torosay, he gradually recognizes the intimate connection between the landscape and the people. The tie is so strong that even the blind know their way; as David's sightless guide tells him, "his stick was eyes enough for an eagle":

‘In the Isle of Mull, at least,’ says he, ‘where I knew every stone and heather-bush by mark of head. See, now,’ he said, striking right and left, as if to make sure, ‘down there a burn is running; and at the head of it there stands the bit of a small hill with a stone cocked upon the top of that; and it’s hard at the foot of the hill, that the way runs by to Torosay; and the way here, being for droves, is

23 Critics who regard Kidnapped as a romance-adventure naturally see this Earraid scene differently. While Kiely admits that “the incident reaches a most un-Defoe-like conclusion” (85), he does not realize that the scene is entirely unromantic in its mirroring of the psychological, cultural and political gap between a Lowlander Whig and the Jacobite Highlands. Instead, Kiely insists on reading the chapter as an example of illusion versus reality, and concludes that nature provides an illusion of danger here for the hero to “see all around,” upon which “it becomes innocuous, almost cooperative with the will of the protagonist,” thus revealing that even nature has an illusory self as well as a real self which is “bland and malleable” (85). Such a reading is wholly unsupported by textual evidence, save that David calls his notion of Earraid as an island “my pitiful illusion” (155).
plainly trodden, and will show grassy through the heather.)
I had to own he was right in every feature, and told my wonder.  (165)

David notes “the sea in all this part running deep into the mountains and winding about their roots. It makes the country strong to hold and difficult to travel, but full of prodigious wild and dreadful prospects” (172). The odd use of “roots” in connection with mountains suggests all the more strongly the tie between the Highlanders and their surroundings, their ancestry and culture. David observes how the landscape makes the country of the Highlanders “strong to hold”; he himself must now “avoid Whigs, Campbells, and the ‘red-soldiers’” (172), and pretend to be a “Jacobite agent” (173). Unlike in the Lowlands, then, the people not only love the land and live off it, but use it to save their lives from the invading redcoats.

It is fittingly in the pivotal Chapter 17 of the novel, “The Death of the Red Fox,” in which Campbell is murdered and Alan suspected, that Stevenson offers the most telling sign of David’s embrace of the traditions, politics, and especially the landscape of the Highlands.

It was near noon before we set out; a dark day with clouds, and the sun shining upon little patches. The sea was here very deep and still, and had scarce a wave upon it . . . The mountains on either side were high, rough and barren, very black and gloomy in the shadow of the clouds, but all silver-laced with little water-courses where the sun shone upon them. It seemed a hard country, this of Appin, for people to care as much about as Alan did.  (181)

David’s thoughts about the difficult landscape elegantly set up the scene that immediately follows:

There was but one thing to mention. A little after we had started, the sun shone upon a little moving clump of scarlet close in along the waterside to the north. It was much of the same red as soldiers’ coats; every now and then, too, there came little sparks and lightnings, as though the sun had struck upon bright steel.
I asked my boatman what it should be; and he answered he supposed it was some of the red soldiers coming from Fort William into Appin, against the poor tenantry of the country. Well, it was a sad sight to me; and whether it was because of my thoughts of Alan, or from something prophetic in my bosom, although this was but the second time I had seen King George’s troops, I had no
goodwill to them. (182)

Early in the novel, he had seen a regiment of English soldiers in Edinburgh, and had felt proud as a Whig Lowlander. Now the soldiers are a “clump of scarlet,” an invasive presence akin to a bleeding wound running through the landscape; their flashing swords betoken violence. David’s description of them is rueful, even hostile, as his opposition of “the red soldiers” to “the poor tenantry” indicates. In three paragraphs, Stevenson deftly shows through his use of natural landscape imagery how David has gone from puzzlement about the Highlanders’ love of their country to resentment of the redcoats he had once felt like cheering.

The shift of David’s sympathies is completed in the next few pages. He resolves his doubts about rejoining Alan as Colin Roy Campbell and his entourage appear, “I made up my mind (for no reason that I can tell) to go through with my adventure” (184). But his subconscious reasons have been communicated to the reader primarily through landscape imagery, as well as his sympathy for the Highland peasants he has met and admiration for Alan’s pride and devotion to his people. When he asks Campbell and his company the way to Aucharn, David identifies himself as “an honest subject of King George, owing no man and fearing no man,” but these words are quickly turned on their head when the Red Fox is shot and killed moments later (185). David spies the murderer and chases him up the hillside, but is soon taken to be an accomplice, and has to run for his life. It is Alan Breck, rising up from the landscape, who saves him; the long escape across moor and mountain in the rest of the novel is here anticipated:

He gave me no salutation; indeed it was no time for civilities; only ‘Come!’ says he, and set off running along the side of the mountain towards Balachulish; and I, like a sheep, to follow him.

Now we ran among the birches; now stooping behind low humps upon the mountain-side; now crawling on all fours among the heather. The pace was
deadly: my heart seemed bursting against my ribs; and I had neither time to think nor breath to speak with. Only I remember seeing with wonder, that Alan every now and then would straighten himself to his full height and look back; and every time he did so, there came a great far-away cheering and crying of the soldiers. Quarter of an hour later, Alan stopped, clapped down flat in the heather, and turned to me. 

‘Now,’ said he, ‘it’s earnest. Do as I do, for your life.’

And at the same speed, but now with infinitely more precaution, we traced back again across the mountain-side by the same way that we had come, only perhaps higher; till at last Alan threw himself down in the upper wood of Lettermore, where I had found him at the first, and lay, with his face in the bracken, panting like a dog.

My own sides so ached, my head so swam, my tongue so hung out of my mouth with heat and dryness, that I lay beside him like one dead. (188-9)

We see David, instructed by a Jacobite rebel, becoming part of the Highland landscape: like a “sheep,” (Alan is akin to a “dog”) as they seek to outwit their pursuers. With his face in the heather (Alan is in the bracken), he embodies a physical attachment to the Highland landscape that once seemed so alien and hostile. If we appreciate this aspect of the novel, we can see it not as a romantic-adventure about a chase through Scottish hills and dales, but as a work dealing with David’s maturation into full acceptance of his identity as a Scot.

Alan trenchantly expresses David’s transformation: ‘we’re in the Hielands, David; and when I tell ye to run, take my word and run. Nae doubt it’s a hard thing to skulk and starve in the heather, but it’s harder yet to lie shackled in a red-coat prison’” (196), and David staunchly accepts his new identity: “we sat again and ate and drank, in a place whence we could see the sun going down into a field of great, wild and houseless mountains, such as I was now condemned to wander in with my companion” (198). Soon, however, given food and shelter in the home of the man fated to hang for Campbell’s murder and blessed by his wife, David sees that “Though, upon its face, that country appeared to be a desert, yet there were huts and houses of the people, of which we must have passed
more than twenty, hidden in quiet places of the hills" (212).

David becomes increasingly aware of the interweaving between life, culture, and landscapes as he experiences the Highlands. In this chapter, “The Flight in the Heather: The Rocks” (the chapter title focuses on the landscape, as many of the chapters do), David follows Alan across a river, nearly made sick by the dizzying jumps from rock to rock with spray “and the river dinning upon all sides” (214). Pulled up to safety by Alan, climbing rock faces, David bonds with the landscape, as it were, and in the process becomes a man, as Alan notes: “To be feared of a thing and yet to do it, is what makes the prettiest kind of a man. And then there was water there, and water’s a thing that daunts even me” (216). David states, upon reaching the top rock, “I saw why we had come there; for the two rocks, being both somewhat hollow on the top and sloping one to the other, made a kind of dish or saucer, where as many as three or four men might have lain hidden” (216). David gives himself over to the landscape – to the very earth in fact: “a little peaty earth had drifted in between the top of the two rocks, and some bracken grew there, to be a bed to me; the last thing I heard was still the crying of the eagles” (217-8). David wakes, and finds the “valley was as clear as in a picture,” but the redcoats are everywhere, “planted . . . on places of command” (219). Now associating himself with the Highland landscape, David finds it “strange indeed to see this valley, which had lain so solitary in the hour of dawn, bristling with arms and dotted with the red-coats and breeches” (219). Alan and David, motionless and ever-vigilant, must wait – or ‘birstle,’ as Alan says in Scottish – “on the bare top of a rock, like scones upon a girdle; the sun beat upon us cruelly; the rock grew so heated, a man could scarce endure the touch of it; and the little patch of earth and fern, which kept cooler, was only large enough for one at a time” (219). They are in effect part of the landscape, so much so that it “sent a cold thrill into my vitals,” David says, to “see the soldiers pike
their bayonets among the heather” (220), almost as if they were striking him. “The clipping tones and the odd sing-song in which” a soldier speaks “the right English speech” (220) startle him, so accustomed has he become to Highland speech. More and more, David is becoming a Scot, not an Anglophile Whig loyal to King George who lives in Scotland. When they slip by the guards, the pair rely on their “swift judgment not only of the lie of the whole country, but of the solidity of every stone on which we must set foot” (223), as well as quickness and courage. Both the sense of place and the details of environment – the elements of landscape which Stevenson uses to relate the feelings and actions of his characters to his readers – are here perceived by the characters themselves.

Throughout, of course, Stevenson has shown the landscape as both threat and haven, and the water, previously seen as an obstacle and a danger, is now presented as a means of salvation as David and Alan plunge into a rushing burn to bathe, drink, and even make oatmeal, that “chief stand-by of those who have taken to the heather” (223). David has not only taken to the heather but the heather has taken him in, providing shelter and a means of “bonding” to his fellow Scots and his native land:

The way was very intricate, lying up the steep sides of mountains and along the brows of cliffs; clouds had come in with the sunset, and the night was dark and cool; so that I walked without much fatigue, but in continual fear of falling and rolling down the mountains, and with no guess at our direction.

The moon rose at last and found us still on the road; it was in its last quarter, and was long beset with clouds; but after a while shone out and showed me many dark heads of mountains, and was reflected far underneath us on the narrow arm of a sea-loch.

At this sight we both paused: I struck with wonder to find myself so high and walking (as it seemed to me) upon clouds: Alan to make sure of his direction.

Seemingly he was well pleased, and he must certainly have judged us out of ear-shot of all our enemies; for throughout the rest of our night-march he beguiled the way with whistling of many tunes, warlike, merry, plaintive; reel tunes that
made the foot go faster; tunes of my own south country that made me fain to be home from my adventures; and all these, on the great, dark, desert mountains, making company upon the way. (224)

The "very intricate" way home is thus personal as well as physical, preparing us for the time when David will have to choose whether to return to "my own south country" or throw in his lot with Alan. The pull of the latter is made clear in David's "wonder" and exhilaration in Alan's company. In Alan's singing "tunes of my own south country," we get a poignant reminder of the link between Highland and Lowland, often divisive, yet mutually dependent, that is now part and parcel of David's identity and of the Scottish national identity he embodies.

Despite all such touches of intimate connection to the landscape and the many gestures of intimacy with the enterprising, wily, and loyal Alan, David still thinks of leaving Alan, who imperils his life as well as being "a burden on my purse" (234). But David recognizes that Alan had "no thought of the sort... He believed he was serving, helping, and protecting me" (234). When Alan and David next face a moor after seven hours of "incessant, hard travelling brought us early in the morning to the end of a range of mountains" (236), and mist covers the "piece of low, broken, desert

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24 In Chapter 21, David and Alan reach a cleft in a mountain, and live there for five days, "happily," with David looking out in "continual wonder and pleasure" on the sea- Loch that divides Mamore and Appin. The symbols of the Highlands are again the pair's berths, with the two "making our bed of heather bushes which we cut for that purpose, and covering ourselves with Alan's great coat" (226), tying David even more closely to the landscape. Alan explains how, by placing a button from his coat on a burnt cross, with sprigs of birch and fir, the Jacobite in whose house window he shall place the sign will understand where Alan is; the button suggests 'The son of Duncan is in the heather, and has need of me,' and the rare birch and pine sprigs will indicate Corrynakiegh, one of the few places in the area with such foliage (229). When David asks why a simple note would not suffice, he is told that the man cannot read. Clearly, this section shows how Highlanders - much like the blind man earlier - can read the landscape, so intimately are they connected with it, and that they depend on it not only for survival and protection, but even communication (Alan makes a quill from a bird feather, and ink from gunpowder and river water to write a message [231]; the heath is especially important and is even used for helping to tell time).
land, which we must now cross” (236), David delights Alan by agreeing to strike out across the moor in the daylight, away from Appin and eastward to Edinburgh. Alan teases him that sometimes “‘ye are altogether too canny and Whiggish to be company for a gentleman like me; but there come other whiles when ye show yoursel’ a mettle spark; and it’s then, David, that I love ye like a brother’” (237). “Spark” – courage, initiative, and intelligence, especially as relating to the land, are the Highland virtues, and David’s pledge, though given after some hesitation, to stay with Alan and brave together “that country lying as waste as the sea” again proves that he is being drawn towards the Scottish values represented by the Highlands, its people and their ways, and, last but not least, its countryside. The open expanse of moor is “red with heather; much of the rest broken up with bogs and hags and peaty pools; some had been burnt black in a heath fire; and in another place there was quite a forest of dead firs, standing like skeletons” (238). David is descending – “We went down accordingly into the waste” (238) – into the bowels of the earth, the most hellish landscape he will travel through, with Alan. Even though he at times regrets his commitment to Alan and the arduous, death-like trek across the moor, this part of their adventures in the Highlands seals their bond despite the occasional frictions between them.

