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"Phases of Romanticism in Stevenson's Novels"

by

Mary Gladys Pearl Matchett, B.A.

University of Manitoba.



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"PHASES OF ROMANTICISM IN STEVENSON'S NOVELS"

C O N T E N T S .

INTRODUCTION

The Past of Romance and the Reactionary
Periods.

I The Evolution of Stevenson's Romanticism.

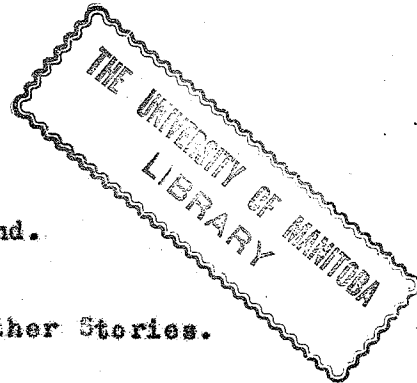
II Various Phases of Stevenson's Romance.

- (1) Books of Adventure.
- (2) French Stories.
- (3) Short Stories of Scotland.
- (4) "The Black Arrow" and other Stories.
- (5) "New Arabian Nights" and Various Other Stories.
- (6) Tales of Horror.
- (7) The Tragedy.

III The South Sea.

- (1) "The Wrecker", "The Ebb-Tide."
- (2) "Beach of Faless"
"The Bottle Imp"
"The Isle of Voices"

CONCLUSION.



INTRODUCTION.

THE PAST OF THE ROMANCE AND THE REACTIONARY PERIODS.

Before entering upon a minute study of the works of Robert Louis Stevenson, 'twere well to turn aside for a moment in order to obtain a brief survey of his predecessors in this wonderful field of literature.

One can be definitely assured that upon such a temperament as that of Stevenson, such works must certainly have had a powerful influence.

The most famous early definition of the "romance" and "novel" is that given by Clara Reeve¹: the "novel" deals with the real and commonplace and the "romance" covers the unreal and fanciful. The modern definition, however, considers the novel as divided into two classes, namely:- the "romantic novel" and the "realistic" or "psychological" novel. Incident is the chief characteristic of the "romance", and character the most important consideration in the "realistic" novel. It will be seen that Stevenson's fictional writing comes mostly under the heading of romance, yet one is surprised to note that character analysis is by no means neglected.

The chief of the early romances were cycles which had as centres Arthur, Charlemagne, Alexander the Great, and Troy. Appearing first in verse form, they had, at a later period, prose versions, chief among these being "Morte d'Arthur" by Malory. These were followed by "King Horn", "Guy of Warwick", and "Robert the Devil" in verse, and also the "beast fabliaux." A popular subject of the latter was "Reynard the Fox".

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At a relatively more modern period came Chaucer who was "at will a romancer or a realist"². His "Troilus and Cressida," though in verse, shows the character-analysis necessary to a novel. Its heroine is "the subtlest piece of psychological analysis in medieval fiction"³.

There is little worthy of note in the early sixteenth century, More's "Utopia" being the most important work. We must not forget to mention Montalvo's a Portuguese writer's "Amadis de Gaula", which in its definiteness of plot and seriousness of motive demonstrates the movement away from medievalism.

Cervantes' "Don Quixote" is illustrative of the inevitable reaction after a surfeit of romance. In type it is close to the picaresque novel, and has as its aim, the ridicule of romance.

The Elizabethans, so famed in dramatic verse, also contributed the following romances: Sir Philip Sydney's "Arcadia" Thomas Nash's "Jack Wilton" (rogue story), John Lyly's "Euphues" in antithetical style, and "Rosalynde" (Lodge), which is traceable in Shakespeare's "As You Like It".

Until the Restoration, the romantic inspiration was in abeyance, "Oroonoko" (Mrs. Aphra Behn) and Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" being its most noteworthy examples." To the latter of these, fiction is indebted because of "the artistic effect of minute detail, the precision of his imagination and the force and charm of his simple idiomatic English"⁴

2. W.L.Cross "Development of the English Novel" Page 6.
3. W.L.Cross "Development of the English Novel" " 6.
4. W.L.Cross sp. cit. " 21.

In the opinion of Professor Phelps, our first novelist is Defoe, who wrote "Robinson Crusoe"⁵. It is romantic in spirit and realistic in its details. It is an improvement on the old romantic story in that, it "humanized adventure"⁶. It is interesting also because Stevenson is the modern exponent of a similar type in "Treasure Island"; "Gulliver's Travels" (Swift) also deserves attention. Although it was primarily intended as a satire, it is mostly read when we are children, when our innocence screens the bitterness.

The first realistic reaction of note was that set in motion by Richardson. Others prominent in it were Fielding, Smollett and Sterne. Smollett reminds one of Stevenson, in that, as W.L. Phelps says, speaking of Smollett and the seafarers: "It is like witnessing, from a safe coign of vantage, a free fight, and hearing resounding whacks"⁷. Contemporaneous with the writings of these men is Goldsmith's "Vicar of Wakefield" (1766), which in part is romantic.

