

**Travelling Hopefully: Reading Childhood in Robert Louis Stevenson's
*A Child's Garden of Verses.***

By

Eluned Jones

**A thesis
submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

MASTER OF ARTS

**Department of English
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada**

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Abstract

A Child's Garden of Verses by Robert Louis Stevenson is a landscape of reconciliation. The figure of the sick child who is present in the truncated and deformed person of Hyde is rehabilitated through the play world of the garden that grants joyful and secure being as a precondition of existence. The imaginative force that the imperiled figure of Jim Hawkins possesses in his pirate world is similarly manifested in the child's games, but the budding adventure world of the garden can be deliciously subversive without the quality of danger that threatens the child in *Treasure Island*. In the healthy space of the garden, the problem of fathers in *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped* that also afflicted Stevenson's own relationship with his father is variously resolved through parental presences who imaginatively bless the child.

The shifting borders of the garden world, where a swing's flight can extend towards heaven at the same time as the child is limited by an enclosing wall, are part of the poem's inquiries about what it means to go away, and what it means to return. The idea of recovery that is part of the poems' relationship to sickness is linked to a belief in the possibility of return that lead to inquiries about the nature of travel and manifestations of "home." The poems' imaginative preoccupation with travel is connected with Stevenson's own writings on travel and his far-reaching voyagings, but they also are part of an attempted understanding of growing up, and its place in the child's world. The poems work from a voice that is at once convincingly and recognizably childish, without excluding the presence of an adult voice and understanding. The language of the poems themselves attempts to negotiate and understand the gulfs and the links between adults and children, and between parent and child.

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Dedicated to my parents, whom I adore.

Introduction.

“Are you sitting comfortably? Then I’ll begin.”

Opening of children’s radio show *Listen with Mother*.

“If this don’t catch the kids, why they have gone rotten since my day.”

Robert Louis Stevenson on *Treasure Island*.

In Defense of Fun and Adventure: A Child’s Garden of Subversives.

What is that mysterious and frivolous quality that goes under the name of fun? Surely adults have no more use for fun than they do for training wheels, or plastic pants, or other discarded relics of childhood. But fun, if it has its least self-conscious and enduring forms in childhood, has its best uses in adulthood. The spirit of irreverence and freedom and the belief that life is sacred that is the core of all good rebellions against an unreasoning and oppressive authority (including the solemn authority of self), are all born from fun. Robert Louis Stevenson, of course, the “king of contemporary storytellers” (Savater 197), knew fun in its deepest, most cosmic sense, as it was entirely necessary to not dying. Stephen Arata writes of Stevenson that, “It is easy to see his subsequent flight to Samoa [after *Jekyll and Hyde*] as a finally futile attempt to reclaim the possibility of pure Romantic expression. The irony, of course, is that exile made him more popular than ever with the middle-class reading public in Britain.” (52-3). If there are two words that could less describe Stevenson’s life than “futile” and “ironic,” I do not know what they are. No one lived a life that was in spirit less ironic than Stevenson, no-one was ever less despairing with more cause to be. Chesterton, who believes wholeheartedly in humour, adventure and pure Romantic expression, observes that:

Treasure Island, if hardly a historical novel, was essentially a historical event. The rise or revolt of R.L.S. must be taken in relation to history, to the history of

the whole European mind and mood. It was, first and last, a reaction against pessimism. ...Anyhow, in that period we might almost say that pessimism was another name for culture. Cheerfulness was associated with the Philistine, like the broad grin and the bumpkin...Stevenson...stood up suddenly...and shook himself with a sort of impatient sanity; a shrug of scepticism against scepticism...He did definitely and even dramatically refuse to go mad; or what is very much worse, to remain futile. (63-5)

Making a case for the un-ironic spirit of adventure, he concludes:

...Whatever may be the case with most boys, there was certainly one boy who enjoyed *Treasure Island*; and his name was Robert Louis Stevenson. He really had very much of the feeling of one who had got away to great waters and outlandish lands; perhaps even more vividly than he had it later, when he made that voyage not metaphorically, but materially, and found his own Treasure Island in the South Seas. But just as in the second case he was fleeing to clear skies from unhealthy climates, so he was in reviving the adventure story escaping from an exceedingly unhealthy climate...He alone escaped, as from a city of the dead; he cut the painter as Jim Hawkins stole the boat, and went on his own voyage, following the sun. Drink and the devil have done for the rest, especially the devil; but then they were drinking absinthe and not with a "Yo ho ho"; consuming it without the most feeble attempt at any "Yo ho ho" – a defect which was, of course, the most serious and important part of the affair. For "Yo ho ho" was precisely what Stevenson, with his exact choice of words, particularly desired to say just then. It was for the present his most articulate message to mankind. (75-6)

Arata sees the "male romance" of Stevensonian adventure as a "form of critique – occluded, self-interested, contradictory – arising from within the patriarchy itself...Stevenson used the conventions of 'adventure' (and again those conventions could be said to structure both his work and, especially after the move to Vailima, his life) in an attempt to shape his male middle-class readership and ultimately to affirm his ties with them" (47). Ah, but adventure has little to do with its own conventions, for adventure has to do with a certain spirit. The exact position of enlightened cynical skepticism that governs Arata's analysis is the spirit that adventure rails against. One is aware one is having an adventure when "pluck" and courage and a whole host of outdated words become indispensable. If the reader of *A Child's Garden of Verses*

notices one thing, it is that most of the poems, even the scary ones about night, are about having fun. We might, perhaps pompously, call the whole book a study in representations of fun. These children are, of course, adventurers in training, for adventuring is about people who are energetically able to have all kinds of fun in the midst of dire circumstances. Adventure is the way in which play remains convincing in the adult world. Light-heartedness, so often absent from criticism, is another virtue of the adventurer, who whistles as he makes his way down the road. And light-heartedness too, that must turn to brave-heartedness of the man that must bear up under dreadful circumstances. If we want to know what is meant by that word “adventure,” what is feelingly at the word’s core, we need only look to Stevenson’s own words:

In nobler books, we are moved with something like the emotions of life; and this emotion is very variously provoked. We are so moved when Levine labours in the field, when André sinks beyond emotion, when Richard Feverel and Lucy Desborough meet beside the river, when Antony, “not cowardly, puts off his helmet,” when Kent has infinite pity on the dying Lear, when, in Dostoieffsky’s *Despised and Rejected*, the uncomplaining hero drains his cup of suffering and virtue. These are notes that please the great heart of man. Not only love, and the fields, and the bright face of danger, but sacrifice and death and unmerited suffering humbly supported, touch us in the vein of the poetic. We love to think of them, we long to try them, we are humbly hopeful that we may prove heroes also.

We have heard, perhaps, too much of lesser matter. Here is the door, here is the open air. *Itur in antiquam silvam*. (“The Lantern-Bearers” 150)

Adventure is finally about transformation – yes, even the same motions that concern Jekyll and Hyde – for it is about altering despair to resolve, indifference to engagement, sickness to strength, defeat to love and courage. It is overall about responding to the world with passion and loyalty and the bravery of self, and being so converted into a self, into a man. And why should anyone be ashamed to own up to that word “man,” as if it always signals “patriarchy” or some derogatory “masculinity” to us? Let us think of it

rather as someone to whom the heart is precious. "Glad did I live and gladly die" is manly in this old and good way.

Arata reads *Jekyll and Hyde* as "turn[ing] the discourses centering on degeneration, atavism, and criminality back on the professional classes that produced them, linking gentlemanliness and bourgeois virtue to various forms of depravity. At the same time the novel plumbs deep pools of patriarchal anxiety about its continued viability...a meditation on the pathology of late-Victorian masculinity" (43). But "gentlemanliness," "bourgeois virtue," and "depravity" – why, these are words that describe that magnificent old pirate Long John Silver! And Alan Breck, honest and honourable in that silver-buttoned coat, entirely profligate, prone to sword fights and lawlessness: a pirate in spirit if ever anyone was. One might read *Jekyll and Hyde* equally well as a study in piracy – piracy will out. It is perhaps only because Hyde's spirit is forced to dwell in the city of London that his tale ends in defeat. Who can tell what a character he might have been if allowed to roam the high and free seas! (Which is like saying, if only Hyde had been allowed to have more fun...) One might also say that *Jekyll and Hyde* has its roots in sickness, in the battle against one's own body that will insist upon deforming and reducing itself. Anyway, Jekyll is only interesting because of Hyde, that elfish spirit disrupting the London streets. How do we know that Jekyll is not, in fact, the less exciting manifestation of a Hyde who has secret desires to be respectable? It seems to me that adventure is the thing that saves the worst of the world, and makes it into the best. Permit me a lengthy passage from the best authority on pirates, Fernando Savater, for no-one understands the critical importance of piracy to the world like he does:

Sandokan [a pirate] tells us – and it is a lesson so subversive that it smashes into fragments the very idea of politics as the infamous art of perfecting control – that everyone who does not want to die a slave must be the protagonist of his own passion. It is a terrible message that he brings us, and formulated abstractly, as a pure watchword, it can even resound with equivocal accents of barbarism in the new era. Between us and the joyous individual adventure which takes pleasure in its very risks, the shadow of the sinister swastika will fall for a long time yet.

How difficult it is to be conscious of this and yet not renounce adventure! Storytelling is precisely what helps us to do it, showing us by example that the hero's strength is ethical – the memory of the primordially important and of generosity, faith in life – against which no ethic of force can prevail. And even if it should prevail, the hero would not cease thereby to be a hero – and he would still win in everything essential! In this respect, Sandokan's attitude is luminous, sunny. But let us not burden it with austere transcendentalism, whose seriousness always loses sight of the fact that a joyous lightness is the most important thing. We must embark, without giving it any more thought. We must force our way through the jungle, which offers terrible wonders at every step and ignorance of what may cause the death of the careless traveler...Reward? The only reward is the adventure itself... (88-9)

Yes, we must never travel carelessly. That is the lesson of the adventurer, and a good one too, the sort of thing that can sustain us, even when we ought to be strapped to our bed, dying.

“Cheerfulness,” Robert Louis Stevenson believed, “is the great virtue.” He similarly believed that we have a duty to be happy (Vorhees 25). Both qualities are deeply moving in Stevenson's writing, a sort of manageable transcendence that is less saintly than it is profoundly human. Cheerfulness seems a particularly British attribute: one somehow pictures Baden-Powell and imperial handlebar moustaches, conjuring as it does images of ruddy-cheeked gentlemen in walking shorts energetically swinging sticks. If there is something rather quaintly Victorian about the very idea of cheerfulness as a “virtue” or happiness as a “duty,” there is an equal something of the child in the notion of happiness and cheer. Cheer has a Christmassy ring to it, and indeed, it was thoughts of Christmas that first introduced the Darling children to the ecstasies of flying, while

happiness for whatever reason seems most genuinely viable in the hands of children. We may indeed read Stevenson as a Victorian, with all its accompanying notions and theories. We might, by way of example, read the imaginatively generative garden space against the play energies belonging to “From a Railway Carriage” as a commentary on industrialism, and the urban-rural divide. The wonderment with which the child in the train “whistle[s] by” sights that in any other poem might be worth stopping to consider – “Here is a child who clammers and scrambles,/ All by himself and gathering
brambles.../And here is a mill and there is a river:/ Each a glimpse and gone for ever!” (9-10, 15-16) – finds a sense of magic in the loss of the poem’s landscape (“Faster than fairies, faster than witches...” [1]) that locates the child as an unanxious participant in technology’s encroachment upon the traditional country world. The child’s ability to remain as imaginatively engaged on the train as he is in the garden makes him different from the Romantic child who can only dwell in nature, for this child, like the ones in E. Nesbit’s *Railway Children*, co-exists comfortably both with modernity and within the rural world. He marks a kind of transition point between old and new that breaks with the past as easily as the child seems to break with memory. Harry Hendrick locates the period from the 1880’s to the 1920’s (*A Child’s Garden of Verses* was published in 1885)

as:

“The classic period in which childhood was transformed,” in that compulsory schooling replaced wage-earning as the accepted occupation for children aged five to around twelve or thirteen. The significance of the classroom, and the entire ideological apparatus of education, lay partly in what was coming to be seen as the proper physical segregation of children from adults, and in its demand for “a truly *national* childhood.” This in theory ignored all previous distinctions such as those arising out of divisions between the rural and urban worlds, the respectable and non-respectable working class, and the social classes themselves.
(12)

In the poem's gestures of elimination, we might read the mirror of society's similar move towards certain kinds of erasure. Always a national symbol, the railway potently places the child as a cheerily modern English child. We do not know where the train is carrying the child, for what is important in the poem is his exhilarated participation in a world of movement and vision. Even the potential playmate offered by the poem's other solitary child, "all by himself", is not nearly enough to halt the almost destructive joy of the child in erasing the landscape, as the train is energetically described as "charging along like troops in a battle" (3), as though one might imagine the landscape being vanquished and eliminated by speed. It is not so much what the child sees from the railway carriage that is the source of his enjoyment, but rather the fact that those things can disappear so easily. Clearly unhampered by the burdens of memory and nostalgia, unlike the children in "Farewell to the Farm" who even as they rather cheerfully bid "Good-bye, good-bye, to everything!" are cataloguing their losses, "And fare you well for evermore,/ O ladder at the hayloft door,/ O hayloft where the cobwebs cling..." (9-11), the child in the train is quite untroubled by the prospect of things disappearing for all time. Perhaps for the adult the poem uncomfortably reminds us how easily the things of childhood are forgotten, that childhood itself is but "glimpse[d] and gone forever," but for the child there is a powerful enjoyment in leaving everything behind.

Elizabeth Waterston, who titles her paper on *A Child's Garden of Verses* "Going for Eternity," which speaks to her deep-seated conviction in the continued resonance of the poems – "Do the poems still work? I can only say that they worked for me when I read them to my own children, and as for grandchildren, the only rival I have found so far in the popularity sweepstakes is [Dennis] Lee's *Alligator Pie*" (9) – freely acknowledges

at some length that:

There are other obviously period poems: 'The Lamplighter,' of course, but also perhaps "From a Railway Carriage": today's diesel-drawn trains make no such pounding rhythms. The blocks and the toy boat, the story-books and picture-books and the pretend tools, the chisel and hammer of "My Treasures," all reflect modish "Froebelianism." Friedrich Froebel had convinced mid-century parents that all children should be offered "gifts" in simple shapes, that they should be entertained with nursery rhymes, traditional folk songs, and taught crafts such as simple weaving, and digging and planting. "Kindergarten" is an innocuous term to us today. In 1850, when Stevenson was born, it was a term fraught with controversy. Froebel, the German educator who coined the term, also minted the revolutionary idea that children should be treated like little flowers. Not as little beings born in sin, to be trained and directed with an unsparing rod towards adulthood, and not as seers blest, Wordsworthian beings with visions superior to the limited perceptions of adults: the Froebelian concept was that childhood should be a period of gentle growth toward happy and sociable maturity... Robert Louis Stevenson was raised by modern parents. Like any Froebelian adept, Margaret Balfour Stevenson kept a journal of her child's doings, his games and fantasies, pets and toys. (7)

For Waterston, the immortality of the verses, which, as she points out, are "still available in all sorts of editions, variously illustrated, and is still a pre-eminent choice of educators as well as of parents and care-givers" (5), rests not in whatever unavoidable Victorianisms it is that they express and bring forwards, but in how it moves beyond the concerns of its period, towards "eternity." The poems, virtually alone out of many similar works of the period, have in some way remained alive to the reader both child and adult. The 1880's saw a swell in publications of poetry for children, including books by Kate Greenaway, Walter Caldecott, and Walter Crane. It is fair to say (from my own experience) that of these works, it is only Stevenson's that is easily and regularly found on the children's shelves of any bookstore. The only poetic work for children that has survived so well from roughly the same period is the incomparable nonsense poems of Edward Lear. Critical interest, as we find, for example, with Christina Rossetti's poems, is not the same thing as sustained reading interest from children and their parents. If it is

true that Stevenson's poems have a continued hold on modern children, it is also true that not only objects in Stevenson's world such as gas lamps, but the whole play-world itself, has virtually disappeared for these children. The sort of play that dominates Stevenson's poems, where children roam the countryside freely, is something that middle-class urban children, faced with their parents' fear of predators coupled with our current belief in productive activity – as a recent study in *Time* magazine noted, play such as dress-up or even lego has been widely replaced by supervised lessons and activities – rarely indulge in. “The child in Stevenson's verses,” as Ann Colley observes, “...is constantly using one thing for another – a bed for a boat – and that suffices: it becomes the real thing. For him, in the world of play, the shadow does as well as the substance” (310). Stevenson's complaint, quoted by Colley, that “the mature mind...desires the thing itself,” is as true now for children as it has habitually been for adults. From Cabbage Patch Kids to Tickle-Me-Elmo to Pokémon, we have seen that modern children are extremely aware of the brand-name supplied authenticity of their toys. One toy cannot take the place of another desired toy, a knock-off version cannot convincingly pretend to be the “real thing.” In a sense, the entire imaginative conception of Stevenson is outdated – we see this most clearly, perhaps, in Disney's current need to update *Treasure Island* into *Treasure Planet*, as though islands are no longer anywhere near exciting enough.

If we accept that the child in Stevenson's poems is unlikely to authenticate the modern child's own experience of childhood in an easily recognizable way, what is alive in his child is something that has little to do with authenticity at all, either historical or practical. The child who speaks to us from the garden is at once extremely specific, and very vague. He has an individual voice so that we can instinctively recognize him as

Stevenson's child and not Blake's or Wordsworth's or Carroll's, with his own special plays, and observations, and imaginative obsessions. We can certainly understand and recognize him as an imaginative presence. It is almost certain that he is male, not only for his interest in toy soldiers and guns and other violent play, but because the entire imaginative conception of childhood for Stevenson is located in the energies of the male child. One might go so far as to assign the relative sanity of Stevenson's poetic effort – that is, its lack of the sort of pathological yearnings that comes to haunt the works of Carroll and Barrie, who, as U.C. Knoeflmacher understands of numerous male Victorian writers, become obsessed with the figure of the female child and their relation to a deeply feared/desired maternal presence – to its location in a male figure that demands fewer contortions to the accompanying gestures of nostalgia involved in such an effort. To long for a female child is in a sense an act of self-repudiation for the male writer. Stevenson's project had more to do with recouping play moments lost to sickness – an act of self-reinforcement – than with desire for an unattainable other. It is boyhood imagination that launches the adventure yarn whose first imaginative stirrings are detailed in the child's games in the verses. It might also be noted that Stevenson's marriage to Fanny Osbourne brought him his stepson Lloyd, with whom and for whom he wrote and produced numerous little books (“with titles such as *Martial Elegy for Some Lead Soldiers*” [Waterston 8]), and generally re-inhabited the play world all over again as a parent. It is Lloyd who famously prompted the all-male world of *Treasure Island*, and more generally must have prompted Stevenson towards the “series of reclaimings” of “the other toys and dreams and experiences that had lain buried in the maturing years” (Waterston 8) like the toy soldier of “The Dumb Soldier” who, like Alice, goes underground “through a long

winter of forgetfulness” (Waterston 8), but is uncovered and put back in his rightful place on the nursery shelf.

But if we know the imaginative energies of the child so well, at the same time, we know little specific about him. It is difficult to say how old the child is who at once reads picture story-books in the manner of a very young child, but has a sophisticated imaginative identification with the sun or the garden. In a curious way, the child Tom in his brief appearance in “A Good Play” is more clearly articulated in his act of bringing an apple and a slice of cake along on the play adventure than the main child of the garden ever is. It is unclear if the voice is even that of one child, or if any number of imaginatively sympathetic children speak within the garden. And despite the child’s maleness, certainly female children do not find the poems foreign and unapproachable, for the poems are not overwhelmed by an exclusive masculinity. The child watching birds, and the rain, and the wind, is making inquiries about his world that can be articulated by any child regardless of gender. In this sense, there is a kind of “everychild” conception in the poems that works against any kind of specificity, and that at once welcomes identification in the broadest sense, but prevents the sort of recognition that comes from reading a child of one’s own age or stature.