Unconsciously, however, David does express his misgivings about throwing in his lot with an “outlaw” on the run. Falling asleep on his watch, he allows his friend and himself to be nearly caught by the English:

it behoved us to keep in the hollow parts of the moor, and when these turned aside from our direction to move upon its naked face with infinite care. Sometimes, for half an hour together, we must crawl from one heather bush to another, as hunters do when they are hard upon the deer. It was a clear day again, with a blazing sun; the water in the brandy bottle was soon gone; and altogether, if I had guessed what it would be to crawl half the time upon my belly and to walk much of the rest stooping nearly to the knees, I should certainly have held back from such a killing
Toiling and resting and toiling again, we wore away the morning; and about noon lay down in a thick bush of heather to sleep. Alan took the first watch; and it seemed to me I had scarce closed my eyes before I was shaken up to take the second. We had no clock to go by; and Alan stuck a sprig of heath in the ground to serve instead; so that as soon as the shadow of the bush should fall so far to the east, I might know how to rouse him. But I was by this time so weary that I could have slept twelve hours at a stretch; I had the taste of sleep in my throat; my joints slept even when my mind was waking; the hot smell of the heather, and the drone of the wild bees, were like possets to me; and every now and again I would give a jump and find I had been dozing.

The last time I woke I seemed to come back from farther away, and thought the sun had taken a great start in the heavens. I looked at the sprig of heath, and at that I could have cried aloud: for I saw I had betrayed my trust. My head was nearly turned with fear and shame; and at what I saw, when I looked around me on the moor, my heart was like dying in my body. For sure enough, a body of horse-soldiers had come down during my sleep, and were drawing near to us from the south-east, spread out in the shape of a fan and riding their horses to and fro in the deep parts of the heather. (238-9)

It is the centrality of the heather as an image and as part of the landscape that is of interest here. Heather and heath are used almost interchangeably as a primary representation of the Highland world. The more David is immersed in it, the closer he grows to it and to Alan.

The number of uses to which the heather is applied in the novel is remarkable, from communication and connection, to refuge, survival, and time-telling – always in order to survive and keep ahead of the invading redcoats. If one landscape image can be said to best encapsulate the novel, it is heather, that “native heath” – the only world and aspect of the Highlands David truly comes to know during his gruelling trek to Edinburgh. The heather in its broadest sense is of course Alan’s world, and has been before his meeting with David. Hiding in the moors and mountains (132), he is described as being “‘here and awa’; here to-day and gone to-morrow: a fair heather-cat.
He might be glowering at the two of us out of yon whin-bush, and I wouldna wonder!"" (175)

Subtly, the heath and heather instill a sense of place in us. But rather than having his characters arise from the landscape, as in *Treasure Island*, Stevenson has Alan and David subsumed by it, shrubbery so sparse and meagre, yet so connected with the Highland world that it strongly suggests something of the profound, unspoken bond developing between David and Alan, and marks the novel as more sophisticated in its evocation of character consciousness through landscape than *Treasure Island*.

Still, the Highland world that the heath and heather represent is a world of bloodshed and death: "the least misfortune might betray us; and now and again, when a grouse rose out of the heather with a clap of wings, we lay as still as the dead and were afraid to breathe" (241). The ambivalence of the heath and heather of the moor, as a microcosm of the life-and-death world of the Highlands, its people threatened by an alien army and forced to rely mainly on their bonds of kinship, is perhaps best suggested when David shows his affinity for the land, even after the gruelling escape through moor wasteland, and shares the Highlanders' sense of oppression: "When we stopped to breathe, and I had time to see all about me, the clearness and sweetness of the night, the shapes of the hills like things asleep, and the fire dwindling away behind us, like a bright spot in the midst of the moor, anger would come upon me in a clap that I must still drag myself in agony and eat the dust like a worm" (243).

The Cluny episode in Chapter 22 deepens our sense of the psychological as well as physical importance of the land in this novel. "Cluny's Cage" is an intricate Jacobite hideout with tree trunks serving as steps and the refuge itself made up of a tree trunk barricade, an earth floor, wattle and

25 This passage is quoted in connection with the definition of "heather-cat" in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which states its meaning as "a cat living wild and roaming among the heather; hence fig. applied to a person"; thus Alan is related again to a creature of the landscape.
moss walls, a cliff-face fireplace, and a living tree as centre beam for the roof. The entire house “half hung, half stood in that steep, hill-side thicket, like a wasps’ nest in a green hawthorn” (248). This network of caves and underground chambers is inextricably linked with the intensely communal Highland world. But David’s initiation into this world is a mixed, even harrowing process: by no means is his embrace of the Highland culture smooth or simple. His fear of the landscape and the world of the Highlands, even though he is becoming more and more immersed in it, never fades completely, but ultimately he is afraid for himself because of his fever and also his subconscious, terrifying anxiety about his gradual shift from loyalty to the Crown to a sympathy with the Highland rebels.  But after David has survived another of his near-death experiences and accepts his sympathy with the Jacobites, he takes another step in his maturity and faces down Cluny in a complicated argument about gambling and honour.

Buoyed by this sense of self-assertion and resentful of Alan’s gambling losses, which included his money, David begins again to think about leaving Alan, and when Alan asks “‘Are we to part?’” the question, says David, “pierced me like a sword, and seemed to lay bare my private

26 When David weakens, he relates his deathlike state to the only world he knows, the Highland landscape which has already been associated with possible death: “I had been dead-heavy before, and now I felt a kind of dreadful lightness, which would not suffer me to walk. I drifted like a gossamer, the ground seemed to me a cloud, the hills a feather-weight, the air to have a current, like a running burn, which carried me to and fro. With all that, a sort of horror of despair sat on my mind, so that I could have wept at my own helplessness” (246). Note that David’s metaphor for his delirium eventually settles on water imagery, perhaps harkening back to his fear of the sea as a deathscape, and relating also to Stevenson’s use of the seascape as a terrifying place of near-death and isolation in Treasure Island, among other works. Sandison notes that this reference is a culmination of the desert-land imagery of the moor and the many references to David’s despair (202). It is possible that David’s despair and collapse here “is not entirely physical, the general vacancy of things weighing heavily on him” (202), but the culmination of David’s despairing guilt over his affinity for Alan and the Highlands comes, as shown below, in the chapter where they quarrel in the rain-soaked heather, and David dreams of deathly scenes.
disloyalty" (263). As the argument worsens, David realizes the extent to which his bond with Alan is based on his newly formed affinity for the Highlands, a part of Scotland he now knows to be half of his "divided heart" (261).

But still the unspoken animosity between two friends is reflected in the landscape through which they trek:

for the best part of three nights [we] travelled on eerie mountains and among the well-heads of wild rivers; often buried in mist, almost continually blown and rained upon, and not once cheered by any glimpse of sunshine. By day, we lay and slept in the drenching heather; by night, incessantly clambered upon break-neck hills and among rude crags. We often wandered; we were often so involved in fog, that we must lie quiet till it lightened. A fire was never to be thought of. Our only food was drammach and a portion of cold meat that we had carried from the Cage; and as for drink, Heaven knows we had no want of water.

This was a dreadful time, rendered the more dreadful by the gloom of the weather and the country. I was never warm; my teeth chattered in my head; I was troubled with a very sore throat, such as I had on the isle; I had a painful stitch in my side, which never left me; and when I slept in my wet bed, with the rain beating above and the mud oozing below me, it was to live over again in fancy the worst part of my adventures - to see the tower of Shaws lit by lightning, Ransome carried below on the men's backs, Shuan dying on the round-house floor, or Colin Campbell grasping at the bosom of his coat. From such broken slumbers, I would be aroused in the gloaming, to sit up in the same puddle where I had slept, and sup cold drammach; the rain driving sharp in my face or running down my back in icy trickles; the mist enfoldings us like as in a gloomy chamber - or, perhaps, if the wind blew, falling suddenly apart and showing us the gulf of some dark valley where the streams were crying aloud.

The sound of an infinite number of rivers came up from all round. In this steady rain the springs of the mountain were broken up; every glen gushed water like a cistern; every stream was in high spate, and had filled and overflowed its channel. During our night tramps, it was solemn to hear the voice of them below in the valleys, now booming like thunder, now with an angry cry. I could well understand the story of the Water Kelpie, that demon of the streams, who is fabled to keep wailing and roaring at the ford until the coming of the doomed traveller. Alan I saw believed it, or half believed it; and when the cry of the river rose more than usually sharp, I was little surprised (though, of course, I would still be shocked) to see him cross himself in the manner of the Catholics.

During all these horrid wanderings we had no familiarity, scarcely even that of speech. The truth is that I was sickening for my grave, which is my best
excuse. But besides that I was of an unforgiving disposition from my birth, slow to take offence, slower to forget it, and now incensed both against my companion and myself. For the best part of two days he was unweariedly kind; silent, indeed, but always ready to help, and always hoping (as I could very well see) that my displeasure would blow by. For the same length of time I stayed in myself, nursing my anger, roughly refusing his services, and passing him over with my eyes as if he had been a bush or a stone. (266-68)

When one considers the constant, close relation between the consciousness of David and Alan and their environment, one can see that nearly all the landscape imagery in this passage subtly reflects the depressing silence between Alan and David and, by extension, the two halves of the “divided heart” of eighteenth-century Scotland. The lack of warmth and the oppressive gloom are continually noted and when David says, “This was a dreadful time, rendered the more dreadful by the gloom of the weather and the country,” we see that he now associates the miserable weather and forbidding landscape with the crisis in his friendship with Alan. Even the heather, symbol of the Highlands and their hidden comforts, is “drenching” when they sleep on it, representing their slowly sinking relationship. And yet Alan is David’s only real friend, and together they have helped each other escape their enemies and negotiate the landscape. Alan is the Highland half of David’s “divided heart,” and contemplating separation from him, David says that “I was sickening for my grave”.

When he wakes and sits “in the same puddle where I had slept” and the rain is “driving sharp in my face or running down my back in icy trickles; the mist enfolding us like as in a gloomy chamber,” the feeling of utter gloom and obsession of death overcomes him, and the landscape does nothing to cheer him. The “sound of infinite rivers” seems to warn of danger, even death: “it was solemn to hear the voice of them below in the valleys, now booming like thunder, now with an angry cry.” David can now understand the tale of the Water Kelpie, that demon of streams who wails and roars until a doomed traveller comes. This deathly water imagery, combined with Highland folklore to
further emphasize the relationship between landscape and community, topography and tradition, also inspiries a renewed awe in the life and power of the river: "Alan I saw believed it, or half believed it; and when the cry of the river rose more than usually sharp, I was little surprised . . . to see him cross himself in the manner of the Catholics." Thus the Water Kelpie, a deathly figure, inspiries awe of the life and power of the Highland rivers. 27 Perhaps no other short passage in Stevenson's novels better exemplifies the subtle, essential life-and-death ambivalence of water imagery, used to show the humbleness of man before the awful indifference of landscape and nature. 28

Associating his feelings with the volatile atmosphere, David sees that Alan was hoping "my displeasure would blow by," but for two days, "I stayed in myself," seeing Alan reduced to the base elements of the landscape, "passing him over with my eyes as if he had been a bush or a stone" (268). But as David tries to remain as "cold as ice" (268), like the mist evaporates, Alan's dark mood finally breaks and, happy again, "he forgave himself for the affair at Cluny's" (269). Alan "thought no more upon the Kelpie, and was in high good spirits" (269), but David is still struggling

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27 This is a literal example of "genius loci" or spirit of place, of which Stevenson is such a good practitioner. But the importance of this genius loci, however, lies in the "genius" and not the place, in the sense of "genius" as a spirit which influences a person for good or for evil. The power of Scottish streams was vividly observed by Stevenson in his 1887 essay "Pastoral" (Memories and Portraits, v. 12, cf. pp. 72-4), written not long after Kidnapped.

28 The best example of the ambivalent use of river imagery previous to Kidnapped can be found in Stevenson's 1877-8 An Inland Voyage, an account of his canoe trip on French rivers. In one section, he notes that the "river was swollen with the long rains. . . . The water was yellow and turbulent, swung with an angry eddy among half-submerged willows, and made an angry clatter among stony shores. . . . the river was as cruel as it was strong and cold, and how death lurked in the eddy underneath the willows. . . . If this lovely and beautiful river were, indeed, a thing of death's contrivance . . . " (v. 1, 68-9, 69, 71). Later in that book, the pleasant tranquillity of the river reduces Stevenson to a creature of the landscape, as Alan and David are often referred to: "all the time, with the river running and the shores changing upon either hand, I kept counting my strokes and forgetting the hundreds, the happiest animal in France" (133).
with his resentment: although the night is now "clear and cold, with a touch in the air like frost, and a northerly wind that blew the clouds away and made the stars bright. . . . for me, the change of weather came too late" (269). At this stage he is mired in despair and remorse, but all he is aware of is his physical condition: "I was dead weary, deadly sick and full of pains and shiverings; the chill of the wind went through me, and the sound of it confused my ears" (269). It is fitting, then, that at this time Alan chooses to taunt David's original, false loyalties. "'Whig' was the best name he had to give me. 'Here,' he would say, 'here's a dub for ye to jump, my Whiggie! I ken you're a fine jumper!' And so on; all the time with a gibing voice and face" (269). Sensing his silence to be caused by his guilty feelings, David begins to fantasize about a martyr's death as a creature of the landscape who will die in Alan's world and so have the final taunt:

I knew it was my own doing, and no one else's; but I was too miserable to repent. I felt I could drag myself but little farther, pretty soon, I must lie down and die on these wet mountains like a sheep or a fox, and my bones must whiten like those of a beast. My head was light, perhaps, but I began to love the prospect; I began to glory in the thought of such a death, alone in the desert, with the wild eagles besiegling my last moments. Alan would repent then, I thought; he would remember, when I was dead, how much he owed me, and the remembrance would be torture. So I went like a sick, silly, and bad-hearted schoolboy, feeding my anger against fellow-man . . . And at each of Alan's taunts, I hugged myself. 'Ah!' thinks I to myself, 'I have a better taunt in readiness; when I lie down and die, you will feel it like a buffet in your face; ah, what a revenge! ah, how you will regret your ingratitude and cruelty!' (269-70)

Spiteful and blinded by self-hatred, David wilfully aligns himself with the redcoats he had once admired – but in fact does no longer – when he retorts: "'You have been chased in the field by the grown men of my party; it seems a poor kind of pleasure to outface a boy. Both the Campbells and the Whigs have beaten you; you have run before them like a hare. It behoves [sic] you to speak of them as your betters.' . . . Alan stood quite still, the tails of his great-coat clapping behind him in the
wind” (272). Alan’s great-coat, that symbol of Jacobite pride and Highland society, blowing in the wind behind him, is a menacing response to David’s silly taunt. In his fit of pique, David seems to want to reject his friendship with Alan as well as his hard won but not fully conscious realization that he embodies the two worlds of Scotland. He cannot even fight Alan without using the fighting techniques that Alan has taught him. But when Alan admits that he insulted David to provoke a fight, and then draws his sword only to throw it from him and fall to the ground, David responds sympathetically, giving in to the deep friendship that has grown between him and Alan and to the cumulative impact of his experiences in the Highlands.