Although destined to be the seedtime of the Nineteenth Century Novel⁸, the next half-century was given over largely to imitators of Fielding, Smollett, and Sterne and to novels of purpose and of contemporary manners. Examples of each class respectively are "Henry" 1795 by Richard Cumberland, "Evelina" and "Cecilia" by Francis Burney, and "Castle Rackrent" by

5. W.L. Phelps. "Advance of the English Novel" Page 42.
6. W.L. Cross. "Development of the English Novel" Page 29.
7. W.L. Phelps. "Advance of the English Novel" Page 69
8. W.L. Cross. "Development of the English Novel" Page 83.

Maria Edgeworth. The latter book has the distinction of being the first international ^{novel} and of influencing Sir Walter Scott.

Walpole's "The Castle of Otranto" is the first of the Gothic romances. Here all is horrors and thrills, and the scene is laid in the middle ages. Walpole's chief successors were Miss Clara Reeve "The Champion of Virtue" (1777) and Mrs. Ann Radcliffe (The Mysteries of Udolpho).

"Longsword" by Thomas Leland was the first historical novel since Defoe⁹ and its direct influence was toward giving historical detail to the Gothic romance. "The new historical novel began to give the air of a distinct species in 1783"¹⁰ In this year Miss Sophia Lee published "Recess." Clara Reeve in "Roger de Clarendon" gives the names of her sources, among which appears that of Froissart. Jane Porter marks a great advance in the historical romance. Her two novels are "Thaddeus of Warsaw" (1803) and "Scottish Chiefs" (1809)

In an age of wonderful development comes Jane Austen, whose novels of manners had two purposes. In "Northanger Abbey", she ridicules the machinery of the Gothic romance¹¹ while in her other novels of the stamp of "Pride and Prejudice", she endeavours to present a more natural girl, such as Elizabeth Bennett.

9. W.L.Cross "Development of the English Novel" Page 101.
10. W.L.Cross " " " " " " 111.
11. W.L.Phelps "Advance of the English Novel" " 89.

The active return to realism, however, is evidenced in the works of Thackeray, Bulwer-Lytton, George Borrow, Anthony Trollope, Charles Reade, and Charlotte Brontë; while the active exponents of the psychological novel were Elizabeth Gaskell ("Ruth"), George Eliot and Meredith. The last quarter of the nineteenth century has ^{Thomas} James Hardy, and Zola (Naturalist) as realistic or naturalistic novelists; and Stevenson ushers in a new period of refreshing romance, destined to have many followers in the early years of the Twentieth Century.

This brief summary of the romance now brings us to the discussion of the evolution of Stevenson's romance.

I. (1) THE EVOLUTION OF STEVENSON'S ROMANCE.

1 (A) THE EVOLUTION OF STEVENSON'S ROMANCE.

Stevenson's romance owes its development to the influences brought about by his ancestry, and to his evident desire to cultivate a natural tendency to view life from a romantic standpoint. Robert Lewis Balfour Stevenson was the only son of Thomas Stevenson of the famous family of lighthouse engineers, from whom he derived the Celtic characteristics of his genius, since "his father's pedigree runs back to the Highland Clan Macgregor, the kin of Rob Roy".¹⁵ His mother was Margaret Isabella Balfour, descendant of the Rev. George Smith, to whom Burns made reference in "Holy Fair"¹⁵. The vivacity and sprightliness of Robert Louis Stevenson can be traced to his mother, who was bright and vivacious.¹⁶ The gypsy strain seems to have come from the Stevenson family.¹⁷ That Stevenson resembled his father in other respects is evident from Stevenson's comment upon his father's talk, which in style and manner of delivery was not unlike that of the son.¹⁸

In addition to his inherited endowment of romanticism, it seems as if many things contrived to add to Stevenson's store of romance. Even as a child, Robert Louis Stevenson was very delicate, and, of course, it was necessary to relieve the

15. H.B. Baildon "Robert Louis Stevenson" Page 14.
16. Robert Louis Stevenson's Edinburgh Days. Page 19.
17. E. Blantyre Simpson op. cit. " 20.
18. E. Blantyre Simpson op. cit. " 28.

tedium of so much confinement to the house through serious illnesses. To this end, his mother and his nurse "Cumay" told him numerous stories¹⁹. He early made attempts at authorship, for he dictated "The Life of Moses", when he was only six years of age.¹⁹

Another feature of this story-telling was his game of "Make-believe"²⁰, which is common enough to children similarly placed. The rare feature about it, is that Stevenson continued to play at games until the close of his life²¹ and to display his youthful buoyancy²². His many illnesses must also have begun that tendency to dream, of which later in life, Stevenson made such good use. He called his helpers "The Brownies"²³ or "The Little People"²⁴. One commentator says that these "Little People" bring him a "heightened vividness which is beyond realism"²⁵. Throughout his youth and early manhood, Stevenson kept before him the goal of literature. Thomas Stevenson greatly desired that his son should follow the profession of his ancestors²⁶. Louis earnestly attempted to comply with his father's wish, for he was not without a natural talent for engineering, the romantic side of which appealed to him.

19. H.B.Baildon. Robert Louis Stevenson. Page 15.
20. R.A.Rice. Robert Louis Stevenson, How to Know Him.
Pages 21, 23, 25.
21. J.A.Hammerton. "Stevensoniana" Page 257.
22. Andrew Lang. "Essays in Little" " 24
23. H.B.Baildon. Robert Louis Stevenson. " 99
24. R.A.Rice. Robert Louis Stevenson, How to Know Him pp.28-31
25. R.A.Rice op. cit. Page 37.
26. H.B.Baildon. op. cit. " 237. 327