There are two things that I believe are at the root of the enduring vision of Stevenson’s verses. One is the autonomy and absolute confidence of the child within his world. There is a quality of being to Stevenson’s child that is remarkably vivid, and whether or not the games the child plays to assert his place in the world remain relevant to children, the self-contained and imaginatively sure nature of the child must appeal to child readers. The child’s presence is always asserted in the poems, and he exists with an

immediacy and strength that is at once powerful and reassuring. The sureness with which the child transforms the world to his play-needs, the absolute pleasure with which he swings or climbs, are constant declarations of self that mark the child as important and immediate within the world. The number of orphans who populate children's literature reflect a secret feeling among children that they too could be more effective children without parents. Children do not, of course, want to be orphans, but they probably like to feel that if they were they could be good ones. If we feel one thing about the vaguely realized parental figures of *A Child's Garden of Verses*, it is that they are a presence that one can always come back to, but not right now, right now we are playing games.

Parents probably do not become fully important to us until we are adults, probably for the very fact that, being less dependant on them, we can discover how they might be more entirely loved. Stevenson demands no allegiance from his children except to themselves, and it is an assumed precondition of their world that the child should possess a viable self that, rather than battling for its existence against a world of dangerous and duplicitous adults as in so many other popular children's books (the beginning of the *Harry Potter* series, for example), is automatically granted as though such things were naturally possessed. This is a strong message for a child to receive, and one that creates a desire for identification with the powerful child of the poems, in the way that children want to play with the most charismatic child on the playground.

Related to this sense of charisma and power is the second attribute of Stevenson's verses, which has something to do with the imaginative obsessions and repetitions that punctuate the poems. Stevenson repeatedly returns to certain ideas, that of the sailor, or of the garden itself, and works it out in different perspectives over many poems. What

Stevenson is not doing in these poems is assuming that the child has a simple and easily satisfied imagination. His implicit belief that a child has an incredible complex and difficult system of imagination and thought, his refusal to reduce the ideas of his poems to one thing, captures something about the way children see the world. He is right to place the child as an often wondrous observer of the world, but where he carries this idea further is in his understanding that the world does not reveal itself to children any more than it does to adults. In an early edition of the poems, he had attempted to rhyme "children" with "bewildering," a formulation which, although rejected by his friend Sidney Colvin as "A Cockney rhyme" (Waterston 5), goes a long way to expressing Stevenson's vision of the child within the world. Stevenson's poems in their language play out endless encounters with difficulty, (not least in his willingness to move his language beyond the nursery rhyme formulation), and in this, they are never patronizing towards the child reader. The relative complexity of the ideas in the verses, which border gently upon anxieties about home, about night, about size and age, speak respectfully about and within the child's world, a sympathetic quality which is rare indeed in much of writing intended for children and fools.

If Stevenson's child is authentic in the important imaginative ways, it is because he had something different invested in his child than the usual nostalgia and affection for childhood. *A Child's Garden of Verses* is perhaps the most important critically of all Stevenson's works, because in it he wrote freely and un-self-consciously of the things that concern his writing over his lifetime. Everything that was to interest Stevenson later can be located in some form in his verses, as Waterston observes:

A Child's Garden of Verses reveals many of Stevenson's persistent motifs. Recalling Northrop Frye's phrase, "Fables of Identity," we recognize with

amazement the way the tiny poems unroll all the kinds of stories that Stevenson would go on telling as a way of defining himself. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is often instanced as epitomizing the neurosis of a split personality. Long before he wrote that classic, Stevenson revealed his doppelgänger bent in "My Shadow." For the wanderlust that would catapult him into a famous series of voyages, there is a diminutive version in "Foreign Lands." "Marching Song" swings with the military zest that carries Alan and David along the road to the isles in *Kindnapped*. Rebellious dreams of piracy, raids, and anti-social adventure, released in *Treasure Island*, were pre-released in "A Good Play." (8)

All this is true, but what is even more compelling about the poems is not that they say things that Stevenson would go on to express, but that they touch on the things that Stevenson otherwise did not allow himself to express publicly. The deepest battle of Stevenson's life was not necessarily with sickness, but the one that alienated him from his father for many years. This was their disagreement over religion. The child who inhabits Stevenson's garden might in a very strong way be his best argument against the strict and unforgiving Calvinism of his father. Illness in one sense had liberated Stevenson to a certain extent, for his orthodox father, who would otherwise have strongly disapproved (not of the adventure, which he enjoyed as much as his son, but of the "heathenism"), allowed books such as Burton's translation of *The Arabian Nights* into the nursery to occupy his son, and that vision of mysterious foreign lands, of thieves and swords and revenge and strange magic would endure throughout Stevenson's writing. One might even be tempted to argue that what might be seen as Scottish in Stevenson's novels is in fact pure Burton. *Jekyll and Hyde* has a strong echo of Presbyterian morality throughout its pages, and it could even be said that the only thing that condemns Hyde in the book is the moral scheme that seems to ultimately demand it, rather like the patriarchal voice breaking in upon the story. *Jekyll and Hyde* might be Stevenson's most obviously moral work, but that is not the same thing, especially to Stevenson, as being

religious. Like the secrets between Jekyll and Hyde, Stevenson had a hidden world to his writing that he kept intensely private. Biographer Richard Holmes' exploration of Stevenson's travels in France recounts his visit to a Trappist monastery, and ultimately uncovers the deep ambiguity that exists in Stevenson's writing. Stevenson, Holmes tells us, wrote "As I walked beside my donkey on this voyage, I made a prayer to myself, which I here offer to the reader, as I offer him any other thought that sprung up in me by the way. A voyage is a piece of autobiography at best." Holmes continues:

He then entered not one, but three short prayers in his journal, of which the last is a Prayer for Friends...I sensed in all this that Stevenson was telling himself, quite simply, that he was not made to be alone, either in the human or the divine scheme of things. Paradoxically, the Trappists were teaching him that he belonged outside: he belonged to other people, and especially to the people who loved him. It is here that I later discovered one of the most suggestive differences between the original journal and the published *Travels*. For, on reflection, Stevenson removed all these passages from the published version. They were, I think, just too personal and became part of an emotional "autobiography" he was not prepared, at that date at least, to deliver up to his readers. Instead he struck a more romantic, raffish pose, remarking only of his feelings after the Compline service: "I am not surprised that I made my escape into the court, with somewhat whirling fancies, and stood like a man bewildered in the starry night." Cutting out all mention of the prayers, he reverted to his bohemian persona, and added instead a snatch of bawdy French folk-song... (33)

The religious feeling that Stevenson for whatever reason could not allow himself – perhaps simply the fashion of most nineteenth-century artists, perhaps something more complex to do with illness and a necessary repudiation of certain fatalisms about life and the soul that religion often carries with it – finds curiously free expression in the verses. His language edges close to hymn cadences on many occasions, and there is an exaltation of the world and its heavens that finds similar expression only in the prayers published after his death. What runs through the garden in an intense stream is Christian feeling, released from dogma and ritual, and distilled to its purest form of joy and worship.

Similarly, although much of his life worked to repudiate his illness through his vigorous prose style and travels, there is a surprising and endearingly vulnerable acknowledgement of his sickness in "The Land of Counterpane." *A Child's Garden of Verses* has perhaps given Stevenson a largely undeserved reputation for nostalgia, but it is in fact one of the few places that he allowed himself to indulge in the past in a life that constantly moved forward at an almost alarming pace. His novels usually carry us to a point where return is impossible: Jim's repudiation of the treasure in *Treasure Island*; the flight through Scotland with the looming threat of arrest for Alan and David in *Kidnapped*; the final death in *The Master of Ballantrae* where the Master discovers one cannot be buried alive and revive; the deaths of Hyde and then Jekyll as well, whose whole experiment was based in the belief that one could go away and always return to oneself intact. The poems are perhaps the one enduring place where he could make room for gestures of return and recovery. It is as though everything Stevenson was normally afraid of in his writing was converted into the poems in the secure space offered by the garden. Without pushing the metaphor too far, the garden of the poems is Stevenson's most lasting vision of resurrection.

The complexities of the child voice in *A Child's Garden of Verses* are for a large part due to Stevenson's repeated working outs of the same ideas in many incarnations and through many perspectives. What I have tried to do throughout these pages is to undertake a study in much the same manner, working through a series of linked approaches that address the poems in relation to certain broad concepts that run through the poems: joy, travel, growing up. The fourth chapter, a kind of containing chapter, revisits the poems as poetry, with the belief that poems do something special. The poems

of *A Child's Garden of Verses* are the most effective group of poems that Stevenson ever managed, so it seems that there must be something in poetry and something in childhood that prompted each other. Childhood offered Stevenson the right language, and poetry became the place through which childhood could realize itself. I read *A Child's Garden of Verses* very much as a book of poems, by which I mean that the poems are not simply collected into the same place, but work in close and sometimes difficult relation to each other. With this sense, I have tried to account for as many poems as is possible without unnecessary repetitions, and I have done my best to read the poems closely not just for the ideas they yield, but the language in which they are written. One reason for this is that the poems have not been given serious or lengthy consideration as acts of poetry – and I am not uncomfortable making the claim that as a book of poetry, there are few, not just for children, but for any audience, with more consistently and beautifully intertwined meanings – but also, more importantly because we must understand how the poems are conceived of and work as a whole. Given that our own feelings towards memory and childhood are undeniably complex, it is odd that we look for simplicity in works that engage with these issues. Stevenson's poems, while they individually may appear to be charmingly light rhymes about playtime, are invested in an immensely difficult grappling with the imagination and the ways it sustains life and self. It would perhaps be easier to reduce the poems to historical or theoretical beginnings, but the more difficult and honest approach is to attempt to understand and come to terms with the poems' own complexities. The best way to do this, I believe, is to try as many approaches as the poems suggest, to work within the imagination to understand the imagination, and to not be neglectful of the feeling that almost palpably dwells in the poems, where repeated

invitations to the reader, “How do you like to go up in a swing?,” “Come up here, O dusty feet!,” “Bring the comb and play upon it!” entice and welcome us to fully inhabit childhood.

In “Keepsake Mill,” leaving the garden is an unforgivably violent act that trespasses into a place where adult memories live, “Over the borders, a sin without pardon,/ Breaking the branches and crawling below,/ Out through the breach in the wall of the garden,/ Down to the banks of the river we go” (1-4). The motion of the mill in the river lies outside the borders of childhood, inhabiting itself a kind of border world where “Long after all of the boys are away” (16) and “Dusty and dim are the eyes of the miller,/ Deaf are his ears with the moil of the mill” (11-12), the adults “Home from the Indies and home from the ocean/...all shall come home” (17-18). Once drawn out of their secure garden space, the children can never return, for the illicit mill becomes the place where “we shall meet and remember the past” (24). If childhood gardens are difficult to find, they are relatively easy to escape, for one need only swing high enough, climb a tall enough tree, crawl through enough holes, to move beyond its threshold. Entering the garden is obviously, then, a delicate task. Let me here quote in its entirety, as the best entrance to Stevenson, the moving words of his poem “Night and Day,” for like Alice, we must become little before we are allowed into the garden. We notice the hush that falls around us as we proceed, for we are here setting foot among the things of the heart, so let us move forward with our own hearts open, answering its summons, ready to receive as children whatever the garden offers:

When the golden day is done,
Through the closing portal,
Child and garden, flower and sun,
Vanish all things mortal.

As the building shadows fall
As the rays diminish,
Under evening's cloak, they all
Roll away and vanish.

Garden darkened, daisy shut,
Child in bed, they slumber –
Glow-worm in the highway rut,
Mice among the lumber.

In the darkness houses shine,
Parents move with candles;
Till on all, the night divine
Turns the bedroom handles.

Till at last the day begins
In the east a-breaking,
In the hedges and the whins
Sleeping birds a-waking.

In the darkness shapes of things,
Houses, trees and hedges,
Clearer grow; and sparrow's wings
Beat on window ledges.

These shall wake the yawning maid;
She the door shall open –
Finding dew on garden glade
And the morning broken.

There my garden grows again
Green and rosy painted,
As at eve behind the pane
From my eyes it fainted.

Just as it was shut away,
Toy-like, in the even,
Here I see it glow with day
Under glowing heaven.

Every path and every plot,
Every bush of roses,
Every blue forget-me-not
Where the dew reposes,

“Up!” they cry, “the day is come
On the smiling valleys:
We have beat the morning drum;
Playmate, join your allies!”

Chapter One: Joy.

“‘O, why,’ I remember passionately wondering, ‘why can we not all be happy and devote ourselves to play?’ And when children do philosophise, I believe it is usually to very much the same purpose” (221).

Robert Louis Stevenson, *Child's Play*.

“When you have/ once had/ a great joy/ it lasts always/ quivers gently/ on the edge of all the/ insecure adult days / subdued inherited dread/ makes sleep deeper.”

Tove Ditlevsen (Trans. Ann Freeman), “Self Portrait 2.”

Is there any way for the reader to refuse the joyful invitation “How do you like to go up in a swing,/ Up in the air so blue?” (1-2) that opens Robert Louis Stevenson’s poem “The Swing?” The upward rush of the swing’s movement so convincingly captures what it is for the heart itself to “leap up” that one immediately feels swinging to be “the pleasantest thing/ Ever a child can do!”(3-4). In the swing’s flight, elated and weightless, we can understand what it truly means to be moved. The same uncontained joy that carries us into the bright air allows us to uncomplicatedly inhabit childhood. The invitation of the poem is to participate in a shared act of swinging enjoyment, where the poem is as wholly absorbed in the delights of swinging as the soaring child. Freed from all restraint, the child is brought forth into a world that matches his exuberance with its own responsive brightness, where the sky is as naturally sunny as the child. In the child’s movement through the air one is reminded of Stevenson’s other shining inhabitant of the sky, “Great is the sun, and wide he goes/ Through empty heaven without repose/...Above the hills, along the blue,/ Round the bright air with footing true...” (“Summer Sun” 1-2, 17-18). The encompassing wideness of the sun’s journey is similarly present in the arc travelled by the child in the swing. While the poem extends the brief moment of ascension to seemingly infinite proportions, Stevenson’s child himself seems to exist

uncontained by time. The firm belief in swinging as a timeless pleasure, “the pleasantest thing/ *Ever* a child can do” (my italic), binds all swinging children “each to each” in a kind of Neverland, where one is a child eternally, and childhood never changes.

How, then, might the serious reader of Stevenson approach this poem? The child in the poem exists only in his pleasure; he is articulated through his joy in swinging, described only in his full and involved experience of play. When we touch the joy in the poem, we also touch the child. The only reading context demanded of, or perhaps even available to, us is this great and wide sense of joy. Surprisingly for the experienced reader of poetry, Stevenson is asking us to actually imagine swinging. Let us consider, for a moment, the metaphoric possibilities that the act of swinging offers the poet – not at all in the interest of providing a richer, more meaningful reading than the one Stevenson offers us, but rather to acknowledge the sorts of things that we might expect a swing to point us towards. Stevenson’s swing with its broad sweep conjures the sensation not of the uninspiring backyard swing, but rather the sort of swinging that takes place in haylofts and over rivers, the sort of swinging that Tarzan might do, and that children in books like *Charlotte’s Web* always seem to have glorious access to. How might we approach swinging in order to yield the most complex approach? Katherine Paterson, in her novel *A Bridge to Terabithia*, finds the opening to her children’s imaginary country at the very point where they are in danger of becoming lost, as though the terrifying fairytale image of the children in the dark forest is relocated into midair. The enchantment of her rope swing has, like all good spells, the prospect of real danger:

There was an old crab apple tree there, just at the bank of the creek bed,
from which someone long forgotten had hung a rope.

They took turns swinging across the gully on the rope. It was a glorious
autumn day, and if you looked up as you swung, it gave you the feeling of

floating. Jess leaned back and drank in the rich, clear colour of the sky. He was drifting, drifting like a fat white lazy cloud back and forth across the blue.

“Do you know what we need?” Leslie called to him. Intoxicated as he was with the heavens, he couldn’t imagine needing anything on earth.

“We need a place,” she said “just for us. It would be so secret that we would never tell anyone about it.” Jess came swinging back and dragged his feet to stop. She lowered her voice to a whisper. “It might be a whole secret country,” she continued, “and you and I would be the rulers of it.”

Her words stirred something inside him. He’d like to be a ruler of something. Even something that wasn’t real...

...“I know” - she was getting excited - “it could be a magic country like Narnia, and the only way you can get in is by swinging across on this enchanted rope.” (38-39)

The sense of forgetfulness and void that first introduces the rope, left by “someone long forgotten,” is present in the motion of the child Jess on the rope. Jess’s enjoyment of the rope is located in a kind of self-erasure, in a weightless, and therefore seemingly bodiless, “floating” and “drifting” that pleasurably gestures towards the death suggested by the rope’s original owner. What is curious in the passage is Jess’s vivid absorption in his own disappearance, the sense of full and delighted involvement in self-nullification. His “intoxication” with the possibilities of his own absence suggests the dangers of an imagination whose strength is that it can overpower the self. The imagination is understood not as a force opposed to death and loss, but as a thing that travels painlessly through the empty regions. The rope’s movement over the abyss of the gully cannot be entirely forgotten despite its locating the child in the “rich, clear...sky.” The passage does not make us particularly aware of the possible drop, pointing us instead up in the air so blue where even the movement of the rope seems harmlessly “lazy” rather than dizzying. We might therefore be forgiven if we remember only that the rope is a swing, and not its potential as an instrument of hanging. How powerful it must be for the child, forced to depend on the adult world a great deal, to find himself not “needing anything on

earth.” The temptation to erase that world, to effectively destroy its presence, is understandably strong and intoxicating.

The magic country of Terabithia is in effect an enchantment that balances that of the rope, a generative imaginative location that is entered by powerfully confronting the imagination’s destructive capabilities. One is reminded of the play pleasure recounted by George MacDonald Fraser in his introduction to Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*, where it is the dying figure of Israel Hands, and not the daring and victorious child Jim Hawkins, who is most exciting to the boys:

Sixty years ago the superintendent of Carlisle swimming baths decreed that no boy of twelve years or under should use the high diving board. R. L. Stevenson was to blame for this... The film version of *Treasure Island*, with the immortal Wallace Beery as Long John Silver, was showing at a local cinema, and no incident in that splendid production had so excited our juvenile admiration as the moment when Israel Hands, played by that matchless villain, Douglas Dumbrille, dragged his way up the shrouds of the good ship *Hispaniola*, dirk in teeth, in pursuit of Jim Hawkins, only to be properly shot and make his fatal, twisting plunge into the watery depths. It cried out for emulation, and the deep end of the baths was rendered perilous by a constant swarm of urchins struggling to the high board and toppling backwards with realistic death-screams, regardless of the orthodox bathers below. Hence the ban. (vii)

The fact that the superintendent’s ban need only apply to those boys either Jim’s age or aspiring to be so suggests that the opportunity to perform such a thrilling death has at least something to do with one’s assured status as a Jim-like figure, a Jekyll-and-Hyde-like doubling that allows the child to return to his child self when he emerges from the water, a pleasure that allows one to enact the satisfying death of Hands, while secretly knowing that at heart one is really the figure of Hand’s conqueror. This is by way of saying that Stevenson is clearly not unaware of the wonderful dangers that potentially accompany the journey up into the rigging, where the rope swing is given its best adventurous incarnation among pirates, who better than anyone can use a rope to its full

imaginative potential. At the close of that awfully thrilling scene where Jim, pinned to the mast by Hand's dirk, fires his pistols "in the horrid pain and surprise of the moment" (154) and plunges Hands to his death, Jim although "sick, faint and terrified" from the dagger penetrating his shoulder, recounts that "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" (155). Any terror that might exist in the death of Hands seems located in Jim's fear of falling to lie "beside the body of the coxswain," as if the adventurous child's body is not so distinct from the villainous adult one. The boys tumbling from the diving board instinctively understand how close the two bodies might be in that moment. If Silver is the pirate Jim should be, Hands is the pirate he very nearly is. Jim looking down upon the dead body of Hands is matched in its vision of child terror only by the moment in *Kidnapped* when David Balfour ascends in darkness the uneven "grand stair" which ends in a dead drop into emptiness. Jim's security in the rigging of the lurching ship is in fact the accidental gift of Hands, whose own grip is not strong enough to hold onto the shrouds, but who pins Jim in place in an ironic play on his own name.