At this the last of my anger oozed all out of me; and I found myself only sick, and sorry, and blank, and wondering at myself. I would have given the world to take back what I had said; but a word once spoken, who can recapture it? I minded me of all Alan’s kindness and courage in the past, how he had helped and cheered and borne with me in our evil days; and then recalled my own insults, and saw that I had lost for ever that doughty friend. At the same time, the sickness that hung upon me seemed to redouble, and the pang in my side was like a sword for sharpness. I thought I must have swooned where I stood. (273)

Realizing that a “cry for help” is more effective than an apology, he “put my pride away from me,” sobbingly admits his near-death state, and brings Alan, almost weeping himself, to his side once more (274). In trekking across the Highlands with a Jacobite rebel, David has undergone a political and social education, and a test of physical, emotional, and mental strength, with Alan Breck at last embraced as his one true friend. When David returns to the Lowlands with his Highlander friend, he reconciles, at least in himself, the two halves of the “divided heart” of Scotland.  

29 It is only a ridiculous misreading that could lead Kiely to state that the natural landscape, for all its atmospheric importance in Kidnapped, is not permitted to pose an ultimate threat to the characters. . . . Once the [imperfect perception of David, as epitomized in the incident on Earraid] has been
Near the end of their adventures, David must convalesce with a Jacobite family while Alan hides in a little wood nearby, refusing to leave him. When they set off again, close to Edinburgh now, the landscape reflects their renewed friendship, David’s peace of mind, and his delight at returning to the Lowlands:

The twenty-second we lay in a heather bush on the hill-side in Uam Var, within view of a herd of deer, the happiest ten hours of sleep in a fine, breathing sunshine and on bone-dry ground, that I have ever tasted . . . That night we struck Allan Water, and followed it down; and coming to the edge of the hills saw . . . the moon shining on the Links of Forth (288); in Allan Water . . . we found a little sandy islet . . . that would just cover us if we lay flat . . . It behoved to lie close and keep silent. But the sand of the little isle was sun-warm, the green plants gave us shelter for our heads, we had food and drink in plenty; and to crown all, we were within sight of safety. (288-9)

He adds that “It was altogether a right pleasant sight to me; and I could not take my fill of gazing at these comfortable, green, cultivated hills and the busy people both of the field and sea” (293).

corrected, the danger disappears and the young hero is able to control and toy with topography . . . For all the fatigue and discomforts caused by the rough terrain and the fickle Scotch climate during their flight in the heather, David and Alan have a rather whimsical time of it, whistling and joking and treating the dangers of man and nature with a casual disregard. Throughout their flight, while hotly pursued by semi-barbarous Campbells out for revenge, and troops of redcoats with a warrant for their arrest, the two heroes insist upon acting like vacationers on a walking tour of the Highlands (84-5).

Nothing could be further from the truth, as has been shown. David and Alan bake in the sun, are often compared to wild animals, David nears death more than once, is filled with despondency at the sight of the moor ahead of them, and the two fight often. The landscape is far from a threat, because it acts instead as an important symbol of the Highland world, a landscape that shapes David’s awareness of that world. The landscape is not “almost cooperative with the will of the protagonist” (85), but illuminative of the protagonist’s growing (sub)consciousness of himself as a Scot and the Jacobite Highlands as an inextricable half of Scotland.

30 Stevenson, as I have shown throughout this thesis, was well aware that landscape affected people’s moods and thoughts, and that landscape in literature had to be altered to suit a character’s mindset. (For example, the air of despondency instilled in David by the sight of a dreary landscape is similar to Stevenson’s own experience in the Cévennes, as recorded in *Travels with a Donkey in
He and Alan are still fugitives and must continue to hide, first in a small wood near the beach (300), and then "lying in a den on the sea-shore" (302). As with the bleak Highlands, the landscape of the lush Lowlands – also their own land – protects them.

Even after he is taken in by his countrymen and legally restored to his fortune, David has some trouble readjusting to his home: "I had been so long wandering with lawless people, and making my bed upon the hills and under the bare sky, that to sit once more in a clean, covered house, and to talk amicably with a gentleman in broadcloth, seemed mighty elevations" (314). He cannot help remembering the many days on hill and heath with Alan, an experience of the other Scotland

_The Cévennes_ [1878-9]: "all was cold and grey about our onward path. An infinity of little country by-roads led hither and thither among the fields. It was the most pointless labyrinth. ... The failing light, the waning colour, the naked, unhomely, stony country through which I was travelling, threw me into some despondency" [v. 1, 223]). In a March 16, 1885 letter to P.G. Hamerton, regarding his recently published book _Landscape_ (about landscape painting), Stevenson commented on a section in Ch. VIII in which Hamerton wrote: "'Homer is not a picturesque author in the conscious modern way. He does not set himself to describe and produce effects, does not study the art of word-painting ... There is, in his poetry, a frequently expressed sense of contact with the natural world which, if not quite the same thing as picturesque enthusiasm, is at least equally refreshing!'" (Letter 1409, footnote 2) Stevenson's comment on this is: "you know, that is just what I have come to think landscape ought to be in literature; so there we should be at odds" (Letter 1409). Thus Stevenson states that he wishes to describe and produce effects of landscape in his writing, and in _Kidnapped_ he does so in order to emphasis the political, social, and historical importance of the Jacobite Highland world in eighteenth-century Scotland. There is no doubt, too, that Stevenson wanted to move away as much as possible from any influence of the romantic use of landscape (to inspire contemplation, to prettify a scene, and to generally adorn a passage of writing with idyllic imagery), which would not subtly relate the consciousness of a character. In Chapter 17 of _Kidnapped_, after David's crucial view of the redcoat soldiers as an invasive, blood-like sight (182), Stevenson wrote a word that seemed horribly out-of-place to his friend Edmund Gosse: "'although there were of course plenty of little things in it not said exactly as Balfour would have said them, there was ... one phrase that actually shocked me. That was in the Appin part, "ferny dells". This strikes me as purely post-Wordsworthian'" (Letter 1656, footnote 1). Stevenson replied on July 17, 1886: "You were right about "ferny dells": damn, it's like Claribel's po'try. I shall change it to ferny howes, which would be unexceptional" (Letter 1656). Stevenson is aiming for a realistic retelling of David's words, thoughts, and feelings, and no landscape imagery couched in romantic terms will do; only landscape described in a way that reveals inner feelings and a maturing consciousness will aptly reflect and shape David's growing awareness of the Jacobite Highland world.
that matured him beyond measure:

So the beggar in the ballad had come home; and when I lay down that night on the kitchen chests, I was a man of means and had a name in the country. Alan and Torrance and Rankeillor slept and snored on their hard beds; but for me who had lain out under heaven and upon dirt and stones so many days and nights, and often with an empty belly, and in fear of death, this good change in my case unmanned me more than any of the former evil ones; and I lay till dawn, looking at the fire on the roof and planning the future. (335)

By now David’s friendship with Alan is unmixed with any uneasiness. It is Alan who tricks David’s uncle into confessing his crimes, thus not only bringing the adventure to a just conclusion as in a typical romance, but also demonstrating that David has had no loyal Lowland friends or family – only Alan, a Jacobite rebel of the Highlands whom David would once never have trusted but who has proved a true friend, and brought him back to his home and fortune. His overdue appreciation is nevertheless mixed with lingering scruples: “So far as I was concerned myself, I had come to port; but I still had Alan, to whom I was so much beholden, on my hands; and I felt besides a heavy charge in the matter of the murder and James of the Glens” (336). (In Catriona, the sequel to Kidnapped, David acts to resolve such scruples and the uneasiness that accompanies them.) Most critics have taken the ending of the novel as a sentimental, bittersweet parting between Alan and David, but the separation of the two friends is also the separation of two warring halves of eighteenth-century Scotland. Neither man denies this separation, dramatizing thus a communal desire for reconciliation and unity of the Scottish nation. When David and Alan take their final walk together, their faces are turned “for the city of Edinburgh,” the heart of Scotland, its ancient capital and its metropolis but also the gateway to the Highlands. The harsh long odyssey across heath and hill brought the two of them together, and the memory of a friendship forged in landscape lends the conclusion such poignancy as the two men, two symbols of Scotland’s as yet unintegrated national
character, sadly head off in different directions:

Alan and I went slowly forward upon our way, having little heart either to walk or speak. The same thought was uppermost in both, that we were near the time of our parting; and remembrance of all the bygone days sat upon us sorely. . . . you could feel very well that we were nearer tears than laughter.

We came the by-way over the hill of Costorphine; and when we got near to the place called Rest-and-be-Thankful, and looked down on Costorphine bogs and over to the city and the castle on the hill, we both stopped, for we both knew without a word said that we had come to where our ways parted. . . . then we stood a space, and looked over at Edinburgh in silence.

‘Well, good-bye,’ said Alan, and held out his left hand.

‘Good-bye,’ said I, and gave the hand a little grasp, and went off down hill.

Neither one of us looked the other in the face, nor so long as he was in my view did I take one back glance at the friend I was leaving. But as I went on my way to the city, I felt so lost and lonesome, that I could have found it in my heart to sit down by the dyke, and cry and weep like any baby.

It was coming near noon when I passed in by the West Kirk and the Grassmarket into the streets of the capital. The huge height of the buildings, running up to ten and fifteen stories, the narrow arched entries that continually vomited passengers, the wares of the merchants in their windows, the hubbub and endless stir, the foul smells and the fine clothes, and a hundred other particulars too small to mention, struck me into a kind of stupor of surprise, so that I let the crowd carry me to and fro; and yet all the time what I was thinking of was Alan at Rest-and-be-Thankful; and all the time (although you would think that I would not choose but be delighted with these braws and novelties) there was a cold gnawing in my inside like a remorse for something wrong.

The hand of Providence brought me in my drifting to the very doors of the British Linen Company’s bank. (339-41)

The two friends instinctively choose to part at the summit of a hill affording a view of Edinburgh, with a silent look at the city and allusions to each man’s “heart”. Without Alan and the Highland world he represents, David feels bereft and strangely guilty. His view of Edinburgh is far from uplifting, for his heart remains in the Highlands and his mind lingers on his adventures with Alan. David is no longer a North Briton; his homeland is Scotland, a Scotland best represented by the Highlands as personified particularly by Alan Stewart. Their separation brings about “a cold gnawing in my inside like a remorse for something wrong.” Among Stevenson critics only Ralph
Stewart expresses something like a full appreciation of the political resonance of the novel’s ending: “Kidnapped points up what is admirable about the doomed culture [of the Highlands], and it is the introduction of this tragic theme that changes the tone of the book” (30). As Stewart adds, David’s point of view, as narrator of the novel, is crucial, for he

is not only an outsider, but a natural enemy of the people he observes, identified in sentiment with the authority that will soon crush them. By public and social criteria he should feel pleased at the Highlanders’ defeat and, until the end of the novel, he persuades himself that he does so. Yet the defeat entails death for some of those who have helped him, and the destruction of what they value. Moreover, David himself has found much to admire in the Highland way of life . . . What is surprising, especially if one reads Kidnapped as merely an adventure story, is David’s state of mind at the end. If he were grieving only at being parted from Alan, one would expect his unhappiness to be less intense and different in kind. Why is he so thoroughly miserable? . . . And why does he feel ‘a cold gnawing in my inside like a remorse for something wrong,’ which seems allied to guilt? . . . As David walks into the capital city towards the British Linen Bank, symbol of the Whiggish, commercial world of the future, he is abandoning Alan and all he represents (31-2).31

My interest in this emphasis on the political complexity of the ending is not only in and for itself but in the light it throws on the book’s pre-occupation with David’s maturation as a man, which involves the achievement of a new understanding, gained in his adventures in the Highland landscape, of his identity as a Scotsman.32 With its sombre, melancholy overtones, its sense of tragic possibility, and

31 I differ with Stewart only with regard to the hindsight which he seems to feel Stevenson alludes to in David’s reaction. It is true that Stevenson’s and other Scots’ knowledge of the extinction of Jacobite culture and society after ‘45 makes the ending and even the whole book more poignant and affecting; it may even have influenced Stevenson to write Kidnapped in the first place. I believe I have shown, however, that David’s sadness and remorse is largely the expression of David’s personal struggle between his Lowland Whig values and his growing affinity for the Highlands.

32 Like David Balfour, who epitomizes by the end of the novel both the Highlands and Lowlands, Stevenson himself had an ambivalent reaction to his homeland (cf. Stott 104):

When I am at home, I feel a man from Glasgow to be something like a rival, a
its dramatization of David's poised awareness of these things, the ending takes on a distinct early modernist richness of suggestion reminiscent of such early modern masters as Conrad and James.

man from Barra to be more than half a foreigner. Yet let us meet in some far country, and, whether we hail from the braes of Manor or the braes of Mar, some ready-made affection joins us on the instant. . . . somewhere, deep down in the heart of each one of us, something yearns for the old land, and the old kindly people.

Of all the mysteries of the human heart, this is perhaps the most inscrutable. There is no special loveliness in that grey country, with its rainy, sea-beat archipelago; its fields of dark mountains; its unsightly places, black with coal; its treeless, sour, unfriendly looking cornlands; its quaint, grey, castled city, where the bells clash of a Sunday, and the wind squalls, and the salt showers fly and beat. . . . And though I think I would rather die elsewhere, yet in my heart of hearts I long to be buried among Scots clods. . . . And, Highland and Lowland, all our hearts are Scottish.

(\textit{The Silverado Squatters} [1882], v. 2, 471-3)
CHAPTER 3: “UNDECIPHERABLE BLACKNESS”

*The Master of Ballantrae* (1889)

I cannot remember to have raised my head or seen the moon or any of the heavenly bodies; my eyes were turned downward to the broad lamplit streets and to where the trees of the garden rustled together all night in undecipherable blackness; yet the sight of the outer world refreshed and cheered me; and the whole sorrow and burden of the night was at an end.

- “Memoirs of Himself” (1880)

Then the devil and Saranac suggested this denouement, and I joined the two ends in a day or two of constant feverish thought, and began to write. And now – I wonder if I have not gone too far with the fantastic. The elder brother is an INCUBUS; supposed to be killed at Culloden, he turns up again and bleeds the family of money; on that stopping he comes and lives with them, whence flows the real tragedy, the nocturnal duel of the brothers (very naturally and indeed, I think, inevitably arising) and second supposed death of the elder. Husband and wife now really make up, and then the cloven hoof appears.

- from a letter to Henry James, January 1888 (Letter 2001)

**Incubus** . . . 1. A feigned evil spirit or demon (originating in personified representations of the nightmare) supposed to descend upon persons in their sleep . . . 3. A person or thing that weighs upon and oppresses like a nightmare.

- *The Oxford English Dictionary*

*The Master of Ballantrae*, a book replete with ambivalence and duality (and Stevenson’s longest-composed novel, written from December 1887 to May 1889), was fittingly born of two landscapes. Moreover Stevenson himself was between two landscapes at the time, staying at Baker’s Cottage, in Saranac, New York, fated to never see Scotland again. The two landscapes which inspired the novel were those of Scotland and the Adirondacks, but as he tells it, they were landscapes of different seasons:
I was walking one night in the verandah of a small house in which I lived, outside the hamlet of Saranac. It was winter; the night was very dark; the air extraordinary clear and cold, and sweet with the purity of forests. From a good way below, the river was to be heard contending with ice and boulders: a few lights appeared, scattered unevenly among the darkness, but so far away as not to lessen the sense of isolation. For the making of a story here were fine conditions. . . . 'Come,' said I to my engine, 'let us make a tale, a story of many years and countries, of the sea and the land, savagery and civilisation' . . . while I was groping for the fable and the characters required, behold, I found them lying ready and nine years old in my memory. . . . I had stumbled on the solution, or perhaps I should rather say (in stagewright phrase) the Curtain or final Tableau conceived long before on the moon between Pitlochry and Strathardle, conceived in the Highland rain, in the blend of the smell of heather and bog-plants . . . ("The Genesis of 'The Master of Ballantrae,'" v. 14, 15, 17)

While most of the action in the novel takes place in Scotland, perhaps because the work was conceived abroad, in *The Master of Ballantrae* foreign landscapes, the nightscape, the elements, and the seasons are more prominent than the Scottish scenery. The winter in Saranac seems to have greatly influenced the novel, for it is subtitled "A Winter's Tale," there are many descriptions of dark, clear nights, and the narrative concludes in the snowy wildemesses of upper New York State. 33 But the winter setting aptly relates also to the cold hostility between the Durie brothers and the sense of death and imminent regeneration crucial to the story.

The twin inspirations for the earlier seed of the story came to Stevenson in Scotland, however, as recounted by his wife:

In January, 1876, my husband, while on a tramp through Carrick and Galloway, spent a night at Ballantrae. Names always had a great fascination for him, and when one struck him as particularly euphonious, he stored it away in his memory to be used or not as occasion warranted. . . . For years the name lay dormant in his mind. Though the earlier portion of the story was partly conceived in August, 1881, while travelling on the way to Braemar, it was not until the winter of 1887, when we were living at Saranac

33 Cf. "Winter," a poem Stevenson also wrote at Saranac Lake, which indicates the extent to which the author was affected by that season while in North America.
in the Adirondacks, that the inspiration seized him to work seriously on The Master. (Prefatory Note to The Master of Ballantrae, 3)

Stevenson himself left an account of this tramp in “A Winter’s Walk in Carrick and Galloway (A Fragment: 1876)” (v. 24, 371-84), most of which is taken up with the wintry scenery of the season:

The fields were all sheeted up; they were tucked in among the snow, and their shape was modelled through the pliant counterpane, like children tucked in by a fond mother. The wind had made ripples and folds upon the surface, like what the sea, in quiet weather, leaves upon the sand. There was a frosty stifle in the air. . . . Over the white shoulders of the headlands, or in the opening of bays, there was nothing but a great vacancy and blackness; and the road as it drew near the edge of the cliff seemed to skirt the shores of creation and void space . . . (371-2)

Here are the crisp air and snowy ground again, but it is the notion of winter as associated with an awesome black void, suggestive of both divinity and death, which Stevenson develops and questions in the novel. This “undecipherable blackness” that makes James Durie an alluring figure of evil and draws his brother Henry into a dark spiral of self-destruction is the driving force behind the plot and characters of the book; it is constantly mirrored and intensified by the landscape. Such a fascination with darkness haunted Stevenson all his life and is expressed throughout the range of his work.  

Calder says that the “night for Stevenson was always to be sinister. . . . Darkness and evil are entwined” (36). Yet this novel and the other instances of Stevenson’s night imagery present more ambiguous pictures. In the children’s poem, “Shadow March,” Stevenson depicts night in conjunction with light and a nightmarish presence, two important aspects of the night in The Master of Ballantrae:

All round the house is the jet-black night;  
It stares through the window-pane;  
It crawls in the corners, hiding from the light,  
And it moves with the moving flame.

. . . the breath of the Bogie in my hair;  
And all round the candle the crooked shadows come . . .  
All the wicked shadows coming, tramp, tramp, tramp,  
With the black night overhead (A Child’s Garden of Verses, v. 8, 44-5).
The terror of the night and its nightmares is also deftly conveyed in the various eerie night scenes and the awe and horror the Master inspires in others. But as in the poem "Summer Night," 35

In *Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes* (1878-9), Stevenson writes of how "at a single swoop, the night fell. I have been abroad in many a black night, but never in a blacker. . . . a certain fleecy density, or night within night . . . this was all that I could discriminate. The sky was simply darkness overhead. . . . In this sensible roaring blackness I was sure of nothing but the direction of the wind" (v. 1, 242-3). A starless, pitch-dark night in "Will o’ the Mill" (1877) leads the protagonist to think of the dead (*The Complete Short Stories* v. 1, 135), while in "The Sire de Malétroit’s Door" (1877), night is "the tumultuous, leaden chaos of the sky" and "black as the grave" (141). McLynn says that, as a boy, Stevenson suffered the most exquisite nightmares, in which he wrestled with the themes of Hell, Evil and Damnation . . . At the age of thirty he remembered clearly how he woke from dreams of hell ‘my knees and chin together, my soul shaken, my body convulsed with agony . . . Some of this feeling still remains upon me in my thirtieth year.’ . . . RLS does less than justice to the acute night terrors that assailed him to the point where he dreaded the coming of the dusk. . . . In his poem ‘Windy Nights’ the experience is rendered simply:

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All night long in the dark and wet
A man goes riding by
Late in the night when the fires are out
Why does he gallop and gallop about?
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But in ‘Stormy Nights’ the experience has acquired a metaphysical patina:

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Do I not know how, nightly, on my bed
The palpable close darkness shutting round me,
How my small heart went forth to evil things,
How all the possibilities of sin
That were yet present to my innocence
Bound me too narrowly,
And how my spirit beat
The cage of its compulsive purity . . . (15-16)
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35 About us lies the summer night;
The darkling earth is dusk below;
But high above, the sky is bright
Between the eve and morning glow . . .
Stevenson also senses something hopefully transcendental about the darkness of the night, and this aspect of the nocturnal also attaches to the Master of Ballantrae, complicating his apparent evil.

For not only is the landscape in the novel different from that in *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped* in being dominated by night, swamps, and winter, but in *The Master of Ballantrae* Stevenson links landscape with character more carefully than in any other of his novels. The novel is essentially an extensive, subtle study of human ambivalence, forcing us to ask if men are good or evil or ambiguously in between\(^{36}\) and the landscape is an expression of this ambiguity. As Saposnik observes, "*The Master of Ballantrae* must stand as the fullest achievement of Stevenson’s narrative art... an intricately developed narrative whose chilling tone and distant adventures are prepared for from the beginning... The difficulty in *The Master* is not its narrative structure but its multiple ambivalences, for no other of Stevenson’s works is so charged with the burden of his paradoxical attitudes" (119). Two separate reviews of the book aptly introduce the two developments in Stevenson’s writing so evident in the novel: “There is, moreover (to a much greater degree than

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{So glow above the dusk of sin,} \\
\text{Remembrance of Redemption vast,} \\
\text{And future hope of joy therein} \\
\text{That shall be shed on us at last.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Each haloed in its husk of light,} \\
\text{Atoms and worlds about us lie;} \\
\text{Though here we grope a while in night,} \\
\text{’Tis always daylight up on high.}
\end{align*}
\]

(v. 8, 375)

\(^{36}\) Cf. the short story “Markheim,” where the narrator, a murderer, says: “‘Evil and good run strong in me, haling me both ways. I do not love the one thing, I love all... are my vices only to direct my life, and my virtues to lie without effect, like some passive lumber of the mind? Not so; good, also, is a spring of acts’” (*The Complete Short Stories* v. 2, 99). *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, of course, is the archetype of the modernist narrative of ambiguous and unstable character.
hitherto), characterisation of a subtle and striking kind” (Maixner 348 – Unsigned Review, *Dundee Courier*, October 11, 1889); “in the story itself the sun never shines, the air is lowering and ominous, a constant consciousness of calamity, of wrong and injustice, brooding over the house” (364 – O. W. Oliphant, from the Old Saloon, *Blackwood’s Magazine*, 146 [November 1889]: 696-702). As Daiches states, “The linking of action to atmosphere and of both to landscape – the first and most brilliant part of the novel is set in south-west Scotland – is impressive. Stevenson is steadily learning how to bring together in an organic whole his interests in adventure, topography and moral ambiguities” (*Robert Louis Stevenson and His World* 74). In precisely illuminating a detailed study of morally ambiguous characters with profoundly juxtaposed and subtle landscape imagery, *The Master of Ballantrae* is the most complex and richly developed of Stevenson’s examinations of essentially modern aspects of consciousness.

*The Master of Ballantrae* begins with the servant Mackellar’s introduction of the residents of the house of Durrisdeer, and it is not until James Durie – the Master – has left to aid Prince Charlie and is presumed dead in battle that the reader gleans a sense, through dark and light imagery, of the shadowy morals which shall dominate the narrative, primarily through one character: “there was a shadow on that house, the shadow of the Master of Ballantrae. Dead or alive (and he was then supposed to be dead) that man was his brother’s rival: his rival abroad, where there was never a good word for Mr. Henry and nothing but regret and praise for the Master; and his rival at home, not only with his father and his wife, but with the very servants” (v. 14, 45).

Atypically for Stevenson, the novel shifts from one narrator to another, and it is in the next section, narrated by the slavish Irishman Chevalier de Burke, that the Master’s murky moral
character is dramatically demonstrated. In a deft intertextual gesture, Stevenson has Burke and the Master – who survived the battle at Culloden – meet “an Appin man, Alan Black Stewart (or some such name, but I have seen him since in France) who chanced to be passing the same way, and had a jealousy of my companion”\(^\text{37}\) (66). Alan wishes to fight the Master, but Durie says that he would prefer to race, and so gallops off on his horse along with Burke, Alan running pathetically after them. Burke laughs at the horseless Jacobite, but also thinks the Master’s jest “‘a trifle cowardly’” (66). The Master later explains that he fled in order to humiliate Alan Breck, who would never deny reports of the Master’s death now, after such an ignominious meeting. But the incident also shows the Master to be both more underhanded and evil than the often hard-hearted, bloodthirsty warrior Alan Breck; it indicates, too, that the Master will do anything to survive, with no regard for propriety or honour. All this contributes to the notion of the Master as a deathless, nightmarish figure who cannot be contained by the rules of proper society, especially as he returns to the house of Durrisdeer and flaunts his authority and family tradition again and again. The idea of the Master as somehow beyond restrictions, limits, and even emotions, is reinforced shortly after the encounter with Alan, when he carelessly decides with the flip of a coin whether he and Burke shall fight to the death or remain fast friends.