If we accept, then, that those darker incarnations of swinging are undoubtedly present when Stevenson places Jim in the lurching rigging of the *Hispaniola*, we can dispose of that argument suggesting that Stevenson is simply not a good enough writer to understand what a swing really means. He once described his adult self as existing "halfway between the swing and the gate," suspended like the swinging child at his flight's peak between the world that opens upwards and the world that opens outwards.

In many ways in “The Swing,” swinging is a gate, not least for the adult to find a way back into childhood. The joyful singularity of the swing that remains an actual swing asks us not just to imagine the sensation of swinging, but more importantly to imagine what it is like to be as fully involved as the swinging child. That child, entirely existing in the act of swinging, presents us with a figure who fully exists as one concentrated self. This singleness of self is a rare achievement in Stevenson. Fernando Savater’s description of Jim – “His apparently frail figure is revealed at every turn as the strongest one in the story, the cleverest and most implacable, but also as obviously childish” (31) – locates the childishness of Jim most compellingly in his ability to be convincingly piratical. “...This,” Savater believes, “is the story’s hidden plot, events point him towards the pirates’ world, offering him the profound temptation of piracy; that is, the suggestion that, to win a real buccaneer’s treasure, one must in some sense become a buccaneer” (36). The child’s body is deceptive, for what it most importantly houses is the soul of the pirate, as Savater irresistibly writes in offering Silver as Jim’s spiritual father. “In the end, Silver escapes with the most precious part of the treasure, that is, with his spirit and panache – these are the riches no one can steal from the pirate” (36). (Stevenson’s similar contribution in “Virginibus Puerisque” reads “There is nothing so monstrous but we can believe it of ourselves...No one will have forgotten Tom Sawyer’s aspiration: ‘Ah, if he could only die *temporarily!*’ Or, perhaps, better still, the inward resolution of the two pirates, that ‘so long as they remained in that business, their piracies should not again be sullied with the crime of stealing’” [23-24].)

We can see in Jim a less malignant manifestation of the process by which the patrician body of Jekyll houses the grotesque soul of Hyde. Perhaps the point is made

clearer if I state that Hyde's stunted body resembles that of a child: he is the child soul of Jekyll. Hyde, as Irving Massey describes him seems almost like a child playing dress-up in adult clothes: "small, shrivelled; the oversized clothes seem to hang on an emptiness within" (104). We possibly see the flitting shadow of Hyde, who "in his extreme and ultimate state, is invisible, hidden behind the cabinet door" (Massey 104) in the underground tutelary spirit of "The Unseen Playmate", that invisible "Friend of the Children" (4) who, we are told, "...loves to be little, he hates to be big,/ 'Tis he who inhabits the caves that you dig" (13-14). The first appearance of Hyde in the story features a literal collision between him and a small girl, an event perhaps reminiscent of Jim's fear of his body being placed beside the twisted one of Hands:

All at once, I saw two figures: one a little man who was stumping along eastwards at a good walk, and the other a girl of maybe eight or ten who was running as hard as she was able down a cross street. Well, sir, the two ran into one another naturally enough at the corner; and then came the horrible part of the thing; for the man trampled calmly over the child's body and left her screaming on the ground. (466)

The littleness of Hyde in the passage, who oddly enough "stumps" along like some misplaced Narnia dwarf, links him with the smallness of the child with whom he "naturally enough" collides.

If Hyde is the hidden body of Jekyll, who can "trample" Hyde out of existence every time he returns to his own, good, body, perhaps the little girl is the more perfect child soul of Hyde. Massey writes that:

The good in man is identified with duality. It has an alternative: it can escape into the condition of being bad. The good has a recourse, it has an avenue of escape; in a pinch, when its position becomes untenable, unendurable, or simply too much of one thing, it can think of change. The bad is what arises when the good can think of no escape or alternative, when it is forced to confront existence as single...

Jekyll can hide in Hyde, but where is Hyde to hide? (Or, to put it differently, Jekyll is Jekyll-Hyde, but who is Hyde?) There are no further transformations available to him, and having faced his singleness he cannot forever continue dodging back into the falsehood of duality. It is not because the evil in Jekyll has overwhelmed the good that Hyde can no longer return to the form of Jekyll; it is because our progress or descent toward unity is a one-way process, and the realization of our singleness is something that once learned cannot be forgotten. (99, 101-2)

Hyde's evil is, as Massey observes, unconvincing. Like a frustrated and selfish child, he strikes out at people who intrude upon him, who enter the space of his fiercely insistent being. Prevented from other expression by the stifling body of Jekyll which always closes around him, Hyde bursts out in almost autistic fits of temper. The screams of the small girl crushed by Hyde draw outrage from the spectators, but they are the audible expression of the childish anguish forbidden to the silent Hyde.

The tortured child of *Jekyll and Hyde* is the more painful expression of what is at work in *Treasure Island*, what underlies the concept of piracy in Stevenson. The futile pirates of *The Master of Ballantrae* – where, as Roderick Watson tells us in the novel's introduction, "life under Teach's command (he is not even the 'real' Teach we are told) is a series of bungled and fruitless pursuits, with episodes of cowardly and brutal cruelty to those who are too slow or too frightened to escape from a vessel which is itself 'too foul to overhaul a bottle'" (viii) – remind us that without the imaginative force of a Jim Hawkins or a Long John Silver, even piracy, like so much of Stevenson, is invested in deformity and grotesquerie. At its best, piracy is Stevenson's way of assigning a rescuing energy to deformity, something that likely has to do with Stevenson's own sickness and debilitated childhood. If Hyde is invisible, it is the potion drinking Jekyll who wills himself to disappearance. Jekyll has been seen by Arata as a scathing commentary on the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie, made clear by the number of initials that follow his name,

but I wonder if he does not more effectively demonstrate how one becomes overwhelmed by the power of illness. Jekyll is a doctor who drinks potions to erase himself, and Hyde has something to do with an energized illness. We similarly remember how Long John Silver is said to have been inspired by Stevenson's friend W. E. Henley, who suffered an amputated foot, and the peg-legged pirate is not an indictment of Henley, but rather a grand compliment that animates deformity. In a letter to Frances Hodgson Burnett's publisher, Stevenson wrote of his "amusement and delight" for *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, but added that he wished the author had "conceived the tale one touch more humanly" because she misses "the delicious *scène-à-faire*: the scene when the boy misbehaves, and our wicked earl becomes in turn his teacher in goodness" (*Letters* 1783A). Stevenson's vision of the child habitually seems realized most fully through the influence of wickedness upon him. His sympathy with the wicked is borne out in the ending of *Jekyll and Hyde*, where:

All that really sticks with the reader is one's sorrow for Hyde, not his evil; and by the time that sorrow makes itself felt the book is nearly over, Hyde is hidden from the reader, and soon after is dead. Yet these concluding pages are what matter in the book, not the stage of contrived violence. We learn to identify with Hyde, even to love him. In the end he proves to be less afraid of death than Jekyll had been. (Massey 105-6)

Jekyll cannot be loved, not only because Jekyll does not exist fully as himself, but because to love Jekyll is to erase Hyde. Jekyll, who wants to be Hyde far more than he wants to be Jekyll, understands this. If we love Jekyll, we cannot acknowledge Hyde, because Hyde can only then exist as the worse part of Jekyll. In loving Hyde, the reader can learn to love Jekyll, for we know his most secret self. The secret of the singularity of Hyde's existence is that it offers to us the duality of love. What Hyde must earn from the

reader is granted as a natural condition of the swinging child's existence in the garden.

Ann C. Colley observes:

The child's orientation is not, therefore, like that of Dr. Jekyll or the Master of Ballantrae, for his self is not a divided house; it need not turn back to regard itself and stare at its own 'imperfect and divided countenance.' The child blends the nights and days and the open and the secrets that come between Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and cause Hyde, at one point, to look back through the space of his anguish and review his life from his infancy. The child is spared this pain, for he lives in an ever-revolving present... ." (309-10)

The singularity that condemns Hyde is easily inhabited by the child who need neither be assigned as good or bad, but simply fully and articulately joyful. He invites us to live engrossed in the happy self of childhood.

The child who invites us so readily along in the opening lines of the poem promptly seems to forget our presence (Lewis 250). The perhaps plaintive request for a playmate, where the child "yearns to share his exaltation with someone else, perhaps another child, perhaps a friendly adult" (Lewis 250), is transformed with the swing's movement into a glorious assertion of the word "I." Barely pausing for a response to his question, the child rises unconcerned into the air, assured that his own enjoyment is sufficient. In asserting his pleasure, the child simultaneously asserts himself, "Oh, *I do think it the pleasantest thing/ Ever a child can do!*" (my italics). Is the child's pleasure at least somewhat due to this startling discovery of a self that so surely knows its own delights? Part of the secret of the child's enjoyment is that our presence is welcome, but not at all required. Regardless of how we respond, the child is still blithely flying above us. Of the group of poems in *A Child's Garden of Verses* that contain a happily playing child, "The Swing" seems the most perfect expression of an almost magically powered joy.

Like Wordsworth, “surprised by joy,” the relative inexperience of most of us with the automatically accessed joy of the child, unfailingly present every time he swings, leaves the reader without a ready-made understanding of what Stevenson could mean by this joy, and what he could want from us by coercing our participation. Let us look at two prose passages of Stevenson’s. The first is from the autobiographical essay of childhood memory and imagination called “The Lantern Bearers.” In it Stevenson writes:

...To look at a man is but to court deception. We shall see the trunk from which he draws his nourishment; but he himself is above and abroad in the green dome of foliage, hummed through by winds and nested in by nightingales. And the true realism were that of the poets, to climb up after him like a squirrel, and catch some glimpse of the heaven for which he lives. And the true realism, always and everywhere, is that of the poets to find out where joy resides, and give it a voice far beyond singing. For to miss the joy is to miss all. In the joy of the actors lies the sense of any action. That is the explanation, that is the excuse... .(149)

In another, rather more famous excerpt of a letter to reviewer William Archer about *A Child’s Garden of Verses*, he writes:

You are very right about my voluntary aversion from the painful sides of life. My childhood was in reality a very mixed experience, full of fever, nightmare, insomnia, painful days and interminable nights; and I can speak with less authority of Gardens than of that other ‘land of counterpane.’ But to what end should we renew these sorrows? The sufferings of life may be handled by the very greatest in their hours of insight; it is of its pleasures that our common poems should be formed; these are the experiences that we should seek to recall or to provoke; and I say with Thoreau, ‘What right have I to complain, who have not yet ceased to wonder?’ and, to add a rider of my own, who have no remedy to offer. (*Letters* 1416)

My reason for quoting both of these passages together is to begin to understand what it is for Stevenson that is at stake in joy. Joy is the treasure that rewards the diligent search, that, as Stevenson and Savater well know of treasure, can only ever fall into the hands of the deserving. “Smollet’s way does not lead to the treasure, for he has no sympathetic

relationship with the treasure,” writes Savater (36), and in the same way, one must “find out where joy resides” by climbing up behind in search of it like the “little me” who heads upwards into the cherry tree’s branches in “Foreign Lands.” Suffering is all too readily available in Stevenson’s world: perhaps the hardest thing of all to manage is that heartfelt expression of a genuine and credible joy.

One is reminded of the beautifully persistent sun of “Summer Sun” which makes bright an otherwise shady, empty, and enclosed world that seems almost tomb-like. Let me quote the poem here in its entirety, for the hymn-like quality that produces a radiance in the poem that matches the sun’s own light:

Great is the sun, and wide he goes
Through empty heaven without repose;
And in the blue and glowing days
More thick than rain he showers his rays.

Though closer still the blinds we pull
To keep the shady parlour cool,
Yet he will find a chink or two
To slip his golden fingers through.

The dusty attic spider-clad
He, through the keyhole, maketh glad;
And through the broken edge of tiles,
Into the laddered hay-loft smiles.

Meantime his golden face around
He bares to all the garden ground,
And sheds a warm and glittering look
Among the ivy’s inmost nook.

Above the hills, along the blue,
Round the bright air with footing true,
To please the child, to paint the rose,
The gardener of the World, he goes.

The light that falls “more thick than rain” is not unaware of its heaven’s capabilities for sorrow, for the rain is indeed a “thick” rain, but finds in the heaven an even greater

capacity for light. In one of the series of family prayers written at Vailima in Samoa towards the end of his life, "In Time of Rain," in a voice (not the sentiment expressed) that seems curiously foreign to the rest of Stevenson's writing, Stevenson writes:

We thank Thee, Lord, for the glory of the late days and the excellent face of thy sun. We thank Thee for good news received. We thank Thee for the pleasures we have enjoyed, and for those we have been able to confer. And now, when the clouds gather and the rain impends over the forest and our house, permit us not to be cast down; let us not lose the savour of past mercies and past pleasures; but, like the voice of a bird singing in the rain, let grateful memory survive in the hour of darkness. If there be in front of us any painful duty, strengthen us with the grace of courage; if any act of mercy, teach us tenderness and patience.

The Christian joy that Stevenson is writing of reveals itself in the images of the garden. If the garden was the place Stevenson had to construct in order to properly imagine the child who would dwell within it, it similarly was the place that he turned to in order to manage and express his religious feeling. The garden seems the one surrounding place that was adequate to bringing forth the things in Stevenson that were otherwise hidden or elusive. The Samoan jungle, "a few handfuls of men, and how many myriads upon myriads of stalwart trees!," through which a road had to be cut with knives and axes by forty chiefs to reach the top of the mountain where they knew Stevenson wanted to be buried, is a different landscape entirely than the childhood garden, tended however taciturnly by an ordering gardener. The chiefs had to open up the jungle to move Stevenson through it, but the garden had to be closed off, ringed with a wall (like the stockade that shields the Dr., Squire and co. in *Treasure Island*). Something stronger than imagination is needed to hold the child within the garden, as if the near-escape on the swing that carries him "over the wall"(5) or the covert burrowing that takes him through a gap out to the river in "Keepsake Mill," are movements that remind us of the child's refusal to inhabit or be contained by one enclosed space, even that of memory. It

is not the child who holds onto the garden, but the garden that holds onto the child. Because the swing's excess energy is an expression of an almost uncontrollable imagination, the garden is needed to provide the only imaginative landscape that can house the child without terribly restraining him. The child's impulse towards heaven is a move that is ultimately matched by the vision of the "garden green" and the "roof so brown," that call to the child as effectively as the open air. The "empty heaven" that the sun gardens cannot anticipate the cluttered and disordered world that the chiefs of Samoa would lovingly prune for Stevenson's body, but the chiefs garden on the same opening principle as the sun, carrying Stevenson upwards to the mountain peak in the sort of motion that surely is meant, if not understood, by the swing's movement.

The beautiful openness of the sun's face, which somehow manages to make its "glittering" quality seem warm and welcoming, is so unlike that of the "Old and serious, brown and big" (8) adult gardener (in "The Gardener") who "does not love to talk" (1), and who "when he puts his tools away,/...locks the door and takes the key" (3-4). What Stevenson thinks of the sullen gardener is made quite clear in the ultimately condemning line that marks him as one who "never seems to want to play" (12). Unlike the sun, who gardens the world by shedding uncontrollable brightness and whose first duty, even before "paint[ing] the rose" is "to please the child," the gardener, although responsible for the garden, has no true place within its borders. The real adult presences in Stevenson's garden are those nurturing souls like the stalwart cherry tree in "Foreign Lands," or the heaven-born sun and moon, whose greatest quality is a seemingly unlimited capacity for blessing. Parents in the poems are found in the things that bring light to the world. The sun's radiance is found in the candles of the parents who move

through the house at day's end in "Night and Day" until it shines from their presence. Just as the garden in that poem is articulated through the waning and revival of the light, where night hides the garden so that it can be rediscovered by morning, the light of the sun and moon work to define the borders of the garden space. The warm familiarity of the sun's smiling golden face, so readily and candidly bared, makes its light somehow homey and comfortable. While the sun is the angel-like inhabitant of the garden world, concentrating his light upon the home, the moon carries the imaginative blessings of the garden into the world beyond. The light in "The Moon" that shines upon "birdies asleep in the forks of the trees" (4) also shines benevolently "on thieves on the garden wall" (2). Those thieves, who seem like the relatively harmless cousins of the more terrifying pirates in *Treasure Island*, become illuminated as they break into the garden world. Once the moon successfully sheds light upon them, it moves through the opening created in the garden to shine confidently all over "On streets and fields and harbour quays" (3).

If the moon grants its light in a lovely way to the thieves, ("handle with care - everything - even the predators,") as if welcoming them into the garden, the breach in the wall assures us that childhood is no safe haven away from the world. It is the presence of the thieves that gives beauty to the moon's light. Its light is made heavenly by the fact that the moon does not leave them groping in the dark. No doubt the thieves would prefer to break into the garden in the dark, where there is less chance of being discovered, and in this sense the moon acts like a "howling dog" (6) protecting the house. Nonetheless the very human presence of the thieves is placed together with the assigning of a "face" to the moon. If the moon's face is described both as familiar, and as familiarly blank, "The moon has a face like the clock in the hall" (1), where the opening

lines seem to promise us a humanness that is rather disappointingly made mechanical, the thieves, who undoubtedly have interesting faces, provide us with the sort of appropriate human faces that we might assign to the moon. Is it in fact the presence of the thieves that makes the moon's light seem more genuinely illuminating than that provided by the lamplighter Leerie? Stevenson appears to more surely locate the fatherly presence of his lighthouse designer father in the maternal light that watches over everything in the world except "flowers and children" (11) who "Cuddle to sleep to be out of her way" (10).

But if children "belong to the day" (9), the poem imagines the moon as a sort of proxy childish discoverer, shedding light on all the things that have no place in, and even disrupt, the ordered adult world: "The squalling cat and the squeaking mouse,/ The howling dog by the door of the house,/ The bat that lies in bed at noon..." (5-7). The child who must follow the rules and routines of everyday life is understandably fascinated by the animals that are deliciously lawless. The thieves are allowed at least partial access to the garden because in this sense, they do belong there, offering an imaginative alternative to more conventional adults. The prospect of some force, malicious or not, in Andrew W. Metcalfe's words "breaking into the small house of our cautionary being," causes Stevenson little anxiety. By shining on all the things that might become disturbing, the "silent ministry" of the moon reveals them to be harmless, especially since the child is comfortably "cuddle[d] to sleep." Just as the world of Coleridge's poem becomes mysteriously and beautifully moon-like when it responds to the offered light, "quietly shining to the quiet moon," the potentially threatening world of Stevenson's poem is made as much a part of the shining world as the child who "belong[s] to the day." That the world remains steadfastly alive and active even when the

child closes his eyes is reassuring. Also reassuring is the notion that what is wicked and unfriendly in the world can be easily identified and assessed. Understanding the night's inhabitants, the moon gardens the night with a sympathy that molds its presence as surely to the difficult night as the sun is fitted to the glorious day.

The sun can find a chink in any darkness "to slip his golden fingers through" as if he too were a kind of master thief who breaks into the most protected house, whose inhabitants seem unable to resent his intrusion into their carefully constructed coolness. The almost neglected house is made somehow whole by the sun's rays, which make the "broken edge of tiles" not a sign of a house growing increasingly unstable, but rather a place that surprisingly welcomes the sun's rays. The coffin-like attic, unentered by any presence other than the spiders, is almost religiously bestowed with happiness, as the hymn-like language of the poem makes even that closed-off space penetrable. One might imagine the home storing the sun's light and retaining it at evening's end to shine in the darkness like the houses in "Night and Day." The sun locates the home in a way that is only vaguely available to the child in the swing, who sees only its brown roof. It is the sun who seems to know every corner of the house, however forgotten they are by the home's inhabitants. (One thinks of the grown-up child who enters the desert house in "Travel" and finds in a corner the abandoned toys of the departed children.) All hidden places, as high up as the attic, as close to underground as the "ivy's inmost nook" are acknowledged and revealed by the sun, for here there is no place for secrets. Oddly enough, among the sun's closest companions in the other poems is the beloved "friendly cow all red and white" (1) who nourishes not only the child's stomach ("She gives me cream with all her might,/ To eat with apple-tart" [3-4]) but also his heart, eliciting the

child's most heartfelt expression of love. The cow, gardening the field in its own endearing cow way by unconcernedly eating the flowers,

...[W]anders lowing here and there,
And yet she cannot stray,
All in the pleasant open air;
The pleasant light of day;

And blown by all the winds that pass
And wet with all the showers,
She walks among the meadow grass
And eats the meadow flowers. (5-12)

One feels a curious desire to have as much access to the Elysian fields as the cow who, moving through the open air as flawlessly as sun and child, seems to hold out hope even for those not powered by a forceful imagination.