It is landscape, however, and a more insidious adversary than Alan Breck that truly reveals the supernatural amorality of the Master. Burke and Durie find that the ship on which they have procured berths is “commanded by a lunatic,” the satanic captain Teach, and “might be called a floating Bedlam” (73). But the Master is unafraid of Teach and asserts his authority with an ease that

\(^{37}\) A note to the text by Mackellar says, in part, “Should not this be Alan Breck Stewart, afterwards notorious as the Appin murderer?” (66). The reference to France concerns Alan’s eventual escape from Scotland and refuge in France, as detailed in Catriona.
wins Burke over entirely, "being upon the whole the most capable man I ever met with, and the one of the most natural genius" (81). 38

When Ballantrae and Burke make their escape to the American mainland, Stevenson plunges the reader into a hellish, murky landscape which reflects the uncertain morality of the Master and his other-worldly aura: "a light, lifting haze" (84); "fog about breast-high on the waters" (88); "fog which was . . . our only safety" (89). This fog is more than just a haven (as in Treasure Island) for those escaping from both the pirate crew and a nearby cruiser; it is also more than simply atmospheric mirroring of the pirates' alcoholic stupor. Though the way forward is obscured by the fog, the reader senses that the Master knows how to get away, outwitting Teach and even mocking him when he calls him "'Captain Learn'" (88). But the many religious references in Burke's narrative (as well as in Mackellar's pious accounts) discourage us from equating the Master with a lowly gang of pirates. Thus Burke says that "heaven guided us" to land with the booty, before they could be found by the cruiser's searchers, and he blesses "the saints for my escape" (89). His naïve religiosity serves to ironize the Master's shifting character. It is tempting to see him, amidst swamp, marsh, and geysers, "vast and dangerous," "blistering hot," a "morass," and "an unhealthful place" (90), as simply a devil among utterly degraded rogues. What the hellish landscape shows more than anything is the Master's uncanny ability to survive any situation; it illuminates the Master's

38 Thus the authentic evil of the Master quashes the second-rate villainy of Teach. As McLynn states, "Stevenson needed the episode of the pirates to convince us of the awesome, almost inhuman, power of the Master, who subdues the pirate captain Teach with ease, pointing up the contrast between the banality of the pirates' evil and the more fearsome variety represented by James Durrisdeer. . . . Teach is an epigone to Silver. . . . [but] has not the tenth of the brain and ambition of Silver; but once again we are alerted to the diabolical power of the Master by the reflection that Silver in turn is a mere remora fish swimming in the shadow of the great white shark that is James Durrisdeer" (306).
otherworldly evil, but it does not make him out to be primarily a devil.

In many ways, the landscape is more moral than physical, and so entirely in keeping with the novel's emphases. While "[t]he thicket was as close as a bush; the ground very treacherous, so that we often sank in the most terrifying manner . . . the heat, besides, was stifling, the air singularly heavy" (90-1), when Grady sinks into a slough with his share of the treasure, Burke observes that "[h]is fate and above all these screams of his appalled us to the soul; yet it was on the whole a fortunate circumstance and the means of our deliverance [as it leads to more careful scouting of the land ahead of them]" (92). Such a hellish landscape serves to show the Master's moral 'mindscape,' and Burke's ruthless regard for another's life only in relation to his own indicates not only the moral selfishness that has led him to side with the Master, but serves to put the Master's next actions in an even more sobering and revealing light. For when Dutton, leading them forward, also starts to sink and turns to the pair for aid, saying he is "'in a bad place,'" the Master stands still and coolly replies, "'I don't know about that'" (92). Dutton's death is in his interest for he can claim more of the treasure, and the setting, full of traps and risks like a fatal maze, seems ideal for the Master, who thrives in apparently otherworldly environments (like the snowbound landscape of the Adirondacks later) in which he can ignore social and moral restraints. 39 After ruthlessly killing Dutton, the Master says simply: "The need for this fellow ceased when he had shown you where the path ran" (93). Burke's inability to "altogether censure" the Master, who brings them out of the swamp loaded with

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39 Chesterton is mistaken when he says that the "indefinable grandeur and even hugeness of outline that recalls the Greek tragedies" in the book are "lost when the wanderings and the places are too elaborately followed out" (165). The book is not a Greek tragedy where good and evil are provocatively constructed, but an exploration of the ambiguities of human good and evil, with the Master as the focal character. His nightmarish, divinely evil figure is introduced and developed in relation to the formidable landscape he supernaturally overcomes, as though he were otherworldly, and the mundane challenges of this world's topography were beneath him.
booty, makes the Master's cold-blooded murderous deeds seem almost beyond question, as if his indifference to human life and scruples were beyond the human – and utterly at home in the swamp from which he escapes.

Similarly, once they have made their way to the North American mainland and buried their loot in the Adirondacks, the Master's "godlike" evil contrasts with Burke's professed Christian orthodoxy. Burke talks of the Indians as "painted devils" (102), and credits "Divine Blessing" and the "Truths of Religion" for his and the Master's survival. But what the text makes clear is that the Master has thrived in amoral, foreign surroundings and it is his godless and yet god-like malevolence, evidenced by his bloody actions and unrestrained cunning, that has ensured their survival. The Adirondacks setting, like the hellish swampland earlier, is largely a landscape of undergrowth and daunting wilderness, with "thickets, swamps, precipitous rocks, impetuous rivers, and amazing waterfalls" (101), "unbroken woods" (104), "sides of the lakes quite impassable with bog" (104), and "impenetrable thickets" (104). Amidst "these barbarous scenes," and wolves and "other savage animals" (101), the Master proves to be the most savage of all. A "gentleman, a perfect stranger in that part of the world" (104), he is so at home in this predatory environment that despite wrecking their cause and losing their bearings, he carries on. Burke now recounts their adventures in mythic terms:

The labours of Hercules, so finely described by Homer, were a trifle to what we now underwent. Some parts of the forest were perfectly dense down to the ground, so that we must cut our way like mites in a cheese. In some the bottom was full of deep swamp, and the whole wood entirely rotten. I have leaped on a great fallen log and sunk to the knees in touchwood; I have sought to stay myself, in falling, against what looked to be a solid trunk, and the whole thing has whiffed away at my touch like a sheet of paper. Stumbling, falling, bogging to the knees, hewing our way, our eyes almost put out with twigs and branches, our clothes plucked from our bodies, we laboured all day, and it is doubtful if
we made two miles. What was worse, as we could rarely get a view of the
country and were perpetually justled from our path by obstacles, it was
impossible even to have a guess in what direction we were moving. (105)

The environment is even more daunting, decaying and deathlike, and more formidable than the
swampland – a “Christian” is found scalped and mutilated in a puddle of blood, birds “screaming
over him” (108). Yet amid such horrific scenes, the Master reveals more of his Byronic defiance as
he rants at the landscape, “shaking his fist at the hills” and crying aloud, “‘To think . . . that I must
leave my bones in this miserable wilderness! Would God I had died upon the scaffold like a
gentleman! . . . then [he] sat biting his fingers and staring on the ground, a most unchristian object”
(106). When he spins a coin to decide which direction to take, he says, “‘I know no better way . . .
to express my scorn of human reason’” (108). The Master blames his brother for his predicament.
He imagines Henry sitting in the Master’s estate in Durrisdeer, courting Alison, who was to be the
Master’s wife. The landscape is thus helping to reveal more and more of the Master’s mindscape,
as it were, showing him to be a vengeful, vindictive, selfish, amoral, godless, and somehow non-
mortal figure. Is the Master truly any more above human reason and society than the supposedly
“beastly” and savage Indians (according to Burke – 108) are below it? Burke’s narrative concerning
his wanderings with the Master is important not just in introducing the elemental yet ambiguous evil
which the Master represents, but also in relation to the plot and the book’s ending. The treasure, so
bloodily stolen from others in the hellish landscape of the swampland, has been buried in another
dense, wild landscape, with the Master consistently associated with undergrowth and by extension
the underground. And when Henry Durie follows the Master into the wilderness to the treasure
tainted with bloodshed and treachery the implications for his character are disturbing and the
ambiguities continue to proliferate.
When the Master returns in 1756 to Durrisdeer after his exploits in North America, Henry's servant Mackellar is struck by his "handsome figure and countenance, swarthy, lean, long, with a quick, alert, black look" (128). But his connection with the wintry landscape remains sinister and ominous. Just before the private duel, we are told: "It was unseasonable weather, a cast back into winter: windless, bitter cold, the world all white with rime, the sky low and grey; the sea black and silent like a quarry-hole" (158). It may seem easy to dismiss at first the night imagery of this scene as simply atmospheric and thus well-suited to what Mackellar calls "one of the dark parts of my narrative" (160), but the "stifling cold" of the "wintry, frosty landscape of white hills and woods" (160-1), in combination with the "dark and still and starless and exceeding cold" (161) is more than a time "fit for strange events" (161). The dark, the deathlike cold, and the starless (that is, Godless) night all stress the elemental evil of the sacrilegious Master, as he battles his lighter and more virtuous counterpart, his brother Henry. After Henry strikes his brother for suggesting that Alison still loves the Master, Mackellar writes: "The Master sprang to his feet like one transfigured; I had never seen one so beautiful. 'A blow!' he cried. 'I would not take a blow from God Almighty'" (164).

When Henry takes down two swords from the wall, Mackellar tries to prevent a duel between the brothers, but gives way when the Master presses his blade against Mackellar's chest. Mackellar "saw the light run along the steel" and falls down before the Master, crying "like a baby" (164). If the starless sky seems bereft of God, the light flashing from the Master's sword may indicate a divine force, albeit malevolent, which he wields. The imagery becomes increasingly complex, with the Master being seen in terms of light as well as dark, suggesting a sort of divine evil within him as "the flashing of that bare sword" blinds Mackellar (165). The night is cold and deadly:
there was no breath stirring: a windless stricture of frost had bound the air; and as we went forth in the shine of the candles, the blackness was like a roof over our heads. Never a word was said, there was never a sound but the creaking of our steps along the frozen path. The cold of the night fell about me like a bucket of water; I shook as I went with more than terror; but my companions, bare-headed like myself and fresh from the hall, appeared not even conscious of the change... (165)

Oblivious to the cold and the dark, both brothers seem somehow part of the night and the elements, and the duel binds them in an obsessive, mutual fate.

Strikingly little attention is spent on the duel itself, but after the Master’s death it is his persistent presence in the landscape that is emphasized. The candles at the site of the duel “made a broad space of light upon the frosted ground. All within that circle seemed, by the force of contrast and the overhanging blackness, brighter than by day” (179). This combination of light beneath a dominating darkness again seems to allude to the supernatural, all-consuming power of the Master’s eerie malevolence. For his body is gone when Mackellar returns for it, and we are left with the uneasy feeling that the Master may well have survived another supposed death: “I stood and listened till my ears ached, but the night was hollow about me like an empty church; not even a ripple stirred upon the shore... I put the candle out, and the blackness fell about me groping dark; it was like a

40 The constant light and shadow imagery, while juxtaposing and further complicating the ambiguous relationship between good and evil in the book, is commented on by Chesterton, with regard to the duel scene: “the description insists not on the darkness of night but on the hardness of winter, the ‘windless stricture of the frost’; the candles that stand as straight as the swords; the candle-flames that seem almost as cold as the stars” (46); thus Stevenson is concentrating more on the divine possibilites of the Master than his evil qualities. Cf. also McLynn 307. The juxtaposition of light and shadow imagery, occurring often throughout The Master of Ballantrae, is also deftly accomplished in “When The Devil Was Well” (The Complete Short Stories v. 1, 46, 49) and “Markheim,” wherein the soul of the protagonist is reflected in light and shadow: “the skylight small and dirty, the day blind with fog; and the light that filtered down to the ground storey was exceedingly faint, and showed dimly on the threshold of the shop. And yet, in that strip of doubtful brightness, did there not hang wavering a shadow?” (v. 2, 91).
crowd surrounding me” (180). Mackellar can feel the overwhelming sense of the divine malevolent force of the Master, as the night is a vacant church when lit up by the candle, and the blackness becomes a crowd when the light is extinguished. Stevenson is implying that the Master’s dark evil is inextricably bound to the light of good in its awesome power. The sense of the Master’s presence in the night is reinforced when Mackellar goes back once more to the scene with Lord Durrisdeer: “I was aware of a strange phenomenon; for though it was quite dark, and the night not yet old, methought I smelt the morning. At the same time there went a tossing through the evergreens, so that they sounded like a quiet sea; and the air puffed at times against our faces and the flame of the candle shook. . . . there came up a sudden, moaning gust . . . we were aware of a strong pattering noise about us in the night: and when we issued from the shelter of the trees, we found it raining smartly” (184-5).

Nearly every landscape image in the book is connected with the Master or with mention of the Master. Years after the duel, the scene still haunts Mackellar with the Master’s dark and oppressive presence, and though it is spring, with the woods in flower and the birds singing, “the shrubbery was only the more sad and I the more oppressed by its associations” (209). Mackellar comes upon Henry mythologizing the Master to his son: “I have just been telling Sandie the story of this place, and how there was a man whom the devil tried to kill, and how near he came to kill the devil instead” (209). The child asks Mackellar, at his father’s bidding, if he saw the devil, and Mackellar cries that he has met him and seen him foiled. The Master thus still haunts Henry as well as Mackellar, and Henry still feels drawn to the allure of his elder brother’s dark power.