The sun is not heaven's only gift to the child, for heaven itself seems to possess a radiance that becomes visible. The "blue and glowing days" own an intense happiness both related to the sun's presence, and moving far beyond into the vivid light of a joyful childhood. The almost too vivid quality of those days, as though the feeling contained in them can only be expressed by a luminescence as concentrated as the sun's, acquires an immediacy that almost makes us forget how empty the house is. Like the dwelling place of memory, the house's dusty vacancy seems a place which we can only inhabit through the sun's light. In the abandoned house of memory, it is joy that grants us the means of return. "To miss the joy is to miss all," for only joy gives us true access not just to the lightened areas, but the dark ones also. To seek out joy is to seek out that dusty attic space, and that forgotten corner, and lovingly illuminate it. Stevenson's joy is far more than casual, for it is fully invested in all possible feeling. Surely his swing seems to burst almost incoherently beyond all possible motion, the exuberant arc it traces moving well

beyond possibility to a fantastic height where nothing is hidden from the child's vision, where everything in the world is made visible. The secret of Stevenson's swing is that it is written by a man who had little opportunity for such carefree swinging in his own life. It is the perfect expression not just of what swinging should be, but of what childhood should be. The tiring physical effort of swinging has no place in the poem, nor is the least bit of attention paid to the disappointing actual act of swinging which offers little by way of transcendence. For all this, Stevenson's joy is not feigned joy: it is earned joy, bought by painful understanding of deprivation. To the child forbidden or unable to swing, swinging must seem the most wonderful and powerful activity in the world. It is an act of transformation, an act of transport, an act even of revelation. In its perfection, the swing is testament not only to the joy of play, the joy of self, but to the joy of the imagination itself, which makes whole.

Stevenson's first and best gift in the *Garden* is his allegiance to the ordinary.

Perhaps we find the most endearing forerunner of the map-inspired world of *Treasure Island* in Stevenson's recounting of childhood meals in his essay "Child's Play":

When my cousin and I took our porridge of a morning, we had a device to enliven the course of the meal. He ate his with sugar, and explained it to be a country continually buried under snow. I took mine with milk, and explained it to be a country suffering gradual inundation. You can imagine us exchanging bulletins; how here was an island still unsubmerged, here a valley not yet covered with snow; what inventions were made; how his population lived in cabins on perches and travelled on stilts, and how mine were always in boats; how the interest grew furious, the last corner of safe ground was cut off on all sides and grew smaller every moment; and how, in fine, the food was of altogether secondary importance, and might even have been nauseous, so long as we seasoned it with these dreams. But perhaps the most exciting moments I ever had over a meal, were in the case of calves' feet jelly. It was hardly possible not to believe – and you may be sure, so far from trying, I did all I could to favour the illusion – that some part was hollow, and that sooner or later my spoon would lay open the secret tabernacle of the golden rock. There might some miniature *Red Beard* await his hour; there, might one find the treasures of the *Forty Thieves*, and

bewildered Cassim beating about the walls. And so I quarried on slowly, with bated breath, savouring the interest. (218-19)

Tedium has no place in Stevenson's imagination. That ability to make magical the act of swinging, to make truly filling the act of eating, suggests to us what it might be like to live to one's best extent. Jean Fritz writes movingly of him:

"Happiness," Stevenson writes, "is not the reward man seeks. His soul is in the journey. He was born for the struggle, and only tastes his life in effort and on the condition that he is opposed." Sick all his life, Stevenson would not let anything deflect him from his pleasure. "The worst sin," he said, "is sloth. Turning away from the glories of life, sulking at dawn, eating without relish." Stevenson didn't always manage to be joyous, but he seldom forgot what joy was.

Of course, I fell in love with Robert Louis Stevenson, and longed to follow his footsteps. From the South Seas he wrote, "These voyagings, these landfalls at dawn, new islands peeking out from the morning bank, new forested harbours, new passing alarms of squalls and surfs, the whole tale of my life is better to me than any poem." Yet, on closer examination I felt that his life was really a poem. In spite of all the voyaging, his life did not have the makings of a true tale. His struggle was for health, and he made a long, gallant struggle in many places, celebrating life all the while. (463)

The voice of *A Child's Garden of Verses* that is drawn up from a wellspring of joy persists into the last days of his life. Stevenson's "Requiem," with its lilt of grateful return, although inscribed into his gravestone, would not be out of place among the poems of the *Garden*:

Under the wide and starry sky,
Dig the grave and let me lie.
Glad did I live and gladly die,
And I laid me down with a will.

This be the verse you grave for me:
Here he lies where he longed to be;
Home is the sailor, home from sea,
And the hunter home from the hill. (Collected Poems 130)

The blue and glowing days that the child inhabits with ease are turned wide and starry, but still recognizable as the sky that is the child's natural home in "The Swing."

Stevenson makes the move underground with the same sense of transport that carries the swing ever upwards, making equally convincing both living and dying gladly. At the end of *Treasure Island*, Jim “begins to disengage himself from the treasure, until his final declaration that nothing in the world would bring him back to seek the rest of the riches hidden on the island” (Savater 37). *A Child’s Garden of Verses* in its most joyous incarnation, returns us to unearth the riches of childhood, as though we had never ceased to seek them faithfully.

Chapter Two: The Voyage Outwards.

“God knows there are desert islands enough to go round – the difficulty is to sail away from them – but dream islands...they are rare, rare.”

Katherine Mansfield on *The Tempest*.

“Far and few, far and few,
Are the lands where the Jumblies live...”

Edward Lear

Nearing the end of the journey that compelled him to follow the path through France walked by Stevenson a hundred years before, biographer Richard Holmes remembers bursting into tears upon reading the poem “Where Go the Boats.” “I am still not quite sure what significance that little poem had,” he writes,

But it is to do with travelling, or at least a childish dream of travel; and perhaps even more the idea of landfall, of coming home. I suppose it is intolerably sentimental, yet it does capture something pristine about the Stevenson notion of “going away,” and just because it was written for children by a thirty-year-old man...this does not make the core of the feeling any less permanent a part of Stevenson’s adult make-up. (51)

The poem that so moves Holmes, and which he proceeds to offer to the reader “as a kind of touchstone,” owes a very real sadness to the deep ambivalence of its feeling, which tries to reconcile the concept of home with a very real fact of distance:

Dark brown is the river,
Golden is the sand.
It flows along for ever,
With trees on either hand.

Green leaves a-floating,
Castles of the foam,
Boats of mine a-boating –
When will all come home?

On goes the river,
And out past the mill,
Away down the valley,
Away down the hill.

Away down the river,
A hundred miles or more,
Other little children
Shall bring my boats ashore.

What does “going away” mean to the child? In Robert Frost’s poem “The Pasture,” the seeming child voice of the poem extends an invitation that tries to cover the poem’s images of separation – leaves raked from a pond, a calf fetched from its mother:

I’m going out to clean the pasture spring:
I’ll only stop to rake the leaves away
(And wait to watch the water clear, I may):
I shan’t be gone long – You come too.

I’m going out to fetch the little calf
That’s standing by the mother. It’s so young
It totters when she licks it with her tongue.
I shan’t be gone long – You come too.

“The invitation,” writes Myra Cohen Livingstone, “...is earnestly meant – for it is repeated in both stanzas of the poem, and is prefaced with man’s eternal plea when he asks another to join him: it won’t take much time” (215). But what aches at the heart of the invitation is that “going out” always begins with the intention to come back right away, until more and more duties or “acts of wonder” (as Livingstone rightly understands the tasks to be) occupy the self, where “only” raking leaves has already turned into the wider task of watching the water clear. The child instinctively understands this when he tries to persuade his companion to join him, as if knowing that he can’t come immediately back to him. The task to remove the newly born calf from the mother who cleans it just as the child has been sent to clean the spring is all about separating loved from loving, and not about fetching back. How can the companionship yearned for by the poem’s invitation hope to overcome a similar separation? “Going out” in “Where Go

the Boats” is governed by similar images of ambiguity, where the image of the river that moves permanently out of the child’s reach, headed towards some achingly elusive eternity, is contained by the trees that prevent the river from slipping entirely away. But even though the river’s flow is endless, it never seems to pass out of the child’s sight. More than conveying the sense that the river is long, the poem captures the childish sense of his own world being encompassingly large. The world the child only vaguely belongs to is as far beyond him as the river. It is as though the world surrounding the child cannot come fully into focus, leaving only the impression of brown set against gold. The child’s best consciousness of the world is not expressed in the details of what he sees, but in his articulation of the world’s distance from himself, his knowledge of the world’s constant “away-ness,” which makes present an acute awareness of loss in its mournful repetition. Can the thought of the boats brought safely to land adequately comfort, when those other childish hands seem to have a much better grip on the world than the child who can only watch things go away? It is not the boats that are most painfully adrift, but rather that first child, who cannot be as easily brought ashore by those imagined welcoming children. Holmes, after quoting a passage from Stevenson that reads, in part, “I have been after an adventure all my life...and thus to be found by morning in a random woodside nook...not knowing north from south, as strange to my surroundings as the first man upon the earth, an inland castaway – was to find a fraction of my daydream realized,”

comments:

I loved this idea of the “inland castaway.” It seemed to me such a subtle, almost poetic idea, as if real travel were concerned with disorientation rather than merely distance. It was losing yourself, then finding yourself again: casting yourself, at least for one moment, into the lap of the gods, and seeing what happened. (29)

The profound loneliness of the child in the poem is most sadly found in his longing for a home contained in the aching question "Where will all come home?" Already present in that question is the knowledge that one must locate a home that may be a long time and far distance away, that a home is not the natural property of the child, but something that must be sought out.

There is something lovely in the image of the other little children being the source of homecoming, the river connecting child to child so that they find an unconscious home in each other. But at the same time, if we are to fully invest in the comfort of those children, it seems we must forget and move away from the first, lonely, child, who launches the boats alone even if they are brought to shore by a compensatory community of children. The "childish dream of travel" is not as much a wish to go away, as it is the longing to "come home." The beautiful ambiguity of the poem lies in those final lines, for if the poem begins with the child's bewildered sense of a river that "flows along for ever," the moment that the boats are brought to shore reminds us that the river cannot carry the boats forever, that the childish belief in the eternity of things cannot be sustained. It is a poem about growing up imagined as travel, and perhaps all of Stevenson's travels has really rather more of the childish dream than Holmes is willing to allow. After all, *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped* contain a vision of travel, a vision of the journey, that is entirely compelling. He travelled with an openness that is frequently startling: one can understand why the Keats' poem "There was a naughty Boy" has been given spiritual status in *A Child's Garden of Verses* by my mother. Her mistake is irresistible: the boy who follows his nose to Scotland seems indeed to be lured into

Stevenson's world. The quality of amazement is certainly familiar, as is the child's capacity for surprise and even bewilderment:

So he stood in
His shoes
And he wonderd
He wonderd
He stood in his
Shoes and he wonder'd – (112-17)

The word "sailor" has so many incarnations in *A Child's Garden of Verses* that it becomes itself a touchstone to which the imagination returns to provide its deepest explanations. There is something particular at stake in the childish dream of going to sea that is quite different from the travel at work in "From a Railway Carriage" or the coach journey in "Farewell to the Farm." Those travels too deal with things left behind, but they are real leavings, actual journeys taken by the child. Sailing is for the child an imaginative journey that attempts to recoup something that the imagination perceives as missing. Stevenson wrote "Where Go the Boats" after he had undertaken a number of foot journeys in Europe, before he embarked upon the great sailings of his life that would take him first to America, and later throughout the South Seas. The poem looks forward yearningly (if we can say that) to the idea of travel that he would work out over the rest of his life, the idea that he finally expressed about himself on his tombstone in the line "Home is the sailor, home from sea." In the poem "Nest Eggs," the anticipated flight of the baby birds is described in a way that blends the joy of the child in the swing with one manifestation of the word "sailor":

Younger than we are,
O children, and frailer,
Soon in blue air they'll be,
Singer and sailor.

We, so much older,
Taller and stronger,
We shall look down on the
Birdies no longer...

In spite of our wisdom
And sensible talking,
We on our feet must go
Plodding and walking. (17-24, 29-32)

“Sailing” in the garden begins to become a wide term for everything that can transform, or get away and escape in some way, which is really no more than the old understanding of slippery Proteus. What is at stake in both places is the imagination. No doubt there is a great deal that is romantic about the sea, and his father, who had a romantic imagination, “put himself to sleep nightly with stories of ‘ships, roadside inns, robbers, old sailors, and commercial travellers before the era of steam’” (Daiches 8), and would tell the same *Treasure Island*-like stories to his son during his restless sick nights. But there is something deeper than romance in the idea that Stevenson kept returning to as important, something, perhaps linked to its beginnings in illness, to do with going away from oneself. When very ill, Stevenson’s response was to go sailing, as though re-entering the story space woven for him as relief by his father. The idea at the end of “Where Go the Boats” is of the traveller commending himself into the hands of others, of giving oneself up not only to the movements of the tide, but to the welcome of others. “Make it heaven about him, Lord,” prayed Stevenson, “by the only way to heaven, forgetfulness of self...,” and maybe there was something in the persona of the sailor that released Stevenson from the necessary solipsism of the very ill.

Stevenson as an adult was the sort of traveller – if there is a sort – who visited a leper colony, and was moved not by their sickness, but rather by the happiness he found

there. Ill himself, there was nothing of pity in his interactions with the people on that island; having decided that it would be insulting to wear gloves, he resolved instead that he would simply not offer his hand to be shaken (Daiches 83), a decision that should not be taken as cavalier, as it speaks about Stevenson's idea of dignity and others' entitlement to it as well as his own. Expecting to find misery and illness, expecting to be disgusted, he was instead gratified by the vibrant community he found there:

All horror was quite gone from me: to see these dread creatures smile and look happy was beautiful. On my way through Kalaupapa I was exchanging cheerful *alohas* with the patients coming galloping over on their horses; I was stopping to gossip at house doors; I was happy, only ashamed of myself that I was here for no good...the low sun was right in my face; the trade wind blew pure and cool and delicious; I felt as right as ninepence, and stopped and chatted with the patients whom I still met on their horses, with not the least disgust. (Daiches 83)

The episode is telling not only for what it says about Stevenson's relation to sickness, but also for its feelings about exile, which, as they are in Stevenson's own life, are brought together in the isolated leper colony. The horrified fascination with sickness that we can sense in the reasons behind his visit, the morbid curiosity of a man who was travelling closer and closer to death is surprisingly transformed into a genuine belief that what he sees in the colony is beautiful. 'It was an extraordinary experience,' writes Daiches,

Undertaken out of a compulsion to face what he called "the horror of the horrible," only to find "a horror of moral beauty" everywhere...To Colvin he wrote... "I have seen sights that cannot be told, and heard stories that cannot be repeated: yet I never admired my poor race so much nor (strange as it may seem) loved life more than in the settlement." (83)

The joy of the episode is Stevenson's repudiation of sickness, not of illness itself, but of the terror and disgust that accompanies it. He is said at his death to have cried out to his wife "What's the matter with me, what is this strangeness, *has my face changed?*" which, if it conjures the image of a despairing Jekyll (Oates 608), also suggests the deformity

visited upon the lepers by their disease, and the horror of becoming unknown to oneself because of illness. In fact, one feels that Stevenson's visit to the colony is like one expecting to encounter a number of grotesque Hydes, and finding himself instead, like Massey in his reading, moved first to sorrow, and then love. At this point, Stevenson was aware that his health would probably never allow him to return home – even if he were to live, he would be compelled to stay in the “healthy” climate of the South Seas. “The verses’ cycle of sleeping and rising, darkness and light are part of [a] reassuring rhythm of recovery. They revolve the child in a world of reawakenings,” writes Ann Colley.

“One wonders, perhaps,” she muses:

if Stevenson's desire to travel was not partially a quest for a place where he might re-enter the orbit of the jet-black night and the clear day – where he might...travel and feel reborn...Obviously, for the ailing Stevenson to go out was not always to be able to come back. The myth of resurrection could not endure. The Master of Ballantrae might return from the dead twice, but not three times. (311-12)

His grateful emotion towards the lepers has a great deal to do with his complex feelings towards home, and towards finding life in the loss of home. Finding life was not only the condition of Stevenson's travels, it was a necessity. “Like Ulysses,” G. K. Chesterton says of Stevenson,

for all his adventurousness, he was always trying to get home. To vary the metaphor, his face was forever turning like the sunflower towards the sun, even if it were behind a cloud; and perhaps after all there is nothing truer than the too familiar phrase from the diary of the doctor or the nurse; that he was a sick child, who passed his life in trying to get well. (91-2)

Chesterton, that grand admirer of Stevenson, finds an almost perverse sense of adventure even in Stevenson's death, with an imaginative flair for the ordinary that matches Stevenson's own:

...And indeed his death may well come also at the end of this chapter of experiment, as the last of his experiments. I was a lad when the news came to

England; and I remember that some of his friends doubted at first, because the telegram said that he died making a salad; and they "had never heard of his doing such a thing." And I remember fancying, with a secret arrogance, that I knew one thing about him better than they did, though I never saw him with these mortal eyes; for it seemed to me that if there were something that Stevenson had never been known to do before, it would be the very thing that he would do. So indeed he died mixing new salads of many sorts; and the image is not inappropriate or irreverent; but only touched with a certain lightness and resilience...that belonged to him from first to last...and even over his grave something of a higher frivolity hovers upon wings like a bird; "Glad did I live and gladly die," has a lilt that no repetition can make quite unreal, light as the lifted spires of Spyglass Hill and translucent as the dancing waves; types of a tenuous but tenacious levity and the legend that has made his graveyard a mountain-peak and his epitaph a song. (123)

Anyway, it is fitting that surprise should mark Stevenson's death, as it marked all of his best travels. His inability to maintain his preconceptions, his fidelity to the currency of experience not only makes him an interesting traveller, but an extraordinarily kind one as well. The journey to and through America in order to reunite with, and eventually marry, Fanny Osbourne, that he recounts in *The Amateur Emigrant* (a wonderfully self-deprecating title) begins with him mocking the class differences of the steamer, and himself for his writer's conceit of travelling among the steerage passengers (although the truer reflection of this decision seems found in his genuine pleasure of company):

For some time after I came aboard I thought I was only a male; but in the course of a voyage of discovery between decks, I came upon a brass plate, and learned that I was still a gentleman. Nobody knew it, of course. I was lost in the crowd of males and females, and rigorously confined to the same quarter of the deck. Who could tell whether I housed on the port or starboard side of Steerage No. 2 and 3? And it was only there that my superiority became practical; everywhere else I was incognito, moving among my inferiors with simplicity, not so much as a swagger to indicate that I was a gentleman after all, and had broken meat to tea. Still, I was like one with a patent of nobility in a drawer at home; and when I felt out of spirits I could go down and refresh myself with a look of that brass plate. (6-7)

There is a Jim Hawkins-like note to the man who disguises himself among gentlemen to whom he ultimately returns, although it is no expression of his inner self. Amid the irony

and jollity of Stevenson's prose lurks the fact that he was, in fact, quite poor himself: the trip to America would exhaust both his funds and his health. He mentions writing in his cabin for hours, a volume of work necessary to earn him money. If the above passage makes Stevenson appear appropriately modern and disdainful of social differences, he offers us a more difficult interaction in America, where upon his "first introduction to a coloured gentleman," he observes:

With every word, look, and gesture [he] marched me farther into the country of surprise. He was indeed strikingly unlike the negroes of Mrs. Beecher Stowe, or the Christy Minstrels of my youth...Indeed, I may say, this waiter behaved himself to me throughout that supper much as, with us, a young, free, and not very self-respecting master might behave to a good-looking chambermaid. I had come prepared to pity the poor negro, to put him at his ease, to prove in a thousand condescensions that I was no sharer in the prejudice of race; but I assure you I put my patronage away for another occasion, and had the good grace to be pleased with the result. (122)

What is notable about the passage is Stevenson's obvious and deliberate use of a not very flattering (at best) description of the "coloured gentleman." It is hard to tell if Stevenson is more insulting to himself or the waiter, and it is this ambiguity that contains the whole direction of the passage. The point is not that Stevenson is not condescending, that he alone among millions escapes racism, but rather his delighted discovery that the waiter is as condescending to him as he to the waiter, and so he concludes quite cheerfully that he is indeed a "sharer in the prejudice of race." It is not prejudice that Stevenson has put aside at the incident's end, but rather his own pretensions. That is better than we ought to expect: it is certainly more honest than most allow themselves to be. As in all good encounters, the real understanding and discovery gained is not about the "negro," but about Stevenson himself: this is one of the things that is meant by "coming home" when one travels.

The cheerful “birdie with a yellow bill” (1) in “Time to Rise” possesses a “negro-like” inflection to its voice as it coaxes awake the sleeping child, “Ain’t you ‘shamed, you sleepy-head!” (4). The delightful intrusion of a seemingly American bird into the English landscape of the poems, like a cheeky Mark Twain moment making a surprising appearance, makes birds seem model travellers who move easily between lands, cheerily startling and energizing the child’s world. In “Singing,” the voice of the “birdie” is imagined as expanding into a joyful cacophony of various voices from across the world, rather like the Disneyworld ride with the multicultural dolls singing “It’s a Small World After All:”

Of speckled eggs the birdie sings
And nests among the trees;
The sailor sings of ropes and things
In ships upon the seas.

The children sing in far Japan,
The children sing in Spain;
The organ with the organ man
Is singing in the rain.

The story-book “negro hunter’s huts” (20) that the child imagines in “Travel” are part of a child’s vision that is intrigued by difference, but has no context for understanding or coming to terms with it. The challenge for the adult traveller is to integrate the world without losing one’s capacity to be surprised and excited by it. The “negro” of *Robinson Crusoe* is no helpful model to the traveller who must encounter living versions, but all the same, one could do worse as a starting point than the curiosity about the other that is excited in childhood by such images. Stevenson was known as “Tusitala” to the Samoans, a word that basically means “Storyteller,” although Stevenson said to his friend Colvin that it literally translated as “Chief White Information.” Where the childhood

vision of travel began however inaccurately in story-books, it ends with real contact and friendship with the sort of natives the books described, becoming known as the storyteller among them. In some ways it is easier to imagine and credit Stevenson's visit with the lepers than it is to form a viable vision of his life among the islanders. One is convinced by the transformation wrought by the leper colony, but the difficulties of colonialism make it almost impossible to be similarly accepting of the possibility that Stevenson could live naturally among the Samoans. But our dislike of the imperial mindset does in return little credit to people like the Samoans, as though their capacity for and enjoyment of the surprising and unique were always a disingenuous and unknowing response, and as though friendship with the other somehow escaped them. The child assumes that he will easily infiltrate the world that others live in and live comfortably among them, and perhaps the difficulties that foreign travel practically presents has more to do with the loss of this attitude than its maintenance.

The modern reader, I suppose, will be less than impressed with the unavoidable imperial tone of Stevenson's travels in the South Seas: probably the story told that upon his death, the Islanders cut a path to the top of the mountain to carry Stevenson's body for burial will seem no more than distasteful. It will likely do no good to argue to this reader that Stevenson's politics were less than missionary, that he argued that the foreign colonial powers should not interfere with hereditary tribal governments for they knew the best way to govern themselves, that he wrote a story "The Bottle Imp" (where Keawe at one point mortgages his soul to heal his leprosy so that he can love the beautiful Kokua) for a Polynesian audience with no hint of conversion narrative. Stevenson was Scottish, and may therefore be credited with a bit of historical experience with foreign occupation

and repression, but nonetheless he was a man of Europe, and no doubt he carried the associated beliefs inexorably with him. One could not help but travel with imperialist luggage, and I doubt Stevenson himself would argue that, although in Chesterton's fine phrase, "[The] casual phrase with which he swept away the South Seas...swept away a good many imperial or international illusions, probably without him knowing it; when he said of those regions, 'It is a large ocean but a narrow world'" (118-19), a formulation which may sum up Stevenson's imaginative philosophy on travel as well. But to condemn outright all those who dared to venture past their natural borders of Europe is to condemn the adventurous. Stevenson believed in adventure far more than he believed in travel, and there is a vast difference in spirit between the two. If he could, I think he would have been Jim Hawkins, or at least Long John Silver. The regret he jokingly expressed to William Ernest Henley one senses to be quite real:

I want to hear swords clash. I want a book to begin in a good way; a book, I guess, like *Treasure Island*, alas! which I have never read, and cannot though I live to ninety. I would God that some one else had written it! By all that I can learn, it is the very book for my complaint. (Colley 307)

His sense of what it meant to be adventurous was inextricable from what he believed it meant to be a child. In "A Humble Remonstrance" he chides Henry James for his reading of *Treasure Island*, and the tone that verges in places on snippish should alert us of the importance of the novel to the usually gentle and self-deprecating Stevenson:

Mr. James refers, with a singular generosity of praise, to a little book about a quest for hidden treasure; but he lets fall, by the way, some rather startling words. In this book he misses what he calls the "immense luxury" of being able to quarrel with his author. The luxury, to most of us, is to lay by our judgement, to be submerged by the tale as by a billow, and only to awake, and begin to distinguish and find fault, when the piece is over and the volume laid aside. Still more remarkable is Mr. James' reason. He cannot criticise the author, as he goes, "because," says he, comparing it with another work, "*I have been a child, but I have never been on a quest for buried treasure.*" Here is, indeed, a wilful

paradox; for if he has never been on a quest for buried treasure, it can be demonstrated that he has never been a child. There never was a child (unless Master James) but has hunted gold, and been a pirate, and a military commander, and a bandit of the mountains; but has fought, and suffered shipwreck and prison, and imbrued its little hands in gore, and gallantly retrieved the lost battle, and triumphantly protected innocence and beauty. (86)

Travel was Stevenson's way of making practical the play-world of the child. He is a great travel writer, but still, sometimes one suspects that the writing was more by way of excuse for the travel than it was the reason. It does not particularly matter, in the end, that his journey to the South Seas was undertaken for health: one need only look at the surviving photograph of the tall and impossibly thin Stevenson (in Chesterton's memorable description, "His name might have been Bones, like the seafaring man at the "Admiral Benbow"; nor was this only because his eternal boyhood was as full of skeletons as the school life of Traddles. It was also because of a certain bony structure in his whole taste and turn of mind; something that was angular though slender like his own slim and brittle frame and long Quixotic face" [127],) standing on the bowsprit of the schooner, his face seemingly erased by the driving surge except for his visible smile, to know the reason he travelled. "Old and Young, we are all on our last cruise," (88) he wrote in "Crabbed Age and Youth," and what he meant might be found in the nursery rhyme he hears called out by "the 'phantom voices' of remembered children" (Lewis 239) in the envoy "To Minnie" from *A Child's Garden of Verses*:

How far is it to Babylon?
Three score miles and ten.
Can I get there by candlelight?
Yes, and back again.

“Three score and ten” – the span of a man’s life – a journey undertaken when we are “called, suddenly and without reason, to make the dream voyage ourselves” (Maguire 421).

The child is, of course, a natural imperialist. In that most joyful of poems, “The Swing”, the “upward arc of a swing gives the speaker a chance to ‘look down on’ various aspects of the landscape, expressing happy momentary dominance of the world in which one is normally small and impotent” (Lewis 250). In “Block City,” the child revels in the power not only to build the “Castles and palaces, temples and docks” (2) with his blocks that make up “a city for me” (6), but takes even greater pleasure in his corresponding ability to destroy the joyful and orderly world he has built, “Now I have done with it, down let it go!/ All in a moment the town is laid low./ Block upon block lying scattered and free,/ What is there left of my town by the sea?” (17-20) Finally, the child confidently asserts a power over memory, and with no fear of his memories becoming scattered like the blocks, he believes that “Yet as I saw it, I see it again,/ The kirk and the palace, the ships and the men,/ And as long as I live and where’er I may be,/ I’ll always remember my town by the sea” (21-24). None of the regret that sometimes tinges the final lines of Stevenson’s poems is allowed to make itself known in the poem, instead, the child’s greatest pleasure in the play seems to come from his ability to look back upon it as he creates an empire of memory over time and space. Writing of the Stevenson child, Ann C. Colley points out that “With ease, the child journeys back and forth between modes of consciousness and terrain without the experience of difference that can complicate the adult experience. In a sense, perhaps, the child is able to realize

or make facile the fantasy of empire, and eradicate the anxieties attending its displacements” (308).

The least convincing Stevenson child voice is the one most readily identified with an imperialist tone. As Elizabeth Waterston describes,

The social interests of late Victorianism appear in the smug piety of a tiny Briton pleased with the thought of “little children saying grace/ In every Christian kind of place” [“A Thought.”] British chauvinism is ironically punctured in “Foreign Children”: “Little heathen Japanee/ O! don’t you wish that you were me?” The poem catches the solipsism of any child, but more specifically reflects the imperial smugness that Stevenson himself had of course shucked off, perhaps in pre-school days. These two poems, which have caused some distress to politically correct educators, come with an irony and an accuracy from a particular period of materialistic self-satisfaction. (6-7)

Regardless of their quality, there is clearly something in the set of poems that might also profitably include those poems such as “Whole Duty of Children,” “System,” and “Good and Bad Children,” – whose titles fairly adequately express their content – that Stevenson himself felt was needed to make complete the child voice he was building. It has to do with what home means to him as a writer. In his book on the Bruegel painting *Children’s Games*, Edward Snow contrasts the figure of a swinging girl with that of a “plump girl lifted by parental arms into a perspective one feels she will enjoy forever” (158). The chapter, titled “Assurance,” deals with the ways Bruegel finds “to inquire about what upholds and supports.” Snow writes that:

Assurance is not something this painting seems anxious to provide...everything seems at risk: open, unfinished selves abandoned to their own devices; a fixed civic space transformed by play into a multifarious instant. One can scarcely imagine what it might mean to be at home or to have a place in such a “world.” (143)

Stevenson’s child world is on the surface a more stable one, sustained by an enriching imagination which nullifies most losses the child might incur from the world. The

generative nature of Stevenson's imagination works to disguise the persistent quality of yearning that runs through so many of his poems, where the child tells us longingly that:

I should like to rise and go
Where the golden apples grow; –
Where below another sky
Parrot islands anchored lie... ("Travel" 1-4)

The imagination is the child's most precious gift, but it is in a sense a compensatory one, which substitutes for all the child should like to be, and knows in his inmost heart that he isn't. The play world is a good home for the child, but it is not always sustaining. In "A Good Play," the familiar objects of the house are gathered by two children to build a sailing ship that imaginatively seems to alter the character of the house itself, making it suddenly the generator of marvelous adventure, "We built a ship upon the stairs/ All made of the back-bedroom chairs, / And filled it full of sofa pillows/ To go a-sailing on the billows" (1-4). The house provides everything needed for the play adventure with a wonderful sense of childish faith that everything the house contains is adequate to the demands of the world. The strange companion Tom has his own imaginative concerns. While the other child is more concerned with the construction of the credible play-world that requires "a saw and several nails/ And water in the nursery pails" (5-6), it is Tom who says "Let us also take/ An apple and a slice of cake" (7-8), additions that remind one of Lear's owl and the pussycat who went to sea "in a beautiful pea-green boat" equipped only with "some money and plenty of honey tied up in a five pound note." It is Tom's contributions that make the play somehow real. But in gaining alliance with a real world that doesn't alter itself into imaginative forms, the play world reveals its dangers, and poor Tom is repudiated from the play world: "We sailed along for days and days,/ And had the very best of plays;/ But Tom fell out and hurt his knee./ So there was no one

left but me” (11-14). The desolate last line reveals the imagination’s inadequacy as a companion, as though the child is a less traumatized Ancient Mariner “Alone, all alone, on a wide, wide sea.”

The image of the lifted girl that Snow locates amidst the perilously shifting play world, like the boat that tosses Tom out as the *Hispaniola* tossed Israel Hands, is one of counterbalance, not only within itself, but towards the painting as a whole:

The man and woman who make a bridge of arms for the small girl in red carry her forward like some precious object. A wonderful mix of security and indrawn poise radiates from this plump, heavily encumbered body. The equally corpulent body of the girl who swings inside the shed above and to the left expresses the elation of flying through the air, defying gravity, but the child in the foreground is an image of contented weight. Parental arms lift her free of the earth, but it is the sag of her own body, which hunches forward and pulls in around itself, that turns her into a centre of gravity and ensures the stability of her perch. She remains absolutely still, trusting yet instinctively counterbalancing what supports her. (141)

It is not just that the parental arms anchor that particular child, but that their solid presence seems to extend to all the painting’s children, offering the almost forgotten possibility of a comforting adult presence that elevates the child’s play world. The swinging child and the cradled child can coexist without any diminishment of the painting’s childish energy. In a similar way, the Stevenson poems that deal rather uninspiringly with saying one’s prayers, or eating one’s dinner, or minding one’s manners, or speaking the truth, are attempts at writing that kind of guiding parental presence into the child’s world. Play is unpredictable in Stevenson’s world, but dinner-time is not, and even in fairy land “all the children dine at five” (“Foreign Lands.”)

Something that stands out about the world his child exists in is the complete absence of parental conflict with the child. The child is never in disgrace with his parents, there are no poems of the child sulking in his room after punishment, or being

forbidden to play because he has punched Tom (although one does wonder how exactly Tom fell out of the boat). Stevenson's child world has an energetic quality of subversion to it in that lawless pirates feature among its chief heroes, but it is not subversive at all in the deeper sense that places the child against a capricious and terrifying world of adults, as Roald Dahl does in his stories. Stevenson cannot successfully make parents have all that much to do with his children at all. Unconcerned with whatever parental edicts might be in effect – and the only rule that seems to practically exist for his children is to be home in time for tea – his children calmly dismantle the house to create a boat, and the poem never tells us what mother had to say when she found her sofa-pillows missing. Poems like "Whole Duty of Children," with its tolerant final line, "A child should always say what's true/ And speak when he is spoken to,/ And behave mannerly at table; / At least as far as he is able," offer the sort of restraint to the child's world that suggests a kind parental hand preventing play from becoming as anarchic as it is in Bruegel. The virtues offered by the adult voice are concomitant with the values of adventure that govern the child's behaviour, for honesty, forthrightness, and kindness are indispensable to courage for the future Alan Brecks of the world. It is indeed comforting that we feel that the injured Tom would be petted and soothed by the same sort of adult that might chide him to mind his manners, that the child could not be left "all alone" in his world but that an adult voice endures and calls him back. At the peak of the swing the child turns his towering gaze back towards the familiar space of his home and garden. The word "up" that has sent us "flying" through the poem is no less ecstatically exchanged for the repeated word "down" ("Till I look down on the garden green,/ Down on the roof so brown" [9-10].) It is this look from above on the space the child already knows so well

that encourages us to return just as joyously to earth, so that the downward movement becomes as much a part of the child's delight in swinging, "Up in the air I go flying again,/ Up in the air and down!" (11-12)

For all his real travels as an adult in the world, Stevenson's children direct their deepest travel longing towards the elusive regions of fairyland. All distances in the Stevenson landscape find their way eventually towards those magic countries. The world beyond the garden in "Foreign Lands" becomes magical, where even the weary "dusty roads.../ With people tramping into town" (11-12) seem to lead somewhere new and mysterious. Unlike the child who swings, wholly absorbed in the joyous sensation of movement, the child climbing the tree goes upwards in order to gain an outwards vision. The world is already convincingly expansive for the swinging child, whose wide trajectory, while it naturally affords a look at the countryside, is more interested in its gestures of detachment and reattachment to an earth that can be both abandoned and re-inhabited. For the child in the tree, however, the act of climbing is one of revelation, bringing an unsuspected world into rich being. The tree is perhaps the garden's most compelling adult presence, an accommodating largeness into which the child can fit his smaller self. The child is naturally drawn to the trees' height, the act of climbing mimicking growth, while safely ensuring the child of his own smallness: "Up into the cherry tree/ Who should climb but little me?" (1-2). Because the trunk offers itself as a solid presence, "I held the trunk with both my hands," (3) the exploratory "look...abroad on foreign lands" (4) remains anchored in the child's familiar garden making the sudden largeness of the world exciting rather than frightening. The comforting trunk prevents the child's littleness from becoming overpowered by the world, reminding the child of the

importance of his own self by providing him with a place within the world. The welcome extended to the child by Stevenson's blossoming tree (the sort of tree that might inhabit the garden of Oscar Wilde's selfish giant, where the giant's answering largeness places the sobbing child into branches that instantly burst into responsive flower) provides a link to the "next door garden" (5), which similarly "adorned with flowers" (6) brightly reassures the child that the "foreign" world is beautifully abundant. Stevenson's tree-climber is granted both stability and ascension as a pre-condition of his precarious reachings towards the world. Let us look, by way of comparison, at the tree in Bruegel's *Children's Games*, which cannot seem to direct the child safely upwards:

The boy climbing the tree, like so many of the children in the painting, is playing a game that expresses an impulse to rise and aspire - he is a distant cousin, for instance, of the budding young Icarus perched high on stilts. Yet one could scarcely imagine a less convincing image of transcendence. He has made very little progress up the tree and seems unlikely to make much more. Unlike the trees in *John the Baptist Preaching*, which seem *made* to accommodate human presence, the one to which he clings is all uprightness. Though it epitomizes something in nature that rises and flowers, it remains indifferent to the human impulse to climb.

Yet the tone of the image is not ironic. The tree may not support the boy's efforts, but its presence answers his embrace. It provides him with what the cityscape refuses to the boy with empty arms running up the cellar door. The tree climber clings to the tree, in fact, as if he were one of nature's children, still attached to the nurturing source... The tree-climber, possessed by vertical urges, embraces a stable, rooted order of things. (Snow 85-86)

Like Stevenson's swinging child, his tree-climber is moved easily upwards, content in his ability to maintain a "rooted" hold on the spaces of his own home.

The tree-climber's desire for a higher tree so that he can see "farther and farther" (14) wonderfully rests in the belief that the distant world naturally "lead[s] onward into fairy land" (18). The child's confident knowledge of fairy land "Where all the children dine at five,/ And all the playthings come alive" (23-24) marks a familiarity with a magic

land that is not at all foreign to the child. The generative nature of fairyland, with its set dinnertime that provides for all hungry children and its delightful living playthings, suggests that fairy land is a natural outgrowth not of the child's world, but of the nurturing adult one, somewhere in the region beyond "where the grown-up river slips/ Into the sea among the ships" (15-16). There is no place in the child's vision for a vanishing point; the moment where the river disappears into the sea simply ushers in more roads that direct us ever onwards into magic regions. "The Unseen Playmate" is undoubtedly an inhabitant of that country, and he is the happiest detail of the child's world:

When children are playing alone on the green,
In comes the playmate that never was seen.
When children are happy and lonely and good,
The friend of the children comes out of the wood.

Nobody heard him and nobody saw,
He is a picture you never could draw,
But he's sure to be present, abroad or at home,
When children are happy and playing alone.

He lies in the laurels, he runs on the grass,
He sings when you tinkle the musical glass;
Whene'er you are happy and cannot tell why,
The Friend of the Children is sure to be by!

He loves to be little, he hates to be big,
'Tis he that inhabits the caves that you dig;
'Tis he when you play with your soldiers of tin
That sides with the Frenchmen and never can win.

'Tis he, when at night you go off to your bed,
Bids you go to your sleep and not trouble your head;
For wherever they're lying, in cupboard or shelf,
'Tis he will take care of your playthings himself!