The central question raised by this passage is, what precisely is the Master? As I have argued, it is too simple to see him as a devil, for his evil is awe-inspiring, and even appealing to other
characters in the book, especially as the narrative progresses. Like Milton’s Lucifer, he is associated with divine light, as Mackellar indeed recognizes (236). Stevenson had rejected the romantic cliché of a good man, whose return to life would be hailed by the reader and the other characters with gladness. . . . This trenched upon the Christian picture and was dismissed. If the idea, then, was to be of any use at all for me, I had to create a kind of evil genius to his friends and family, take him through many disappearances, and make this final restoration from the pit of death, in the icy American wilderness, the last and grimmest of the series.

(‘The Genesis of ‘The Master of Ballantrae’,’ 16-17)

Despite the religious references of Burke and Mackellar, the Master comes across as a figure of elemental evil, yet he is not without an air of a certain alluring divinity, the “kind of evil genius” that Stevenson had in mind when he rejected what he called “the Christian picture.” Although Stevenson also described the Master as an “INCUBUS” (Letter 2001) who oppresses and obsesses Henry, in that letter, too, the ambiguity and complexity of the Master confused Stevenson enough that he referred to the Master as a “cloven hoof,” just as in an earlier letter to Sidney Colvin (December 24, 1887), he wrote that “the Master is all I know of the devil” (Letter 1974). There is no god-figure to counter this devilish Master, merely the pieties, heartfelt but conventional and hollow, expressed by Mackellar and Burke. The Master is a disturbing creation. As G. K. Chesterton said,

I do not in the least object to The Master being The Devil. But I do object to a subtle subconscious something, which every now and then seems almost to suggest that he is The Lord. I mean The Lord in the vague sense of a certain authority in aristocracy, or even in mere mastery. Perhaps I even dimly feel that there is the distant thunder of The Lord in the very title of The Master . . . (131)

And McLynn writes that James Durie, the Master, is

no mere demon or incubus but is himself a divided self. On the one hand he is cunning, malignant, mocking, cruel, egotistical, insidious, false, murderous, vain, insolent, greedy, an artist in deceit, able to play at ingratiating hypocrisy
or ingenuous insult with equal aplomb. But he is also witty, courageous, resourceful, handsome in figure, graceful in gesture, brilliant in talk, gallant and generous, a master diplomat well versed in the ways of court and camp in both East and West. (305)

As Mackellar, describing the Master as a "magician who controlled the elements," concludes near the end of the novel, "hell may have noble flames. I have known him a score of years, and always hated, and always admired, and always slavishly feared him" (353-4).

The Master's return from the dead ten years later is heralded by the elements: "a cold, sunny morning with a thick white frost . . . and there was a noise of the sea in all the chambers" (226) – the Master’s arrival is linked with the sea, just as his disappearance after the duel was echoed by an eerily calm sea (180) and the wind in evergreens were "like a quiet sea" (185). Connected also with

41 Throughout the novel, the wind eerily foretells the disappearance of the Master or suggests death, and is often connected with night and a sense of other-worldliness, or even divine release. The complex and often ambiguous wind imagery in The Master of the Ballantrae has numerous precedents in Stevenson’s ouevre. In Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes, Stevenson says that "the wind roared unceasingly among the trees; I could hear the boughs tossing and the leaves churning through half a mile of forest" (v. 1, 248). Later, he connects the "void of space," the night sky, with a "faint wind, more like a moving coolness than a stream of air, [which] passed down the glade from time to time" (297). Also in the book, night is metaphorized as wind, when "the darkness was rising steadily like an exhalation," while the stars are described by Stevenson in reverential terms (338-40). In The Silverado Squatters, "the silence of the night was utter. Then a high wind began in the distance among the tree-tops, and for hours continued to grow higher" (v. 2, 512-13). In Stevenson’s first short story, “The Plague-Cellar” (1864), “The wind howled chilly and with mournful cadence through the funnel-like closes” (The Complete Short Stories v. 1, 13). In “The Treasure of Franchard,” when at “nightfall the wind rose into a tempest . . . The uproar and terror of the night kept people long awake” (v. 2, 61). In Catriona (1892), the wind conjures up death: “It was a plain, fair morning, but the wind in the east. The little chill of it sang in my blood, and gave me a feeling of the autumn, and the dead leaves, and dead folks’ bodies in their graves” (Vailima ed., v. 10, 41). In The Young Chevalier (1892), an unfinished novel, there appears the “high inhuman note of the wind, the violence and continuity of its outpouring, and the fierce touch of it upon man’s whole periphery” (v. 18, 417). In The Ebb-Tide (1893), a squall of wind and rain strike a ship, “and she stooped under the blow, and lay like a thing dead. From the mind of Herrick reason fled; he clung in the weather rigging, exulting; he was done with life, and he gloried in the release; he gloried in the wild noises of the wind and the choking onslaught of the rain; he gloried to die so, and now, amid this coil of the elements" (v. 18, 83).
blackbirds and even called “the bird of ill omen” (226, 227), the Master is like a force of nature. He is further mythologized when Mackellar recalls his family’s tale of a fairy wife who came and went “under cloud of night” (227) much like the Master. When Henry and his family slip away from the Master and Durrisdeer, bound for Alison’s estate in New York State, they find themselves under a “night of darkness, scarce broken by a star or two” (246), a chilling premonition that the Master, in his godless dark guise, is watching them. Mackellar sees them leave and says that “I never knew before the greatness of that vault of night” (247). When the Master does indeed set out to follow them, Mackellar thinks that his journey will be ill-fated, but the Master reads a different omen in the weather and landscape:

“If you take to prophecy,” says he, ‘listen to that.’
There came up a violent squall off the open Solway, and the rain was dashed on the great windows.
‘Do ye ken what that bodes, warlock?’ said he, in a broad accent: ‘that there’ll be a man Mackellar unco sick at sea.’

When I got to my chamber, I sat there under a painful excitation, hearkening to the turmoil of the gale which struck full upon that gable of the house. What with the pressure on my spirits, the eldritch cries of the wind among the turret-tops, and the perpetual trepidation of the masoned house, sleep fled my eyelids utterly. I sat by my taper, looking on the black panes of the window where the storm appeared continually on the point of bursting on its entrance; and upon that empty field I beheld a perspective of consequences that made the hair to rise upon my scalp. The child corrupted, the home broken up, my master dead or worse than dead, my mistress plunged in desolation – all these I saw before me painted brightly on the darkness; and the outcry of the wind appeared to mock at my inaction. (256-7)

The Master’s calling Mackellar a “warlock” is like an ironic device of camouflage or diversion, but the violent squall and the predicted sea-sickness bode more than physical distress. Certainly the Master’s words, in conjunction with the stormy weather he seems to have called up, disturb Mackellar profoundly. The wind, so often eerily associated with the Master’s appearances (165, 184-
5), haunts him here, and the “eldritch [spooky, weird] cries of the wind” strike the house and virtually shake its foundations, just as the incubus threatens to destroy the family of Durrisdeer.

Mackellar sees the ruin of his master Henry and his family in the “black panes” of the window and “painted brightly on the darkness” – the darkness associated with the Master throughout the novel. In the face of the Master’s evil, so clearly bound up with the power of the elemental forces of nature, Mackellar is helpless.

The malevolence of the Master of Ballantrae expresses itself through the menace and violence of nature and essentially drives the plot of the book. With the departure of Mackellar and the Master from Durrisdeer, the house is left standing “in a strong drenching mist . . . like a place dedicated to melancholy” (258), while Mackellar, forced to accompany the Master in his pursuit of his brother, finds himself caught up in foul weather while awake and premonitory nightmares while asleep:

all the time, sleeping or waking, I beheld the same black perspective of approaching ruin, and the same pictures rose in my view, only they were now painted with hill-side mist. One, I remember, stood before me with the colours of a true illusion. It showed me my lord seated at a table in a small room; his head, which was at first buried in his hands, he slowly raised, and turned upon me a countenance from which hope had fled. I saw it first on the black window-panes, my last night in Durrisdeer; it haunted and returned upon me half the voyage through . . . (260)

The “undecipherable blackness” of the Master is the canvas on which Mackellar’s horrifying visions of family ruin are sketched; before the evil of the Master infects Henry, it works its harm on Mackellar, revealing the darkness of his soul, in light and dark imagery:

If the Nonesuch foundered, she would carry down with her into the deeps of that unsounded sea the creature whom we all so feared and hated; there would be no Master of Ballantrae, the fish would sport among his ribs; his schemes all brought to nothing, his harmless enemies at peace. At first, I have said, it
was but a ray of comfort; but it had soon grown to be broad sunshine. The thought of the man’s death, of his deletion from this world which he embittered for so many, took possession of my mind. I hugged it, I found it sweet in my belly... (265)

In the cramped cabin they share during the stormy crossing to America, with the Master “one moment looking down at me from the skies and the next peering up from under the soles of my feet” (270), the elder Durie is seen as a malign power and his evil as “that dark side that I turn upon the world in anger” (281), a divine devil (“what was in his mind, God knows, or perhaps Satan only” [296]) haunting Mackellar’s dreams.42

The narrative set in New York State continues to associate the Master’s shifting and ambiguous consciousness with the elemental forces of nature represented by seasonal changes in the landscape and the weather. And yet the exact nature of that association is left mysterious, serving Stevenson’s main purpose in this novel – and the central, essentially modernist theme of his fiction – to examine the dual or even multifaceted character of humanity. As Mackellar prepares us for the foredoomed conclusion of the chase after the Master in the Adirondacks, he remarks on the cold, warning of the coming of winter, and questions any simple relation between human agency and the elements:

sure enough, the next day, there fell a sprinkle [of snow] even in Albany; but it passed as it came, and was but a reminder of what lay before us. I thought of it lightly then, knowing so little as I did of that inclement province: the retrospect is different; and I wonder at times if some of the horror of these events which I must now rehearse flowed not from the foul skies and savage winds to which we were exposed, and the agony of cold that we must suffer... (312)

42 In a fascinating section of a letter to Sidney Colvin, dated August 6, 1879, Stevenson relates a dark, existential crisis of his own which occurred on his first sea-voyage to the United States: “I have never been so much detached from life; I feel as if I cared for nobody, and as for myself I cannot believe fully in my own existence... The weather is threatening; I have a strange, rather horrible, sense of the sea before me, and can see no further into the future” (Letter 639).
The possibility that the Master's dark side is merely one aspect of the dark side inherent in the nature of things and beyond human control is expressed as much by his malignant vitality as by the darkness of the night, "hellish" landscapes, raging storms, deathly winter, and an atmosphere full of foreboding.

As Henry, with Mackellar in tow, pursues the Master, the younger sibling is observed, through the landscape, to be increasingly caught up in his older brother's malevolent power, which also infects Mackellar: "I could never depict the blackness of my soul upon this journey. I have none of those minds that are in love with the unusual; to see the winter coming and to lie in the field far from any house, oppressed me like a nightmare; it seemed, indeed, a kind of awful braving of God's power" (322). And more graphically, he soon adds: "It chanced the night fell murderously cold; the stringency of the frost seized and bit me... At last dawn began to break upon hoar woods and mountains... and the boisterous river dashing among spears of ice" (324). But the most chilling transformation is that noted in Henry. Still afraid of his older brother and unable to believe that this time he really is dead, he himself now seems eerily inhuman: "There was something very daunting in his look; something to my eyes not rightly human; the face, lean, and dark, and aged, the mouth painful, the teeth disclosed in a perpetual rictus; the eyeball swimming clear of the lids upon a field of blood-shot white" (348).

The burial site, which Henry insists on seeing for himself, is situated in a forbidding setting described to conjure up a supernatural aura blurring any distinction between the hellish and heavenly:

the Master's grave... lay, indeed, beside a chief landmark of the Wilderness, a certain range of peaks, conspicuous by their design and altitude, and the source of many brawling tributaries to that inland sea, Lake Champlain...
Before us was the high range of mountains towards which we had been all day deviously drawing near. From the first light of the dawn, their silver peaks had been the goal of our advance across a tumbled lowland forest, thrid with rough streams, and strewn with monstrous boulders; the peaks (as I say) silver, for already at the higher altitudes the snow fell nightly; but the woods and the low ground only breathed upon with frost. All day heaven had been charged with ugly vapours, in the which the sun swam and glimmered like a shilling-piece; all day the wind blew on our left cheek, barbarous cold, but very pure to breathe. With the end of the afternoon, however, the wind fell; the clouds, no longer reinforced, were scattered or drunk up; the sun set behind us with some wintry splendeur, and the white brow of the mountain shared its dying glow.