Stevenson knew fairyland as the hidden child presence of the world. Even in the child's garden there are adult spirits masquerading as trees or travelling through the heavens; it is

comforting to know that somewhere is a corresponding child spirit that endures just beyond the reach of our vision (one of those child spirits is Stevenson himself).

Stevenson believed in a heartfelt way in “the possibility of return, of recovery” (Colley 311), a belief unsurprising for a child who was ill, and desperately wanted to get well.

“No matter how far he roams,” writes Colley,

He can always go back. Moving through a malleable map that stretches and shrinks, he never really loses sight of where he is...Home is always, somehow, available; everything is “handy to home” (Keepsake Mill.)...The poems [of *A Child's Garden of Verses*] depict a child who wanders far and wide, yet returns to the safety of his room, who swings high but always comes back down, and who marches around the village and goes “home again.” Like the cow, the child “wanders” yet “cannot stray.” He moves in a landscape of recovery. In this terrain, the continuous movement of the “old mill wheel” is the “keepsake” that promises that “we shall all come home.” (311)

But there are other, more terrible ways to return, and Stevenson, who in the best sense stayed a child all his life, found his father cruelly snatched up by the spirits of fairyland.

In a poem called “The Last Sight” about his father’s senility and eventual death, he wrote:

Once more I saw him. In the lofty room,
Where once with lights and company his tongue
Was trump to honest laughter, sate attired
A something in his likeness. “Look!” said one,
Unkindly kind, “look up, it is your boy!”
And the dread changeling gazed on me in vain. (Morgan 38)

“The father has become helpless, like a child,” writes Morgan, “...but unlike a child he has become an object of terror rather than pity to his son looking at him: he is a ‘dread changeling’ in which something horrible has been planted from outside” (38). Stevenson describes his reaction to his father’s death rather as though he himself suffers from the father’s disease which prevents recognition, “...My dear father lies now dying, he has never known me, we can only be glad he is near the end of long unhappiness. I cannot

write much as you will understand; this is not a thing that one can look in the face” (*Letters* 1808B). The difficulties of Stevenson’s relationship with his father have been made too much of. There was conflict – the phrase “he has never known me” seems to extend past the final visit between them – but also great kindnesses and closeness and sometimes remarkable understandings. He had disappointed his father by turning away from the strict Protestantism he was brought up in – although he was always a peculiarly Christian unbeliever – but throughout his life, and especially at the end, he would write beautiful prayers, finding his way back to his father. He prayed that he might receive the whole world with the tolerance and forgiveness of love, “Let us feel our offences with our hands; make them great and bright before us like the sun...Blind us to the offences of our beloved, cleanse them from our memories, take them out of our mouths forever: Let all here before Thee carry and measure with the false balances of love...” (“For Self-Blame.”) Like all children, the journey towards his parents was perhaps his most complex and difficult travel. But the burden eventually grows comfortable, even loved, as Stevenson writes in “Walking Tours:”

During the first day or so of any tour there are moments of bitterness, when the traveller feels more than coldly towards his knapsack, when he is in half a mind to throw it bodily over the hedge and, like Christian on a similar occasion, “give three leaps and go on singing.” And yet it soon acquires a property of easiness. It becomes magnetic; the spirit of the journey enters into it. (228)

And after all, what does travel most deeply mean to the child in his garden, who plays at being a child by becoming the most fantastic sorts of grownups – pirates and kings and generals – who are all versions in some sense of his father? Children never play at being children. Travel does not mean going away from home, but rather seeing the world open up like the country that unfolds itself for the child’s vision in “Foreign Lands.”

So let us not by any means leave Stevenson marooned on rocky shores. His father was a lighthouse engineer, and so was his grandfather. All his ocean travels were in this sense always in view of the shore. He was, as Jean Fritz calls him, "a joyous traveller" (363). He undertook journeys of hope and love as a matter of course. In fact, he rarely undertook any other kind. Let us close instead with his words from *The Ebb-Tide*, his story from the South Seas, where the bleakness and bitterness of the tale takes place against a background that never breaks faith with the beautiful:

"Come, let's see some more of the island. It's all sand and coral and palm-trees; but there's a kind of quaintness in the place."

"I find it heavenly," said Herrick, breathing deep, with head bared in the shadow.

"Ah, that's because you're new from sea," said Attwater. (Osborn 47)

Chapter Three: Growing Up.

"You may safely go to school with hope; but ere you marry, should have learned the mingled lesson of the world: that dolls are stuffed with sawdust, and yet are excellent play-things; that hope and love address themselves to a perfection never realized, and yet, firmly held, become the salt and staff of life; that you yourself are compacted of infirmities, perfect, you might say, in imperfection, and yet you have a something in you loveable and worth preserving..."

Robert Louis Stevenson, "Virginibus Puerisque" (38-9).

"Last winter another child wrote, 'How can I stay a child forever and never grow up?' And I replied, 'You can't. And it wouldn't be a good idea if you could. What you *can* do, what I hope you *will* do, is stay a child forever *and* grow up.'"

Madelaine L'Engle, "Do I Dare Disturb the Universe?" (221)

In the poem "Travel," after an extended imagining of the sort of world Kipling habitually dwelt in as a writer ("Full of apes and cocoa-nuts/... Where in jungles near and far,/ Man-devouring tigers are" [19, 25-6],) the child comes to a place:

Where among the desert sands
Some deserted city stands,
All its children, sweep and prince,
Grown to manhood ages since,
Not a foot in street or house,
Not a stir of child or mouse,
And when kindly falls the night,
In all the town no spark of light.
There I'll come when I'm a man
With a camel caravan;
Light a fire in the gloom
Of some dusty dining room;
See the pictures on the walls,
Heroes, fights and festivals;
And in a corner find the toys
Of the old Egyptian boys. (31-46)

The child believes that his adult self will remain true to his childhood's most expansive dreams, in the same way that the archeologist contains the child digging in his garden. But the crowded place of his childhood imaginings, filled with every wonder of the world, has become a town abandoned by the child kind. One might imagine walking

through the streets of the little town to which the townsfolk can never return in the frozen and silent world of Keats' Grecian Urn. The Obi-wan-like man, who emerges from the desert and illuminates the forgotten place of childhood as Leerie the lamplighter would, is the only inhabitant of the dusty house of memory. The child cannot know that it will sometimes be easier to find his way to the dark home of the "old Egyptian boys" than it is to re-enter the place of his own childhood. The playthings forgotten in the corner come more readily to hand than his own once-beloved toys. How often toys come alive in Stevenson's childland, as though childhood is so overflowing with life that it fills up every thing that belongs to childhood! When the man finds the toys they bring to mind only their long-dead child owners, for the childlife that might animate them has already departed. The poem is the saddest vision of archeology imaginable, as if excavations were the treading through the dust of one's own desertions. For a child who dreams of travel, the vision of being grown up is something like becoming lost.

P.L. Travers, writing about a young man who, as it turns out, has no memory of his childhood because of an attack of meningitis, recalls his longing to be told stories, a longing, perhaps, to recreate the secure childhood experience of being read to. "There must be some [stories] about things that are lost'," the young man insists, and Travers' response is as follows:

I laughed, not taking him seriously. "Well, how about *Little Bo Peep*, which you've known, of course, since you were three."

"I never was three," he said shortly, turning his head away.

"Well, be three now!" I said lightly, and recited the nursery favorite.

"Wonderful!" he said softly. "Even the tails come home."

That pleased me. He had put his finger on the rhyme's capsule of meaning. Leave things alone and all will be well. (130)

Travers goes on to tell the story of the princess and her lost golden ball that rolls away into the well and is recovered by a frog. After the frog is restored to his true Prince form and married to the Princess, the lifelong servant of the Prince, Faithful Henry, appears in a carriage to take the Prince back home to his father's kingdom. As they drive along, the couple hears a "cracking, metallic sound." The Prince asks if the wheel is broken, and Faithful Henry replies, "When you were lost to the land of men, I felt such sorrow for your grief that I put three bands of iron round my chest to keep my heart from bursting. You have just heard the first band breaking." And the same sound comes again, and again the Prince asks if the wheel is breaking, and Henry replies "No, master, but the thought of you dwelling in the deep dark waters and longing for the light of the sun was anguishing to me. You have just heard the second band break." They drive on, and a mile later, the same thing happens, and the Prince asks, "Is it a carriage wheel?" and Henry says "No, Prince. But while you were so far away from us, lonely among the creatures of the earth, I, too, was lonely and suffered for you. The third band is now broken." "And they drove home happily all together" (133). Travers concludes "I am glad you waited for the ending...for the story not only assures us that all that's lost is somewhere but also that whatever is lost is longing for that which lost it." *Whatever is lost is longing for that which lost it.* Travers believes our childhoods are intact and safe somewhere within us, and that they miss us as much as we might miss them. I like this idea of our childhoods waiting inside us, hopefully extending toys towards us and promising us the enchantments of play, if only we will come back. The iron bands that encircle Faithful Henry's heart hold in the grief, but they are burst by the swelling of joy.

Happiness always outweighs the heartbreak of loss, and this is the lesson of so much of what Stevenson wrote.

Stevenson was less in some ways an adult yearning towards childhood than he was a child longing for a certain kind of child life. That is, his ventures back into the garden have in them something of return, of the desire to re-inherit childhood play, but there is a companion longing not to go back and do over, but to begin again as a different sort of child entirely. It is not regression that Stevenson is after, but a way to allow himself to grow up better, to grow up stronger. It is in fact a vision of childhood that has everything to do with the way Stevenson wants to be an adult. In order to be the best kind of adult, he had to imagine for himself first the right kind of childhood. Ann Colley understands, for example, that the barely restrained violence of Stevenson's verses is a way for Stevenson of vicariously getting well:

Stevenson undoubtedly found a certain pleasure, if not comfort, in the idea of violence because the fantasy of its aggressiveness compensated for the chronic periods of inactivity when he was ill and for those moments when he was actually strapped to the bed to prevent hemorrhaging. As Jerome Buckley points out, Stevenson's interest in action was an expression of his despising his own weakness. Stevenson feared being passive. To be violent was to engage his surroundings – to do battle with them. Thoughts of such activity offered him a kind of sanctuary for his poor health. (313)

The child he wrote in the *Garden* is thoroughly male. The request of his stepson Lloyd Osbourne is credited with keeping women out of *Treasure Island*, but, while “Thrawn Janet” is a kind of female pirate, and the young maid in *Kidnapped* who steals a boat to row David and Alan to safety has something of Jim Hawkins in her, for the most part one cannot imagine what women have to do with what is going on in *Treasure Island* anyway. It is very much about what it means for Jim to be a boy in response to the variously inadequate adult male figures that accompany him, about a certain and special

kind of spirit of boyishness that is brought to bear upon the world. Chesterton writes that:

Treasure Island was written as a boy's book; perhaps it is not always read as a boy's book. I sometimes fancy that a real boy could read it better if he could read it backwards. The end, which is full of skeletons and ancient crime, is in the fullest sense beautiful; it is even idealistic. For it is the realization of an ideal, that which is promised in its provocative and beckoning map; a vision not only of white skeletons but also green palm trees and sapphire seas. But the beginning of the book, considered as a boy's book, can hardly be considered idealistic... When I read the book as a child, I was not horrified by what are called the horrors. Something did indeed shock me, just a little more than a child should be shocked; for of course he would have no fun if he were never shocked at all. But what shook me was not the dead man's chest or the live man's crimes or the information that "Drink and the devil have done for the rest", all that seemed to me quite cheery and comforting. What did seem to me ugly was exactly what might happen in any inn-parlour, if there were no pirates in the world. It was that business about apoplexy; or some sort of alcoholic poisoning. It was the sailor having a mysterious thing called a stroke; so much more terrifying than any sabre-stroke. I was ready to wade in seas of gore; for all that gore was crimson lake; and indeed I always imagined it as a lake of crimson. Exactly what I was not ready for were those few drops of blood drawn from the arm of the insensible sailor, when he was bled by the surgeon. That blood is not crimson lake. Thus we have the paradox that I was horrified by the act of healing; while all the rowdy business of hitting and hurting did not hurt me at all... I will not pause to draw the many morals of this paradox... I will content myself with saying, whether I make my meaning clear or no, that a child is not wicked enough to disapprove of war. (75)

Fernando Savater meanwhile invigoratingly reads the book as a "reflection on audacity,"

of a world-altering sort:

Jim Hawkins is undoubtedly audacious from his first appearance in the novel, but left to himself he would not be capable of exploring all the aspects of his gift, especially that moment of transgression without which it cannot be said that true audacity exists. This is John Silver's virtue, to show audacity's *demonic* face to Jim. And there is no doubt that Jim takes full advantage of the lesson, recoiling from none of the violent, rapacious, or destructive aspects of demoniacal audacity. And this continues to the end, until his domesticated and soothing final return to the "good guys." This twist of the plot is also an audacious act, perhaps the greatest of the whole tale, the one that was being carefully prepared in all the previous reversals. In the end, is it not the demoniacal John Silver himself who teaches Jim the tactical virtues of a timely reunion with the side of the law? "Come back to my dooty, sir." Oh, the old fox! And what matchless audacity, what a splendid lesson in freedom! Desperate and disillusioned audacity of freedom! Jim accepts the challenge like a true pirate, ready to go on to the end of

the adventure. In a fight without quarter, by trickery and by death, he has won the ship, the island, and the treasure; now comes the most difficult test, the hour of renunciation, and in this predicament his audacity does not flag either. Now John Silver can disappear in the hurly-burly of the port, for the game has been played, and well played, to the very end. And so boldness has imposed its own order...
(37-8)

The two passages are long, but I offer them because together they reflect something of that difficult concept of "boyhood" that Stevenson was interested in. It is a force that exists in meaning not in opposition to femininity, but to the world. It is not merely the rebellious sense of freedom, but something greater, something bolder and more audacious, that takes on the world as a condition of accepting it. In some ways the definition very nearly approaches that of adventure. It is something to do also with what Chesterton meant when, remarking with admiring humour that Stevenson "managed to look fierce and adventurous at Bournemouth," he observed "that Stevenson posed as Prince Florizel, of *New Arabian Nights* and *More New Arabian Nights*" and added that "Florizel himself may be a tobacconist posing as a prince, not a prince posing as a tobacconist." (Voorhees 22-3). Boyhood is the indomitable spirit of manhood, a pirate disrupting the high seas of complacency and indifference.

Stevenson's interest in boyhood makes him different from the other male Victorian children's writers, paradoxically because by being interested in boys, he was unconcerned by the gender differences that haunt the works of Lewis Carroll or George MacDonald. U.C. Knoepfelmacher identifies a pathology of deprivation in the works of these male authors, who:

Turned to the child in order to find compensations for a middle-class culture's division of the sexes into different spheres. Whereas girls were kept at home and taught by mothers or governesses or older sisters, their brothers were sent away to school at an early age...The nursery from which [the] boy has been exiled is equated with a sustaining female imagination he wishes to recover.

It is no co-incidence, therefore, that the “special children” for whom Ruskin, Thackeray, MacDonald, and Carroll wrote their fantasies should all have been young girls...

...Given their ambivalent responses towards the world of nurturance from which so many Victorian males felt banished in early boyhood, it is not surprising to find that repudiation and endorsement are often hard to disentangle. Anger and longing, retaliation and idealization, satire and sentiment are inextricably intertwined... (9, 17)

Stevenson dedicated *A Child's Garden of Verses* to his beloved nurse “Cummy,” “My second Mother, my first wife,/ The angel of my infant life –” (“To Alison Cunningham” 9-10), but he hastens to extricate himself from her nurturing presence by asserting that his age of dependence is past, immediately adding that his book comes “From the sick child, now well and old” (11). It is not longing that characterizes Stevenson’s dedication, but rather grateful fondness, as he offers the spirit of Cummy up to other children, “And grant it, Heaven, that all who read/ May find as dear a nurse in need,/ And every child who lists my rhyme,/ In the bright, fireside, nursery clime,/ May hear it in as kind a voice/ As made my childish days rejoice!” (13-18). The matronly presence in Stevenson is always trumped by the spirit of energy, and Colley observes that:

On the sharp brim of the gentle lines in *A Child's Garden of Verses* sits the disorderly figure of conflict that is somehow sustaining and exhilarating: amid the soft folds of the comforting counterpane hide regiments of soldiers (“The Land of Counterpane”) and across the sweet pleasantness of the meadow charge frenzied cattle, galloping destructive winds, pillaging pirates and grenadiers (“Pirate Story,” “Marching Song.”) When cities burn and squadrons charge (“Armies in the Fire”), there is a vitality, an edge, that seems always to have attracted Stevenson. (312)

Alison Cunningham may lovingly preside over *A Child's Garden of Verses*, but she by no means governs its borders. Stevenson is as likely to locate a fatherly presence as a motherly one: the child who wishes to bring light to the darkness in “The Lamplighter,” “But I, when I am stronger and can choose what I’m to do,/ O Leerie I’ll go round at

night and light the lamps with you!" (7-8), bears the mingled Stevensonian longings for the figure of his father the lighthouse engineer, and his childhood memory of nights where, when he was so ill that he couldn't sleep, his nurse would hold him up to the window of his bedroom, and he would look into the other lighted rooms and know that their inhabitants were also awake, perhaps other sick children with their nurses looking in on him for similar comfort. One might sense a continuation of this childish desire to spy on the doings of other children in "Travel," the child imagining himself as a man who can go anywhere, even into homes forgotten by time, and potentially play with those children's toys (an unbearable outrage anticipated in "Looking Forward:" "When I am grown to man's estate/ I shall be very proud and great,/ And tell the other girls and boys/ Not to meddle with my toys.")

Adulthood is not particularly the endpoint of childhood to the Stevenson child at his most self-confident, but rather a continuation made more effective by greater strength and size but no less powerfully imaginative. The difference between children and adults is that children, especially young children, very much want to be older. "Childhood," to Edna St. Vincent Millay, "is not from birth to a certain age and at a certain age/ The child is grown, and puts away childish things./ Childhood is the kingdom where nobody dies" (286). Stevenson is not so concerned with actual death, for Jim remains quite convincingly as a child while watching Israel Hands plummet to his death: it is imaginative death that his childhood kingdom forbids. After ruefully identifying himself as a less-than-experienced sailor, despite the enthusiasm with which he announces himself, "O it's I that am the captain of a tidy little ship" (1), the child in "My Ship and I" confides:

But when I'm a little older, I shall find the secret out
How to send my vessel sailing on beyond.

For I mean to grow as little as the dolly at the helm,
And the dolly I intend to come alive;
And with him beside to help me, it's a-sailing I shall go...(6-10)

The cheerful illogic of the child's growing up by becoming exceedingly little, because the true knowledge of the world is, of course, located in toyland, is matched only by his calm statement that he will make the dolly come alive. One senses no difficulty at all in any of this. Just as easily, the child in the swing negotiates the giant's perspective from which he looks down upon his home. Even the child of "My Kingdom" who, treasuring the fact that he is "very small" because it provides him with a secret world large enough to become a kingdom, is dismayed when he comes in for tea and finds the world is no longer made to accommodate his small perspective ("Alas! and as my home I neared/
How very big my nurse appeared" [28-9]) finds a compensating pleasure immediately in "How great and cool the rooms!" (30). The deep anxiety that accompanied Alice's frenzied growths and diminishments in Wonderland is almost entirely absent from the garden, where the child most often seamlessly incorporates and defines any growth as imaginative expansion.

Stevenson is not simply being charming or whimsical when he repeatedly brings toys to life. That miracle seems instead like something he really wanted, perhaps his only real enduring disappointment with the world. He did not wish as much to be "back among his boyhood play" (Colley 306) as he did that his toys would find a way to join him in the real world. Writing, I think, never quite compensated, despite its best efforts. Cummy was not the only figure who watched over Stevenson's illnesses and comforted him, his toys were enthusiastic companions that made his illnesses bearable. The toys in

“The Land of Counterpane” transform the imprisoning bed for the invalid into a kingdom where the child is powerful:

When I was sick and lay a-bed,
I had two pillows at my head,
And all my toys beside me lay
To keep me happy all the day.

And sometimes for an hour or so
I watched the leaden soldiers go,
With different uniforms and drills,
Among the bed-clothes, through the hills;

And sometimes sent my ships in fleets
All up and down among the sheets;
Or brought my trees and houses out,
And planted cities all about.