The camp was on high ground, overlooking a frozen lake, perhaps a mile in its longest measurement; all about us, the forest lay in heights and hollows; above rose the white mountains; and higher yet, the moon rode in a fair sky. There was no breath of air; nowhere a twig creaked; and the sounds of our own camp were hushed and swallowed up in the surrounding stillness. Now that the sun and the wind were both gone down, it appeared almost warm, like a night of July: a singular illusion of the sense, when earth, air, and water were strained to bursting with the extremity of frost. (355-6)

The “silver peaks,” lit up at dawn, suggest a heaven that neither the Master nor his now corrupted brother will reach. As Hubbard observes about the novel’s American landscape:

The vast northern forest . . . is rendered in all its bitter actuality, as well as its symbolism . . . Stevenson experienced winter in the Adirondacks, the better to take The Master of Ballantrae to its ultimate resolution. The buried, unwelcome one makes his final reckoning with the brother who thrust him out (and, once, thrust him through). Undergrowth and underground are here proximate, as are the buried outcast and the buried treasure . . . (83)

And the snow on the ground only reinforces this gloomy perspective, signifying, as Saposnik says, “the emptiness of final possibility . . . the hopefulness of life reaches its final bounds” (124-5). With a coin-like sun and hellish fumes tossed about by the violent wind, the air is now “barbarous cold,

43 In The Silverado Squatters, too, Stevenson imbues a mountain with a divine presence: “there was something satisfactory in the sight of that great mountain that enclosed us to the north: whether it stood, robed in sunshine, quaking to its topmost pinnacle with the heat and brightness of the day; or whether it set itself to weaving vapours, wisp after wisp growing, trembling, fleeting, and fading in the blue . . . She excelled them by the boldness of her profile . . . a bulk of mountain, bare atop, with tree-fringed spurs, and radiating warmth” (v. 2, 456-7).
but very pure to breathe.” Hell and heaven seem thus to be intermingled, like the heights and
hollows of the forest, and all sound of life from the camp of the searchers is “swallowed up by the
surrounding stillness.” Later in the evening the sense of approaching death is not countered by the
illusory comfort of a warm night (with which the Master is always connected and over which he may
have control), as the elements are “bursting with the extremity of frost.” Thus, in a span of two
pages, Stevenson moves fluidly between complex allusions to death, life, and suspended animation,
showing hell, heaven, and the limbo in between in which the nightmare personified by the Master
thrives. The text’s treatment of the landscape strongly implies that the limbo is earth itself, a static
purgatory between heaven and hell.

As Henry Durie sits “gazing before him on the surface of the wood,” Mackellar follows his
stare, “rest[ing] almost pleasantly upon the frosted contexture of the pines, rising in moonlit hillocks,
or sinking in the shadows of small glens” (suggesting respectively a state of suspended animation
[frost], heaven, and hell), and realizes how irreparably linked the two brothers are (357). For
although “Hard by . . . was the grave of our enemy, now gone where the wicked cease from
troubling, the earth heaped for ever on his once so active limbs. . . . was not my lord dead also? a
maimed soldier, looking vainly for discharge, lingering derided in the line of battle? . . . under the
broad moon [another link with heaven], I prayed fervently . . . that he should be released” (357).
Even Mackellar’s prayer is ambiguous—is it for freedom from the Master’s hold over Henry or from
this nightmarish world through death? As Mackellar observes the arriving group of trekkers: “there
was a whiteness, other than moonlight, on their cheeks; and the rays of the moon reflected with a
sparkle on the eyes of some, and the shadows lying black under the brows of others” (358). The
tense balance between the radiant sky and moon and the black night and woods is emphasized as
the search party nears the Master’s grave:

we set forth along the uneven bottom of the forest; frost crackling, ice sometimes loudly splitting under foot; and overhead the blackness of pine-woods, and the broken brightness of the moon. Our way led down into a hollow of the land; and as we descended, the sounds diminished and had almost died away. Upon the other slope it was more open, only dotted with a few pines, and several vast and scattered rocks, that made inky shadows in the moonlight.

. . . A narrow plateau, overlooked by the white mountains, and encompassed nearer hand by woods, lay bare to the strong radiance of the moon. . . . About the midst, a tent stood, silvered with frost; the door open, gaping on the black interior. At the one end of this small stage, lay what seemed the tattered remnants of a man. . . . It was always moving to come upon the theatre of any tragic incident . . . yet it was not that which struck us into pillars of stone; but the sight . . . of Secundra, ankle deep in the grave of his late master. . . . his frail arms and shoulders glistered in the moonlight with a copious sweat; his face was contracted with anxiety and expectation; his blows resounded on the grave, as thick as sobs; and behind him, strangely deformed and ink-black upon the frosty ground, the creature’s shadow repeated and parodied his swift gesticulations . . . (359-61)41

Just as the landscape seems to become darker ("inky shadows"), foreshadowing death as the men descend, as if into hell, the deathly plateau is exposed by the moon’s "strong radiance," intensified by the "white mountains." Stevenson’s vivid, symbolic, theatrical setting (cf. my discussion of the amphitheatre motif in Chapter 1) ties together the various threads of landscape scenery and light and dark imagery to make the Master’s "final" death all the more profound and inevitable. The foreign landscape in which the Master had thrived throughout the novel proves his undoing, as the cold ground does not allow Secundra’s Indian trickery to work. The Master’s state of suspended

41 The description of the shadowy and tattered Master, the moon and night imagery, the winter scene, and the light images and the heavenly sky at the end of the book, are all uncannily paralleled by a brief passage in The Great North Road, a novel Stevenson abandoned in 1885: "A scathing breeze blew out of the north-east and slowly carried a regiment of black and tattered clouds over the face of Heaven, which was already kindled with the wild light of morning, but where she walked, in shelter of the ruins, the flame of her candle burned steady. The extreme cold smote upon her conscience" (v. 14, 412).
animation, linked so consistently with the imagery of frost and frozen ground, now can be seen as the signs of his slow death, which is the disappearance into the in-between world from which he seems to have come. The finality of death is withheld in the image of the moon, which "was not yet set, although it had sunk low, and now barred the plateau with long shadows" (364), and Mackellar fancies that "I could myself perceive a change upon that icy countenance of the unburied. The next moment I beheld his eyelids flutter; they next rose entirely, and the week-old corpse looked me for a moment in the face. . . . at that first disclosure of the dead man's eyes, my Lord Durrisdeer fell to the ground, and when I raised him up, he was a corpse" (364-5). At last the moon falls, subsumed by the black shadows of night, signalling the moral fall as well as the death of the younger brother, sucked into the Master's black vortex. In employing natural landscape imagery with such subtle control, wholly in relation to the character of the Master, Stevenson takes this novel, his most accomplished and complex, far beyond the genre of fantastic romance, to offer us an essentially modernist exploration of the moral complexities of the human soul worthy of Conrad and James.

It will be clear to readers acquainted with Stevenson scholarship that in taking The Master of Ballantrae, as well as the two earlier novels I have examined, so seriously as works that distinctly look ahead to the modernist vision of reality as uncertain and temporal, I put myself at odds with many critics, especially those who see Stevenson as a writer of adventure romances. Indeed, the debate about Stevenson's status as a literary artist is mirrored quite closely in the debate around The Master of Ballantrae, which focusses on its coherence as a narrative and the cogency of its ending. Donald David Stone, for example, feels that "the definition of good or evil" in the novel "is at the mercy of the narrator" (56), and that "in the last chapters the theme is completely confused as
Stevenson becomes undecided as to whether evil is stalking good or good is hunting down evil" (56-7). Stone does not see moral ambiguities in Stevenson’s work in general, citing Treasure Island and Kidnapped as clear-cut stories in which “ambiguities . . . are made to walk the plank” (57). I hope I have shown in my discussion of these novels that this is untrue, and when we come to The Master of Ballantrae, I find it impossible, especially through my focus on Stevenson’s deliberate use of landscape and setting, to acknowledge sufficiently the extent to which ambiguity characterizes the novel’s disturbing moral vision. Naturally, I also differ with Calder, who essentially dismisses the Adirondack setting of the conclusion as merely a gesture to please the American public (235). What is seldom mentioned in such dismissals of the ending is that the idea for the novel actually began with it. In discussing the book’s genesis, Stevenson explains that “there cropped up in my memory a singular case of a buried and resuscitated fakir, which I had been often told by an uncle of mine, then lately dead, Inspector-General John Balfour. . . . The man who should thus be buried was the first question . . .” (“The Genesis of ‘The Master of Ballantrae’,” v. 18, 16). Eigner completely misses the mark when he sums up the book thus: “James is, as a matter of fact, the most simplified major character in all of Stevenson. He has nothing of the civilized man in him. . . . [he] is a static figure, incapable of becoming more evil, because . . . his evil is pure and absolute at the outset” (177-8). Kiely notes that: “This Master, unlike the Master of the New Testament, may have been transfigured by wrath rather than by love, but the point in which he differs from and exceeds the other characters in the novel is that, for better or worse, he is in touch with some kind of deity” (222). What critics like Carré do not realize is that it is precisely the images of ambiguous darkness in the book, i.e., darkness tempered by holy candles, divine mountains, or the holy moon and stars, that mean “[the Master’s] evil countenance . . . shocked many another. . . . There is nothing in the
whole story to bring the blush of shame to the most Victorian cheek; and yet, analyzing it closely, it is easy to see that the author is far from being on the side of bourgeois respectability” (196). For the Master’s “undecipherable blackness” is undecipherable because it is not wholly black; there is something divine, even noble and alluring, in his great nightmarish power. This is what annoyed Chesterton and others, and even confounds recent critics.

In The Master of Ballantrae, Stevenson is merely bringing to a refined culmination his previously less focussed and more action-filled examinations of protagonists' ambiguous, complex feelings. In Treasure Island, Jim Hawkins must overcome certain moral uncertainties surrounding murder, death, and independent action in order to mature, while Long John Silver is a minor Master, who is never punished for his sins at the end of the novel; in Kidnapped, David’s complex feelings for Alan and his Highland haven conflict with his Loyalist Whig upbringing in the Lowlands. David’s conflicting affinities were never resolved at the end of the Kidnapped, while in The Master of Ballantrae, there is more resolution, in the linked deaths that are foreshadowed and profoundly dramatized through element and landscape imagery. No moral stance is certain in the novel, as the good brother is slowly corrupted by obsession and hatred, while the Master remains a shadowy, elusive nightmare, never wholly evil, and always possessing a touch of the divine. Sandison rightly says that the Master “comes to inhabit an unknown dimension outside anything Mackellar can (or, perhaps, wishes to) conceive, which, while it may make his reality more spectral, gives him, ghost-like, more shapes with which to haunt” (278) not only the servant, but the reader as well. Eigner concludes that “what most of the critics found objectionable in the last chapters of the book, however, was . . . the seeming ambiguity of the action. For both intellectually and morally . . . the last chapters swims out of the grasp of the critic who has continued to regard it either as a realistic
novel or as an allegory of good and evil" (189). Of course, *The Master of Ballantrae* is neither realism nor allegory, but a subtle modernist exploration of character consciousness in order to explore the ambiguity of elemental evil, whether that be in the form of a wrathful God, a nightmarish spirit, or a charming devil. By embodying such notions in one character and exploring such concepts through minimalist, subtle light and dark imagery, element descriptions, and aspects of the natural landscape, Stevenson turns an examination of an abstract idea into a modernist, character consciousness-driven narrative which chillingly illuminates the dark side of the human condition.
CONCLUSION

"As it was, the interest of the scene entirely occupied our minds. We were set just out of the wind, and but just above the fog . . . we looked on upon a strange, impetuous, silent, shifting exhibition of the powers of nature, and saw the familiar landscape changing from moment to moment like figures in a dream." - *The Silverado Squatters*, v. 2, 532

Stevenson’s journey from the Highlands and Lowlands of his childhood to his final resting place on a mountain in Samoa, is no less remarkable than his gradual progression from a visceral sense of ‘place’ to a subtle and complex use of landscape to evoke the moods and consciousness of the protagonists of his fiction. While *Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* has long been recognized as a Freudian examination, pre-Freud, of the ambiguous nature of human morality, *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped* are still commonly thought of as simple adventure-romances, while *The Master of Ballantrae* is often ignored or dismissed as the epitome of Stevenson’s supposedly chronic difficulty with endings to his action-filled plots. In my examination of Stevenson’s use of landscape in those three works – setting them in the context of the keen interest in landscape expressed in all his writing – I have tried to show the strong link between sea/landscape and character.

Susan Lorsch observes that Hardy, Conrad, Woolf, and others found ways of using landscape in literature that went beyond the Romantic poets on whom they nonetheless continued to draw (13). Stevenson, unlike Conrad or Woolf, died before the end of the century, and is not easily

45 Lorsch goes on to say that the more detailed a description of scenery is, the more difficult it becomes to see “that landscape as representative or symbolic, and the more difficult it becomes to realize any link between that landscape and the action that there takes place” (77-8). For example, trees and sea bridge sky and earth, are mythic landscapes, and can symbolize time and eternal
recognized as a kindred spirit of modernists like Conrad, Woolf, and Lawrence. And yet in all his work, especially in his major fiction as well as stories like “When The Devil Was Well” and “Will O’ The Mill,” his use of landscape is inextricably connected with “focalization’ – that is, scenes that are marked by both the physical vision and the mental outlook or attitudes of characters” (Kadish 108).46 Long before The Master of Ballantrae, in Treasure Island, for example, it is apparent

nature, as well as the cycle of life, while stars and light (particularly in The Master of Ballantrae) can represent isolation, God, the universe, and/or the insignificance of humans (cf. Hadas) – these symbolic effects and meanings, among others, can all be found in Stevenson, particularly in his travel writings. If the sea were to be described minutely, however, down to the algae in the waves, or if a tree were reduced to the details of its bark, symbolism, metaphor, or any other imagistic effect – which would transcend the superficial and communicate mood, character consciousness, or other dramatic effects – would be lost in the precise and specific. Stevenson’s use of landscape is general enough to evoke mood and even enter the consciousness of a main character, as I have shown.