I was the giant great and still
That sits upon the pillow hill,
And sees before him, dale and plain,
The pleasant land of counterpane.

The soldiers hidden under the covers of the bed recall George Macbeth’s phrase about Stevenson’s poetry, that he had a “love of clandestine violence.” But the muted violence of the military play figures offers a model by which the violence of the child’s illness is softened. Under the happy influence of the toy inhabitants of the newly pleasant land of counterpane, the pillows that prop the child up to ease his laboured breathing suggest not the choking difficulties of the diseased lung, but rather seem a coveted treat (two pillows!) Toys meant so much to Stevenson, and as a writer he bestowed them, like Daedalus’s mechanical wonders, with as much of the gift of life as he could manage, because in important ways they saved his life, encouraging him towards wellness like the child lured from his bed by the revived garden (“Night and Day”) that “was shut away,/

Toy-like, in the even,/" (33-4), but now, healthily restored and "glow[ing] with day/
Under glowing heaven," (35-6) urges to the child, "Playmate, join your allies!" (44).

It might be noted here for those skeptics unmoved by the powers of Stevenson's playworld, who will persist in seeing it as anachronistically Victorian (horrors!) that Stevenson's games among his sheets and pillows are the forerunners of the current computer games that feature the building of civilizations. "Contemporary children," sniffs Joanne Lewis, "may need a gloss on counterpane. As a child I preferred the mystery of an unknown 'counterpane' to definitions" (248). So much for contemporary children, then!, at least as far as they willingly exclude themselves from Stevenson's world. In all seriousness, though, no modern childhood except the most horrifically abusive could be any more susceptible to angst and anxiety than Stevenson's was, and his poems speak both reassuringly and understandingly to the difficulties that we are more willing now to admit children suffer. Children do need to see other children "like them" in their early readings, but these likenesses, in my own recollection, do not always have to do with colour or social circumstance, but everything to do with authenticity of feeling and experience. Children feel themselves to be like a pirate or a dolly or a lamplighter because of the imaginative meaning those figures hold. As Lewis remembers, the strangenesses of language or costume can be the very thing that excites and entices the child reader into imaginative collusion or companionship. This is not a very modern thing to say, but that does not make it untrue¹. If Stevenson's children offer only one thing of

¹ I reluctantly feel that I must identify myself here as a non-white female whose childhood spanned the 1980's and 90's, lest I be accused of being some ignorant old codger with no sensitivity towards the differences of contemporary society. Of course, one can be as ignorant as one likes regardless of colour, but with only my own experience to go on, it seems to me that, as my mother of Trinidadian (that old port of smugglers and pirates) descent put it, "every child swings, they just swing on a mango tree." Will all children see themselves in Stevenson? Of course not, but not automatically because his children are middle class, white, and Victorian.

value to the modern child, it is the sense of power and self-knowledge that continually accompanies them as a matter of course. Anyway, if Stevenson, other than being, of course, a man of the world in the widest sense, was a citizen of any society, it was an immortal playland. In "Crabbed Age and Youth," Stevenson, "barely disguising his identity" (Colley 306) proclaims his secret allegiance to the country of toys:

A child who has been remarkably fond of toys (and in particular of lead soldiers) found himself growing to the level of acknowledged boyhood without any abatement of his childish taste. He was thirteen; already he had been taunted for dallying overlong about the playbox; he had to blush if he was found among his lead soldiers; the shades of the prison-house were closing about him with a vengeance. There is nothing more difficult than to put the thoughts of children into the language of their elders; but this is the effect of his meditations at this juncture: "Plainly," he said, "I must give up my play-things in the meanwhile, since I am not in a position to secure myself against idle jeers. At the same time, I am sure that playthings are the very pick of life; all people give them up out of the same pusillanimous respect for those who are a little older; and if they do not return to them as soon as they can, it is only because they grow stupid and forget. I shall be wiser; I shall conform for a little to the ways of their foolish world; but so soon as I have made enough money, I shall retire and shut myself up among my playthings until the day I die." (92-3)

Lest we become too alarmed and do Stevenson's sanity an injustice, it should be acknowledged that he adds:

The idea has an air of simple nobility to me, not unworthy of Cincinnatus. And yet, as the reader has probably anticipated, it is never likely to be carried into effect. There was a worm i' the bud, a fatal error in the premises. Childhood must pass away, and then youth, as surely as age approaches. The true wisdom is to be always seasonable, and to change with good grace in changing circumstances. To love play things well as a child, to lead an adventurous and honourable youth, and to settle when the time arrives, into a green and smiling age, is to be a good artist in life and deserve well of yourself and your neighbour. (93-4)

I like Stevenson's individual understanding of the three ages of man (which he expands quite a bit differently in "Aes Triplex,") that the tree-like "green and smiling age" is of course achieved through loving first playthings and then adventure, all moving

seamlessly within a looking-glass river of happiness, as though it never occurred to him that some might find industry and sobriety the way to go. His outburst in "Autumn Fires," "Sing a song of seasons!/ Something bright in all!/ Flowers in the summer,/ Fires in the fall!" (9-12) demonstrates how gladness, which is Stevenson's best wisdom, might be found in being "seasonable." How did Stevenson write so faithfully of an old age that it was clearly unlikely he was to see? Any longing for a return to childhood was surely eclipsed by the gratefulness in unexpected life that he made apparent in his joyful approach to every day. Aging was not inevitable for Stevenson, and though there is real regret at the passing of childhood in his poems, it is not accompanied by regret at growing up, and the more substantial feeling in his poems is in granting muscular life to the child who is happily secure in the knowledge that he certainly will grow up one day.

The child can never properly imagine adulthood: childhood is eternal for the child not in the sense that he can't see it ending, but that he cannot imagine a grown state that is not the direct inheritor of the child self. The child in Stevenson understands the adult world in terms of power, where the parental summons to tea can always abruptly and even disconcertingly end the best of plays, but he cannot understand it as a valid or desirable state of being. The adults the child instinctively understands are those either rejected from adult society like pirates and thieves, or of little standing within it like a lamplighter, who has the added attraction of being mobile. Soldiers too attract the child, because the child knows war as play, and they are like people who get to become toy soldiers. The great imaginative triumph at the end of *Treasure Island* is Jim's rejection of the treasure, for treasure renders meaningless the whole adventure if it becomes the journey's end point because it makes the act of adventure economically practical, the sort

of thing that even the dullest might undertake for the monetary pay-off. No, of course the real treasure, as Savater well knows, is the adventure itself, money would only spoil it. Witness the child's quick rejection of the father's riches in "The Lamplighter," "Now Tom would be a driver and Maria go to sea,/ And my papa's a banker and as rich as he can be;/ But I..." for the brighter richness of the lamp's glow. There is much of the real child Stevenson in the figure of Leerie, who is the figure of Stevenson's remembered play brought to life:

Toward the end of September, when school-time was drawing near and the nights were already black, we would begin to sally from our respective villas, each equipped with a tin bull's-eye lantern... They smelled noisomely of blistered tin; they never burned aright, though they would always burn our fingers; their use was naught; the pleasure of them was merely fanciful: and yet a boy with a bull's-eye under his topcoat asked for nothing more. The fishermen used lanterns about their boats, and it was from them, I suppose, that we had got the hint; but theirs were not bull's-eyes, nor did we ever play at being fishermen. The police carried them at their belts, and we had plainly copied them in that; yet we did not pretend to be policemen. Burglars, indeed, we may have had some haunting thoughts of; and we certainly had an eye to past ages when lanterns were more common, and to certain story-books in which we had found them to figure very largely. But take it all in all, the pleasure of the thing was substantive; and to be a boy with a bull's-eye under his top-coat was good enough for us... The essence of this bliss was to walk by yourself in the black night; the slide shut, the top-coat buttoned; not a ray escaping, whether to conduct your footsteps or to make your glory public; a mere pillar of darkness in the dark; and all the while, deep down in the privacy of your fool's heart, to know you had a bull's-eye at your belt, and to exult and sing over the knowledge. ("The Lantern-Bearers" 144)

Secrecy, so dangerous in the adult, is the illicit heart of childhood pleasures and the light that dwells in the heart of the boy with the lantern bundled up as thickly as the child in the interests of delicious containment.

The wish to be a lamplighter is the sort of peculiar childish desire that becomes incomprehensible to adults who understand the world of work quite differently: if we all grew up with our childhood urges intact, the world would be curiously full of bulldozer

operators and bus drivers. Edward Lear's "The Dong with the Luminous Nose," called by Joan Aiken the "saddest of all" poems of her childhood: "Then, through the vast and lonely dark/ There moves what seems a fiery spark,/ A lonely spark with silvery rays,/ Piercing the coal-black night" (48), alleviates the darkness in a way that reminds us of the way that the unseen playmate could only emerge when the children "are happy and *lonely* and good" [my italics]. The spark of light can be as lonely as the dark it penetrates. The child's desire to become a lamplighter perhaps contains within it an acute awareness that as an adult, he will no longer "belong to the day" ("The Moon" 9) as unquestioningly. How close is Leerie to the moment in *Kidnapped* where David Balfour makes his way up a dark and uneven tower stair in Stevenson's most terrified vision of what it means to grow up? David is saved from a fatal drop only by a sudden flash of lightning that "shone in on every side through breaches in the wall, so that I seemed to be clambering aloft upon an open scaffold, but the same passing brightness showed me the steps were of unequal length, and that one of my feet rested that moment within two inches of the well" (22). The malevolent uncle who sends David into the tower is a grotesque parody of the child's natural impulse to "rise and go" up in the air. The horrifying journey ends, as David tells us, when:

I had come to [a turn], when, feeling forward as usual, my hand slipped upon an edge and found nothing but emptiness beyond it. The stair had been carried no higher: to set a stranger mounting it in the darkness was to send him straight to his death; and (although, thanks to the lightning and my own precautions, I was safe enough) the mere thought of the peril in which I might have stood, and the dreadful height I might have fallen from, brought out the sweat upon my body and relaxed my joints. (22-3)

One is reminded of Stevenson's phrase "The long black passage up to bed" ("North-West Passage" 12) that separates child from adult as the "haunted night returns again" (4). The

military march of the poem, “Let us arise and go like men,/ And face with an undaunted tread/ The long black...” (10-12), and in the poem’s second part – “The shadow of the balusters, the shadow of the lamp,/The shadow of the child that goes to bed –/ All the wicked shadows coming tramp, tramp, tramp,/With the black night overhead” (9-12) – is the more terrified expression of the swinging “military zest that carries Alan and David along the road to the Isles in *Kidnapped*” (Waterston 8). The adventure through Scotland is a way of filling up that gap that seems to be a dark gulf between the world of the child and that of the adult. Alan’s hands reach forward to rescue David from the frightening drop, guiding and accompanying him through dark nights and mountains, bearing him up through illness even after the bitterest of quarrels, a true adventurer and friend.

For all this support, however, Alan’s guiding presence is not a parental one, for the quick-tempered, impractical, charming Alan is as successfully childish as any of Stevenson’s heroes. David, who begins as a cautious and timid traveller – stranded on an island, he does not even explore sufficiently to realize it is closely attached to the mainland – needs the loyal and impetuous presence of Alan to supply the revolutionary fury that he himself lacks, and needs to overcome the Claudius-like treachery of his uncle. Where Alan’s rebellion is national, David’s is the ancient struggle of sons and fathers. The crumbling house of Shaws tells us all we need to know about the state of David’s family, and that same pervasive dampness seems to have spread to David until he meets Alan. Alan, with his fierce joy for battle, his childish sense of injustice and how to right it, is what David needs to be as a son. And what David needs is to be a son, in the old revengeful sense, and in order to become so, he must remember how to be a child,

for all sons are always in some way children. Through Alan's presence, the sickly David is borne up and strengthened, rather like the child in the *Verses* strengthens the sickly child Stevenson. The book is Stevenson's most moving vision of companionship, in which one finds the truest reward of growing up.

Among the "saddest of all" poems in *A Child's Garden of Verses* is the final poem of the book, "To Any Reader." It is an elegy about reading and about the mute spaces between us that reading cannot fill:

As from the house your mother sees
You playing round the garden trees,
So you may see, if you will look
Through the windows of this book,
Another child, far, far away,
And in another garden, play.
But do not think you can at all,
By knocking on the window, call
That child to hear you. He intent
Is all on his play-business bent.
He does not hear; he will not look,
Not yet be lured out of this book.
For long ago, the truth to say,
He has grown up and gone away,
And it is but a child of air
That lingers in the garden there.

The poem explains adulthood to the child as asking him to imagine himself as his mother watching him play, but unable to break through into his playworld. All loss in the poem is explained in terms of presence, of the quality of the world that allows us to get close, but not close enough. Reading, the poem tells the child, is like being that adult who can see and yearn towards the child and yet can make no successful contact. At the same time, the poem reminds the adult reader, perhaps reading the poem to her own child, how far away that child already is from her, even in that most intimate of moments. Parent and child are as strangers to each other, and what makes the image of the window so sad

is that they are not hidden away from each other in the secret hollows of the world, but available, if only the parent could knock hard enough, or the child could turn his head at the right moment. One is reminded of the scene in *Our Town* when the dead Emily returns into a remembered happy day only to find how far away her mother is from her. “Why can’t we look at each other just once?” is the play’s aching plea for finding some way to reach across the gulf that separates us even from the ones we love most deeply. The children can find their way into the other child’s garden, but they can only play there alone and unknown, like the children in “The Selfish Giant” who creep at early light into the giant’s garden, but are always eventually chased away. It is only memory who lives in the garden, even perhaps in the hearts of parents who remember that ethereal figure of their own child long after he has left the garden for other places. The ghost figure of the child lingers for the adult in a heartbreaking way. Even in the secure house of adulthood the windows cannot help but reveal the haunting child figure of themselves. Saddest of all is Stevenson’s own knowledge that however hard the writer creates a house and garden and a child to play in them, however intently he himself plays to entice other children, he can not properly reach out to the children he hopes to lure back to him, for he has already grown up and gone away and he does not have enough substance remaining to make his way back. He has left the treasured spaces of his own imagination and no child, no matter how magically they read, can help him reinhabit them. *Whatever is lost is longing for that which lost it*, said Travers, but in the final poem of Stevenson’s garden, everyone is lost and longing for each other, and no one can call each other home.

Stevenson’s final task in *A Child’s Garden of Verses* after successfully creating poems that identify children’s imaginative play as substantial, as if to tell the child “you

are reading about your plays: they are real. They must be real, for there is a book written about them. As you recognize your play, your play recognizes you. See, even the playthings are coming alive in your presence,” is to try to explain adulthood to them. In “To Minnie,” Stevenson reminds his friend in India that real distance has outstripped the farthest reaches of childhood imagination:

Below the yew – it is still there –
Our phantom voices haunt the air
As we were still at play,
And I can hear them call and say:
“How far is it to Babylon?”

Ah, far enough, my dear,
Far, far enough from here –
Yet you have farther gone!
“Can I get there by candlelight?”
...I do not know – perchance you might –
But only, children, hear it right,
Ah, never to return again!
The eternal dawn, beyond a doubt,
Shall break on hill and plain,
And put all stars and candles out
Ere we be young again.

The toys of the old Egyptian boys remain long after the boys themselves have departed, and the voices of children still linger in the garden air. Play has its own memory, and if the child never could bring his playthings to life, after he has grown up and gone away his toys retain his memory and summon the child back to life for any solitary traveller who finds his way towards them in the gloom.

Chapter Four: And a star to steer her by.

“We are but older children, dear,
Who fret to find our bedtime near.”

Lewis Carroll from *Through the Looking Glass*.

This is a chapter about poetry. How absurd to make that statement at this late point in time! Surely we have been intimately concerned with poetry before now. But let us cease to think about ideas: let us here turn our attention to words. In his thesis on the magic and incantation of poetry, my grandfather Noel Davies Jones wrote of holding his toddler son at night (my father) and speaking to him in Greek the opening lines to Aeschylus’s *Agamemnon*, which in English begin:

I ask the gods some respite from the weariness
of this watchtime measured by years I lie awake
elbowed upon the Atreidae’s roof dogwise to mark
the grand processions of all the stars of night
burdened with winter and again with heat for men,
dynasties in their shining blazoned on the air,
these stars, upon their wane and when the rest arise. (Lattimore 35)

My Grandfather recalls how, even though the child could not understand the words being spoken to him, those words comforted him in ways no other ones could, and my father would beg for the verses by reciting the poem’s unfamiliar Greek words. Bernard Evslyn recalls a similar experience through the voice of his uncle, and observes “I’d been bitten by poetry in the dark and didn’t know it.” For my grandfather, the child’s instinctive understanding of Aeschylus’s nighttime words spoke to the power of enchantment that poetry, the secret hiding place of spells, possesses. Let us take that belief as our starting point, for “charms” and “chants” echo through Elizabeth Waterston’s description of *A Child’s Garden of Verses*:

It is a book for children too young to express an opinion of its charms; but many of us re-open it as adults to discover how deeply it has sunk into our pores. Poem after poem chants itself: "I have a little shadow...", "The friendly cow, all red and white...", "The world is so full of a number of things...." (5)

The magician's trick of the disappearing garden in "Night and Day," only to be conjured even more miraculously back to life, contains all the wonder and magic that is such a necessary part of Stevenson's child world:

When the golden day is done,
Through the closing portal,
Child and garden, flower and sun,
Vanish all things mortal.

As the building shadows fall
As the rays diminish,
Under evening's cloak, they all
Roll away and vanish. (1-8)

The "evening's cloak" that gathers all mortal things to itself summons what Snow evocatively calls "the feeling of being 'covered'" (144), which he understands as a magical gesture of "clustering" together. Stevenson's poems will always seem to me to be bedtime poems, for that is when they were read to me, and to many young children, as if the words retain the sense of a blanket being pulled around and a voice soothing to sleep with poetry.

The group of poems that contain the figure not of the playing child, but of the child at bedtime, are our concern in this chapter. Nighttime creates different demands for the child voice, for while the child at play depends upon a buoyant voice whose effect lies in the very fact that it can be joyfully unaware of everything except the consuming power of its own happiness – where the gasping thrill of "Oh, I do think it the pleasantest thing..." can sweep us brightly away through our answering thrill of recognition – at nighttime we are aware of the shadows of things like death and bewilderment and terror

that demand the child voice's attention. The characteristically light hand with which Stevenson manages night terrors in "Windy Nights," with its "haunting, frightening, galloping dactyls" (Waterston 6) allows the sounds effects of the poem to become as potentially frightening as the night sounds the poem describes:

Whenever the moon and stars are set
Whenever the wind is high,
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?

Whenever the trees are crying aloud,
And the ships are tossed at sea,
By, on the highway, low and loud,
By at the gallop goes he.
By at the gallop he goes, and then
By he comes back at the gallop again.

What makes the understated terror of the poem effective is the way that the galloping seems to overwhelm everything else in the poem, until it is hard to hear anything except the thundering hooves. The sense of being drowned out, of being overpowered by a bewildering and invisible force, is at the heart of the poem's anxieties. The power of the hidden wind ultimately entices the child in the day-time world of "The Wind," more like a harmless prankster fairy tossing kites and birds about than a seriously unbalancing force: "O you that are so strong and cold,/ O blower are you young or old?/ Are you a beast of field and tree,/ Or just a stronger child than me?" (13-16). The nighttime wind, however, blows into its poem like black magic, and suddenly the unseen becomes terrifying, expressing itself in relentless and unyielding sound.

If the sense of language is the thing that makes "Windy Nights" effective, suggesting that language in itself can be a source of inarticulate terror, as the poem's

almost obsessive repetition of the word gallop finds building alarm in the child's use of language, Stevenson in other places understood that, especially for the child, language demands a precision that the adult tongue, so familiar with language, overlooks. In a letter he wrote that "'Twinkled' is just the error; to the child the stars appear to be there: any word that suggests illusion is a horror" (Lewis 241). In "Escape at Bedtime," his version of that most famous children's verse "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," the sparse chiming language of the nursery rhyme has been exchanged for language that reflects in its crowded quality the intense "thereness" of the stars:

The lights from the parlour and kitchen shone out
Through the blinds and the windows and bars;
And high overhead and all moving about,
There were thousands and millions of stars.
There ne'er were such thousands of leaves on a tree,
Nor of people in church or the Park,
As the crowds of the stars that looked down upon me,
And that glittered and winked in the dark.