46 He could see its congregated roofs and the chapel belfry shine in the sunlight among the black pines, under the glaring dusty shoulder of the hill. He looked back into the narrow crevice, and then forth and on where the widening valley showed him many fruitful counties and famous cities and the far-off brightness of the Adriatic beyond all, and he thought how he left his soul behind him in that cleft of the big hills, and how all these kingdoms of the earth that lay outspread below, could offer him nothing that he loved or coveted.

A little wind blew now and then among the foliage, and stirred the lights and shadows over the new-fledged grass. And even when the air was still, there was a sentiment of life in the mere distribution of the light and darkness, as here and there a single ray shot vividly through some opening in the texture of the wood, or a whole sheath of them plunged down at once and made a little lit space in the shadow. From time to time, also, he was visited by wandering perfumes, sometimes by the faint odour of the violet beds, and sometimes by the strong spell of the sunshine among firs. He felt the springtime through his bones, and though he sought . . . to exaggerate his evils and keep himself in a true martyr’s humour, for the very life of him he could not withhold his lips from smiling, or keep his step from growing lighter as he went.

“When The Devil Was Well” (1875), The Complete Short Stories v. 1, 24, 49

The Mill where Will lived with his adopted parents stood in a falling valley between pinewoods and great mountains. Above, hill after hill soared upwards
that Jim’s description of the island has more to do with his retrospective dread as the adult narrator of what the sea around the island and its landscape signify for him. Even those critics who recognize it do not adequately acknowledge the close relation between landscape and character in Stevenson, who was in fact moving away from the “Wordsworthian” or romantic use of landscape (recall the “ferny dells” emendation in Kidnapped). Stevenson uses nature not just to provide a setting or describe nature for its own sake. Instead, he uses landscape and seascape to show and evaluate the workings of a character’s mind. Perhaps it is his Scottish-centred, historically-oriented imagination expressed in romantic plots that obscures the fact that Stevenson’s landscapes are not mere idyllic recreations of the past, or flowering Edens of the imagination, but “morally neutral” (Saposnik 23) theatres of land, sea, and sky in which the drama of his characters’ consciousness is played out.

While a typical work by Stevenson, like the prose romance, is set in the past and “emphasizes adventure, and is frequently cast in the form of the quest for an ideal, or the pursuit of an enemy,” Treasure Island, Kidnapped, and The Master of Ballantrae do not in fact involve standard romance-adventure “characters who are sharply discriminated as heroes or villains, masters or victims” (Abrams 132). Long John Silver, Jim Hawkins, Alan Breck, David Balfour, and the Durie brothers

until they soared out of the depth of the hardest timber, and stood naked against the sky. Some way up, a long grey village lay like a seam or a rag of vapour on a wooded hillside; and when the wind was favourable, the sound of the church bells would drop down, thin and silvery, to Will. Below, the valley grew ever steeper and steeper, and at the same time widened out on either hand; and from an eminence beside the mill it was possible to see its whole length and away beyond it over a wide plain, where the river turned and shone, and moved on from city to city on its voyage towards the sea.

... all down the valley that night there was a rushing as of a smooth and steady wind descending towards the plain; and when the world rose next morning, sure enough Will o’ the Mill had gone at last upon his travels.

“Will o’ the Mill” (1877), The Complete Short Stories v. 1, 117, 139
are all portrayed as mixed and complex in character, and their ambiguous moralities and suspect, darkly human motives are constantly illuminated by the deployment of landscape imagery. Most romances, too, involve protagonists who are “relatively isolated from a social context” (132); Jim in *Treasure Island* often feels alone and faces his sternest test in isolation, but David in *Kidnapped* experiences the Highland landscape, in the company of Alan Breck, to discover community and revise his notion of his own social identity. The increasingly allusive and dramatic ways in which Stevenson used landscape to express his protagonists’ consciousness and illuminate moral uncertainties of human nature should encourage us to see his work as related at least as much to the modernists as to the Victorians. And this relation, specifically in the terms I have been trying to establish here, should enable us to acknowledge the extent to which his romance-adventure plots fulfill a central criterion of literary realism: “representing complex characters with mixed motives” (132).

Many critics who see Stevenson as an adventure-romance writer have recognized this realistic aspect of his work (e.g. Furnas 218, D.D. Stone 55, Calder 222, 236), but they have usually failed to discern its presence in *Treasure Island* or *Kidnapped*. Even Stevenson’s interest in moral and psychological ambiguity and the dark undertow of consciousness and reality that we associate with the modernists has been observed as fitfully present in his work. Baildon, for instance, notes that “Stevenson plunges much more boldly into the deep and dark regions of Life and Nature; never blind to what is beautiful and of good report in either, he does not flinch from the evil and criminal in the one, nor from the terrible, the seemingly malign, and even diabolic, in the other” (62). And anticipating my tracing of Stevenson’s intimation of Freudian psychology, Dekker says that he “had a profound intuitive understanding of the contending forces central to the Freudian scheme of human
development” (133), which may have helped to inspire the many Freudian interpretations of Stevenson’s work (Sandison in particular). Much of his work, as I have argued, meshes perfectly with modernist attempts to show the complex consciousness of characters. As Saposnik recognizes, invoking Jungian as well as Freudian psychology, “Stevenson structured his narratives so that they might penetrate the deepest layers of the psyche . . . [and] placed himself in opposition to the major literary currents of the nineteenth century [by relying] upon suggestive implication [and] reduc[ing] experience to gesture and symbol . . . he attempts to awaken the collective unconscious” (19).

As one of a chorus of voices paying tribute to Stevenson’s “genius of place,” Sharp writes:

And as the outward man was, so was his genius, so is the country of his imagination. The lands of Stevenson-country know the same extremes: sombre, melancholy, stricken— or radiant, picturesque, seductive; full of life and infinite charm; so great a range between the snow-serenities of Silverado and the lone Beach of Falesa, or between the dreamy manse-lands of ‘Thrawn Janet’ or the desolate sea-highlands of ‘The Merry Men’ and the bright dance of waters round the Bass and beyond the Pavilion on the Links, or the dreamy peace of ‘Will o’ the Mill,’ or the sunlit glades of Fontainebleau which hid the treasure of Franchard— as, again, between Pew or Huish or other vivid villains of all degrees, from Long John Silver to James More, and the polished Prince Florizel, the Chevalier de Brisetout, the old French colonel in St. Ives, the dour David Balfour and the irrepressible Alan Breck, between Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, between the Stevenson of Aes Triplex or Pulvis et Umbra, and the Stevenson of Travels with a Donkey or An Inland Voyage. (23)

In addition to challenging what seem to me simplistic critiques of Stevenson’s work, I have tried here to go beyond such generalized enthusiasm as Sharp’s by stressing Stevenson’s ability to transform mere setting or scenery, carefully and precisely observed, into landscape imagery that is full of resonance for the rendering of character and meaning. It is the deeply symbolic, metaphorical,

47 Hennessy says that “Stevenson took an extremely enlightened interest in the world of dreams and of what came subsequently to be called the subconscious, although there is no evidence that he ever read the first works of Freud, who was his junior by six years” (19).
and atmospheric relations between landscape and character that most impress me after my examination of a wide range of Stevenson’s work and several careful readings of the three novels I have discussed.

To me, then, Stevenson seems not only a much finer craftsman, especially in psychological characterization, than many critics allow, but also modernist in spirit, looking ahead to the literary movement which “took hold shortly after 1910” (Hochman 11). A major development in the modern novel is “the conception of character, and the ways of projecting it” (11) and Baruch Hochman, for one, in The Test of Character: From the Victorian Novel to the Modern, sees Stevenson as an important bridge between the Victorian novelists who preceded him and his modernist inheritors. As I suggest here, Stevenson’s use of landscape in the three novels, culminating in The Master of Ballantrae, is in keeping with the modernist “recoil from the effort to capture the seemingly solid social and moral surfaces of the self, and the need to penetrate those surfaces and capture essences that underlie them . . . [as] in the work of Joyce and Woolf and Lawrence [who] are not identified with their social and moral surfaces . . . but rather with something both more essential, more transient, more elusive” (12). Jim Hawkins’ incomprehensible dread of Treasure Island, the ‘divided heart’ of Scotland in Kidnapped poignantly evoked in the complicated friendship of David Balfour and Alan Breck, and the enigmatic allure of the Master of Ballantrae that eventually draws his upstanding brother into his darkness and death, all bespeak Stevenson’s interest in the “something both more essential, more transient, more elusive” that Hochman attributes to the modern masters of fiction. Especially in the way that he employed landscape we can see that, like the modernists, he “stressed a range of unconscious motives that shape and inform the conscious self – the kind of responses that were analyzed by Freud and that included sexual, aggressive, and destructive feelings
that had been pushed out of mind by earlier writers. The modernist conception of character . . . often
directs our consciousness away from the immediate context of social, moral, economic striving, and
tends to subvert our sense of monolithic coherence in characters” (12). Like the modernists, too,
Stevenson shied away, in his novels as in life, from the “need to affirm moral values” which
possessed most Victorian writers (31), as evident, Hochman says, in “the almost ubiquitously
obtrusive author” (32). The three novels I have examined here are all narrated by characters rather
than an authorial narrator and conspicuously deny us the sense that “both author and reader are on
the way to achieving a wisdom and ripeness that the characters in the novel have not achieved, and
are usually not capable of” (32). Evil, amorality, and even immorality are not didactically
condemned by Stevenson in these novels, but rather dramatized and explored through landscape and
character.

There is little sense of community in the novels, apart from the important glimpses of the
imperilled Highland society in Kidnapped, and this, too, reveals a marked proximity to a modernist
rather than a Victorian quality: “The moderns, if anything, tend to spurn the world and place the
center of value in the individuals who are in conflict with it. Indeed, they tend to question the whole
system of inherited, consensual morality and to commit themselves to the refinement of individual
experience” (35-6). Saposnik says that Stevenson’s “fictional world is fragmented and severe; it is
a world of physical hardship and spiritual isolation in which man in separated from his domestic
comfort and from his social and moral authority. . . . Stevenson’s romances are grim reminders of
the modern condition in which man finds himself in frightful isolation” (104). And invoking
Stevenson, Allon White writes about the early modernists:

The mutual adoption of deflective strategy and enigmatic method by so many
writers during this period [of early modernism], the exploratory use of secrecy, lying, obscurity, impression and withdrawal, form an interconnection of cultural concern and activity which became a generative complex of modernism. This frequently involves the decision not to tell the truth and the decision not to strive, or perhaps not to hope, for sincere and easy communication with the reader. ‘Do you understand me?’ asked R.L. Stevenson. ‘God knows, I should think it highly improbable’...” (54)

Fowler notes that an “encompassing yet elusive phosphorescence of moral meaning was a quality of several nineteenth-century writers... Not the least valuable legacy to the literature of our own century, however, has been variously inherited by Conrad and Greene and Borges, and such postmodernists as Donald Barthelme, from Stevenson. For the special obliquity of moral that he taught is remarkably close to the way in which serious dramas often convey their sense” (126).48 Stevenson’s “predilection for the abstract” (Sandison 7), distilled through landscape imagery, fills Jim even as the adult narrator with dread of the island, underlies David’s growing love for the Highlands and for Scotland as his true home, and conveys the quasi-religious evil that enshrouds the Durie brothers. The characters’ development is then traced carefully on both a conscious and subconscious level, giving the reader a sense of transcendent themes and feelings being worked out through character. Thus we can sense that Jim’s dread of the island is somehow related to the dread of growing up in a morally relative world, while David’s pain in his separation from Alan expresses his regret about leaving the community he has just discovered, and the Durie brothers’ fate hints at an insidious spiral of corruption to which human nature is prey. To help him convey these abstract visionary intuitions about the human condition, Stevenson, as I have argued here, employed

48 Sandison describes Stevenson as a proto-modernist on the basis of the self-consciousness, textuality, and subversion of authority that he finds in his fiction (298). But in the three novels I examined here, textuality and subversion of authority are not marked – only the element of self-consciousness (the inner workings of character) is strongly etched.
landscape imagery with a subtlety and precision that have not been fully recognized.

From an early age, Stevenson had a "fascination . . . with high places and distant views" (Robert Louis Stevenson and His World 61). Upon seeing a stream in a cave high in the mountains of California, he could write knowingly, "It was a promising spot for the imagination. No boy could have left it unexplored" (The Silverado Squatters, v. 2, 504). Yet in his fiction he turned the "familiar landscape changing from moment to moment like figures in a dream" into more than just setting for romance and adventure stories. The landscape itself became a multifaceted, shifting metaphor, conveying the tensions and dark corners of his protagonists' minds, tracing like the modern masters "evolving consciousness: consciousness aesthetic, psychological, and historical" (Bradbury and McFarlane 47). The struggle to maturity in Treasure Island, the feelings of attachment to one's homeland in Kidnapped, and the sacred darkness of the human soul in The Master of Ballantrae - there is something profoundly elemental and transcendent about Stevenson's elaboration on these themes through landscape, physically apparent and ever-present, and character, evanescent and ever-changing. This link between natural landscape and character in the novels, at times overwhelming and magical, is perfectly captured in a passage from The Ebb-Tide that describes the sea, Stevenson's favourite symbol of life and death:

About four in the morning, as the captain and Herrick sat together on the rail, there arose from the midst of the night, in front of them, the voice of breakers. Each sprang to his feet and stared and listened. The sound was continuous, like the passing of a train; no rise or fall could be distinguished; minute by minute the ocean heaved with an equal potency against the invisible isle; and as time passed, and Herrick waited in vain for any vicissitude in the volume of that roaring, a sense of the eternal weighed upon his mind. (107)
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The *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*.


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For my parents

To all those who doubted

And to a man who knew that the best literature addresses the dark complexities of being human