The Dog, and the Plough, and the Hunter, and all,
And the star of the sailor, and Mars,
These shone in the sky, and the pail by the wall
Would be half full of water and stars.
They saw me at last, and they chased me with cries,
And they soon had me packed into bed;
But the glory kept shining and bright in my eyes,
And the stars going round in my head.

The appalled adults who discover the happily missing child and chase him to bed are less articulated, a nameless crowd of "they," than the familiar stars who reveal themselves out of the initially bewildering crowd of stars, which seems to multiply with every "and" in the poem. The pail "half full of water and stars," is a wonderful collecting image that contains, it seems, everything that comes from the heavens, and whose image of smooth reflection provides us with the counterbalance to the whirling stars that end the poem.

“The adults catch him at last,” exults Lewis, “...but the stars keep ‘going round in [his] head.’ The child speaker cherishes this talisman against fear, a charm that seems to have come directly from the universe” (248). The dizziness of the final lines, as the child’s eyes themselves become star-like, provides an alternative to the opposition of nighttime comfort to terror, where terror, like the galloping hooves or marching feet is energetic, and comfort serene. The child’s delight is in his own bewilderedness, a glorious confusion that seems to promise exciting dreams.

There is, I think, a sort of less-than-subtle consensus that Stevenson is not a particularly good poet: “One reason [Stevenson’s verses] fail is that the adult, unlike the more flexible child, cannot play properly – he has difficulty accepting substitutes and, thus, can never fully entertain the notion of recovery, for he feels cut off from the authentic or legitimate experience” (310), Ann Colley remarks almost casually, although whether it is the adult reader or writer who fails seems unclear. Edwin Morgan has a more sweeping indictment: “He was writing at a time when it was difficult for poetry to be good, and one must not fall too hard on shortcomings which he often shared with his contemporaries” (43), an astonishing criticism from which he gracefully exempts only Gerard Manley Hopkins. It is true that much of Stevenson’s “adult” poetry is not specially entrancing, but is there anyone who would see changed a word of “Requiem,” where only five words contain two syllables (four of which read together, “Under,” “Starry,” “Gladly” and “Sailor,” almost completely capture the entire meaning of all of Stevenson’s works put together), but the word “wide” in the first line expands to fill the poem, and the single-syllable line “And I laid me down with a will” exactly expresses its own meaning in the calm and authoritative drop of its syllables? We might remember

that Thomas Hardy once said that he would give up everything he had ever written to have written the words to “Abide with Me.”

Let me admit here that there are poems in *A Child's Garden of Verses* that I like better than almost any other poems: I cannot think that “Night and Day,” which captures perfectly what the sunrise expresses, could be any more skillfully written, or that the last lines of “Travel” with their soft step could be any more moving. How much of “Abide with Me” (“Abide with me; fast falls the eventide:/ The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide!/ When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,/ Help of the helpless, O abide with me”[1-4]) is expressed and transposed in the Stevenson verse from “Night and Day”:

In the darkness houses shine,
Parents move with candles;
Till on all, the night divine
Turns the bedroom handles. (13-16)

How beautiful the way the shining houses become the shining figures of the parents, who in turn become the loving night putting all to bed. The presence of our light-carrying parents remains with us right to the moment that night arrives, coming softly to all like a parent looking in on a sleeping child. Night comes to us all, but to all also comes comfort. In one of Astrid Lindgren's *Mardie* books, the family gathers at the girls' bedsides each night and sings “Abide with Me.” The younger sister has transposed the words to “*soft* falls the eventide,” a change which perfectly re-gathers the language of the hymn for its comforting family context. The sort of comfort that the young child offers herself by removing the anxiety of the approaching night and unconsciously giving it a softness that matches the loving bedside presence of the parents is the same transformation that Stevenson makes for night in his poem. The presence that the hymn begs for in the absence of all other comforts is supplied in the poem by the candlelit

parents, who illuminate the divine night until the door closes quietly behind them.

Stevenson is capable of the most gentle-sounding meters, sounding the soft tread of the parents through the passage. His metre is habitually measured and secure, as though made for the soothing parental voice to ease the child to sleep. The jumpiness that we sometimes sense in Blake, where lines are slightly too long, jumbled, or oddly emphasized – a tactic that emphasizes the precarious and discomfited innocence of his childhood – is carefully absent from Stevenson, rather like a hand smoothing the covers a restless child has rumped.

Stevenson imagined himself in “Requiem” lying “Under the wide and starry sky.” The wideness of the eternal night that settles around him is not engulfing, for night is the thing that summons everything home, the sailor from sea, the hunter home from the hill. The sailor comes “home from sea,” and without the word “the” before “sea,” there is a answering wideness to his sea, not just the waters people sail, but a deeper and more feeling idea of what it means to be far away, a sort of sweeping concept of being utterly submerged by distance and loneliness that the word “under” in the first line responds to. One thinks of sailors’ bodies being brought back from the bottom of the ocean to rest on land, so that the idea of being “under,” of being buried, seems in comparison like lying outdoors in the open looking up at the stars. In this, Stevenson is like the toy soldier the child buries in “The Dumb Soldier,” who despite the thickening grass he lies under “...has seen the starry hours/ And the springing of the flowers;/ And the fairy things that pass/ In the forests of the grass” (25-8). The real burial for the soldier is when he is brought back home and laid “on the shelf” (35), as if everything forgotten about can be remembered, rescued, and brought back where it belongs. “Here he lies where he longed

to be” understands perfectly what it means to come home, to find all longing finally answered. Night brings everything back, in the words of Sappho, “brings back everything that shiny daybreak scatters”; it is the place of return in the same way that tea-time recalls the playing children throughout *A Child’s Garden of Verses*. The final lines of the poem expand to include not just Stevenson but all sailors and hunters lost on hills and seas, all who stray from home. That final line where the hunter rather unexpectedly appears in a poem that seems to be so much about seas is the answering call to “Glad did I live and gladly die,” ending the poem in a way that summons the sound of the hunter’s horn joyfully signaling the end of the hunt. It is the perfect bright noise to surprisingly punctuate the poem with an absolutely convincing note of gladness. What makes the last line work is the way the gestures of return extend, for Stevenson was a sailor, and in the end he wasn’t a hunter, as if the poem, content that Stevenson is at rest, takes the time to carry another soul home.

The hunter seems to contain the child soul of so many of the games in the garden, as in “The Land of Story Books”: “Now, with my little gun, I crawl/ All in the dark along the wall,/And follow round the forest track/ Away behind the sofa back.// There, in the night, where none can spy, / All in my hunter’s camp I lie” (5-10), and later in the same poem “These are the hills, these are the woods, / These are my starry solitudes” (13-14) until “...when my nurse comes in for me,/ Home I return across the sea” (21-2) . One thinks of the child identifying both the Hunter, and “the star of the sailor” in the glittering sky of “Escape at Bedtime,” as if those stars are called to rest in “Requiem” out of the wide and starry sky they have spent eternity lying in. If there is such a thing as a child’s companion piece to “Requiem,” although part of what makes that poem so beautiful is

the words that never move beyond the ones a child knows, it is found in the poem "My Bed is a Boat." The poem is an unexpectedly pure vision of sailing, of voyage, where the imagination that transforms bed to boat does not conjure up mysterious countries of sleep or the fantastic land of nod, but travels the dark oceans all night:

My bed is like a little boat;
Nurse helps me in when I embark;
She girds me in my sailor's coat
And starts me in the dark.

At night, I go on board and say
Good-night to all my friends on shore;
I shut my eyes and sail away
And see and hear no more.

And sometimes things to bed I take,
As prudent sailors have to do;
Perhaps a slice of wedding-cake,
Perhaps a toy or two.

All night across the dark we steer;
But when the day returns at last.
Safe in my room, beside the pier,
I find my vessel fast.

In the first lines, the child imagines his own littleness in a way that perfectly fits his imaginative vision of himself. Being tucked into bed loses none of its little boy comfort and security in the line "Nurse helps me in when I embark," but the image moves towards the grand word "embark" at the end of the line, as though Nurse were not only helping him into the boat, but is also the band that plays as he pulls away from shore. The awayness contained in the voyage word "embark" is anchored by the image of the helping nurse, who even as the child imagines himself already away, reaches in a hand to further secure him. The word "gird" in the next line has a similar imaginative sense, its military sense of strength and fortification making the "sailor's coat" of a nightshirt and

covers seem wonderfully containing, like the most protective garment a person could wear. One thinks of the tightly-buttoned topcoats that concealed the inward lights of the lanterns of Stevenson's own childhood. What it is that becomes the "sailor's coat" remains ambiguous in the line – is it the covers placed around the child's shoulders, or is it his pajamas, the nighttime uniform – but I think the sense of the line, of being tucked in, makes the covers a rich meaning for the line, suggesting that last tug of the blankets around the child's body as the thing that "girds" him and keeps him tightly moored within his boat. The two "adult" words of the poem capture the child's "pleasure at new words" that Elizabeth Waterston notices in "The Rain," "'The rain is raining all around/ It rains...It rains...'" and then the joyous whoop at a delicious 'big word': 'It rains on the UMBRELLAS'" (6), but more importantly, they infuse the ritual of being put to bed with solemnity, words that understand and speak to the importance of being tightly placed "Under evening's cloak." The idea of embarkation moves beyond travel to wider ideas of setting off, of voyaging. The same hand that tucks the child under covers also "starts [him] in the dark," and I love that idea of being pushed off, of impetus, coming from that securing hand, as though the best nurturance is knowing just how to see someone off. I do not think the poem is that far at all from Tennyson's poem on voyaging, "Crossing the Bar":

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark;

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar. (166)

The curious third verse of Stevenson's poem has to negotiate the dark space created by "I shut my eyes and sail away/ And see and hear no more" and the moment of return where we find the boat as safely and tightly moored in the room as the child was under the covers. The sleep/death of the second verse seems to offer no way to anticipate revival, which is what Chesterton sees in the poem when he writes:

Indeed there is here a curious aptness in the quaint simplicity of his childish rhyme that ran, "My bed is like a little boat." Through all his varied experiences his bed was a boat and his boat was a bed. Panoramas of tropic palm and Californian orange-grove passed over that moving couch like the long nightmare of the nursery walls. But his real courage was not so much turned outwards to the drama of the boat as inwards to the drama of the bed. Nobody knew better than he did that nothing is more terrible than a bed; since it is always waiting to be a deathbed. (14)

The feeling impact of the second verse depends upon an adult apprehension of what lies behind those lines. In response, however, the third verse is reassuring in its pure childishness, filling the drifting boat with companion toys, and most characteristically, the sticky wedding cake which no adult could imagine wanting anywhere near their own beds (like the cake contributed to the sailing expedition by Tom in "A Good Play.") Somehow the darkness that shuts out all sight and sense manages not to be terrifying in the poem, but part of the poem's whole sense of "rightness" where going under the covers naturally leads to a covering darkness.

The images of the child being fitted to his bed, which is comfortably as little as he is, capture the snug sense of “rightness” that is at the heart of Stevenson’s world. One need only witness the child’s outrage at being sent to bed in the summer when the world is still light to understand how the dark, in fact, secures the child in his bed:

In winter I get up at night
And dress by yellow candle-light.
In summer, quite the other way,
I have to go to bed by day.

I have to go to bed and see
The birds still hopping on the tree,
Or hear the grown-up people’s feet
Still going past me in the street.

And does it not seem hard to you,
When all the sky is clear and blue,
And I should like so much to play,
To have to go to bed by day?

The plaintive note that inflects the poem’s last verse has one sadness that is childish, and another that is adult. The child’s appeal that he has been shut away from the beckoning playworld resonates with the potential adult listener’s regret that so much playtime has been left to slip by. The wrongness of being sent to bed when the world is not ready to go to bed has the potential to be more disturbing than the rightness of being tucked into bed in the dark. Despite the poem’s gentle, even teasing, tone, the poem hints at a deeper anxiety at finding the world strangely reversed. Magic in Stevenson’s world is not about things altering themselves into different states, but a process of transformation by which things become more rightly themselves. It is the recuperative magic of the fairy tale, where for an anxious moment the prince may have been turned into a frog, but the very frog state signals the presence and inevitable return of the prince self, who will be reconstituted more fully by being awarded love. The belief so

consistent in Stevenson's poems that everything lost can be brought back has less to do with the motions of memory and nostalgia than it does with the workings of magic. G.K. Chesterton, in his essay "The Ethics of Elfland" explores the law and philosophy that comes from fairy tales. He begins with the belief that:

...Many noble and healthy principles that arise from them. There is the chivalrous lesson of *Jack the Giant Killer*; that giants should be killed because they are gigantic. It is a manly mutiny against pride as such. For the rebel is older than all the kingdoms, and the Jacobin has more tradition than the Jacobite. There is the lesson of *Cinderella*, which is the same as that of the Magnificat – *exaltavit humiles*. There is the great lesson of *Beauty and the Beast*, that a thing must be loved before it is loveable. There is the terrible allegory of the *Sleeping Beauty*, which tells how the human creature was blessed with all birthday gifts, yet cursed with death; and how death also may perhaps be softened to a sleep. (29)

In Chesterton's description of *Jack the Giant Killer* we find the spirit of the entire plot of *Kidnapped*. In *Cinderella*, the mixed message of *Treasure Island* with its final renunciation of the riches of the earth for the riches of the soul, even if it is a piratical soul. In *Beauty and the Beast*, we find exactly what it is that Massey said of *Jekyll and Hyde*, where in loving Hyde we redeem all that is hidden shamefully away. *Sleeping Beauty* is the allegory of Stevenson's life itself, culminating in "Requiem," and the image of the child in bed, clutching his toys and a wedding cake, and making his way home through the dark. But Chesterton is chiefly concerned not with "the separate statutes of elfland, but with the whole spirit of its law, which I learnt before I could speak, and shall retain when I cannot write" (29). The law is this, that:

[When] certain transformations do happen, it is essential that we should regard them in the philosophic manner of fairy tales, not in the unphilosophic manner of science and the "Laws of Nature." When we are asked why eggs turn to birds or fruits fall in autumn, we must answer exactly as the fairy godmother would answer if Cinderella asked her why mice turned to horses or her clothes fell from her at twelve o' clock. We must answer that it is *magic*. It is not a "law," for we do not understand its general formula. It is not a necessity, for though we can

count on it happening practically, we have no right to say that it must always happen... We do not count on it; we bet on it. We risk the remote possibility of a miracle as we do that of a poisoned pancake or a world-destroying comet. We leave it out of account, not because it is a miracle and therefore an exception... The only words that ever satisfied me as describing Nature are the terms used in the fairy books, "charm," "spell," "enchantment." They express the arbitrariness of the fact and its mystery. A tree grows fruit because it is a *magic* tree. Water runs downhill because it is bewitched. The sun shines because it is bewitched... This elementary wonder, however, is not a mere fancy derived from the fairy tales; on the contrary, all the fire of the fairy tales is derived from this... we all like astonishing tales because they touch the nerve of the ancient instinct of astonishment. (31)

Now I will let you in on a secret. It is the secret of *A Child's Garden of Verses*, and it is this: that children are magicians. He is not the Romantic child of Wordsworth, whatever that has come to mean, or the creature of Innocence in Blake, he is really an elf. In some way, this makes the child a poet. The child goes into nature and finds himself not a naturalist, but rather with a deep knowledge of fairyland:

All the names I know from nurse:
Gardener's garters, Shepherd's purse,
Bachelor's button's, Lady's smock,
And the Lady Hollyhock.

Fairy places, fairy things,
Fairy woods where the wild bee wings,
Tiny trees for tiny dames –
These must all be fairy names! ("The Flowers" 1-8)

The abiding belief in magic reaches towards the thing that is at the core of Stevenson's vision of Christianity. In its doctrine of glorious and unlimiting return, we find the spirit of forgiveness that merges in kind with the belief in resurrection. This is what we see in the revival of the garden in "Night and Day":

There my garden grows again
Green and rosy painted,
As at eve behind the pane
From my eyes it fainted.

Just as it was shut away,
Toy-like in the even,
Here I see it glow with day
Under glowing heaven. (29-36)

What is heaven made of but joy? His stubborn and unyielding “celebration of life,” so deeply moving in the face of so much that was to be abhorred and despaired of in life, is the lesson at the heart of the resurrection. He writes in another one of his prayers:

Lord, thou sendest down rain upon the uncounted millions of the forest, and givest the trees to drink exceedingly. We are here upon this isle a few handfuls of men, and how many myriads upon myriads of stalwart trees! Teach us the lesson of the trees. The sea around us, which this rain recruits, teems with the race of fish; teach us, Lord, the meaning of the fishes. Let us see ourselves for what we are, one out of the countless number of the clans of thy handiwork. When we would despair, let us remember that these also please and serve Thee.

“[His] personal creative spirit...was...that of the genuine Christian craftsman,” concludes Chesterton:

Whatever else Stevenson stands for, he certainly stands for the idea that literature is not mere sensation or mere self-expression or mere record; but is sensation appealing to certain senses, self-expression in a certain material and record in a certain style. And in this he was certainly asserting the rights of the soul of man, as against various formless forces which some regarded as the soul of nature; the *anima mundi* of the pantheists. In this way Stevenson resonated the same deep, ancient, hieratic and traditional truth that was taught to that generation by William Morris; and neither of them had the least idea what it was. (138)

Oscar Wilde took the giant figure from *Jack the Giant Killer* and taught him to let the children into his garden and play with them. His reward was heaven. The giant is monstrous only so far as his soul is. That is the lesson of Christianity in *The Selfish Giant*, and it is similar to the one that Stevenson’s world embraces, where pirates are imaginative heroes, and giant adults are invited to swing. The message that runs through the poems is this: “You let me play once in your garden, today you shall come with me to my garden, which is Paradise.”

Conclusion.

When my eyes I once again
Open, and see all things plain:
High bare walls, great bare floor;
Great big knobs on drawer and door;
Great big people perched on chairs,
Stitching tucks and mending tears,
Each a hill that I could climb,
And talking nonsense all the time –

O dear me,

That I could be

A sailor in the rain-pool sea,
A climber in the clover tree,
And just come back, a sleepy-head,
Late at night and go to bed.

Robert Louis Stevenson, "The Little Land."

"To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive." With these words from Stevenson's essay "El Dorado," we near the end of our voyage. Travelling hopefully is to travel adventurously, for hope is the first meaning of adventure. If there is such a thing as an adventure thesis, I have aspired to it over these pages. Perhaps we began with different thoughts in our hearts, but the elves would steal in and start dancing.

The art of voyaging, Stevenson's words tell us, lies in making a beginning. With the right beginning the voyage is sure to conclude satisfactorily. Thus hope matures into faith, for as Stevenson wrote elsewhere:

...The true conclusion of this paper is to turn our back on apprehensions, and embrace that shining and courageous virtue, Faith. Hope is the boy, a blind, headlong, pleasant fellow, good to chase swallows with the salt; Faith is the grave, experienced yet smiling man. Hope lives on ignorance; open-eyed Faith is built upon a knowledge of our life, of the tyranny of circumstance and the frailty of human resolution. Hope looks for unqualified success; but Faith certainly counts on failure, and takes honourable defeat to be a form of victory. Hope is a kind old pagan; but Faith grew up in Christian days, and early learnt humility. (*VP* 37-8)

If we begin our travels hopefully, we must bring them faithfully to an end. Hope is the adventure, but faith is the context of adventure: hope the vessel, faith the tides and winds of the surrounding seas. The young will be old eventually, there is nothing to be done but to begin hopefully and continue faithfully. "Old and young," as Stevenson said, "we are all on our last cruise."

Even his famous description of his bed-ridden self as a "pallid brute that lived...like a weevil in a biscuit" summons the sense of voyaging, of the food stored unappetizingly in the ship's hold. For a great part of his adult life, Stevenson lived in exile from his childhood home of Scotland. For all his intense dreams of travel, in his years in the romantic South Sea Islands and Samoa, he wrote repeatedly of Scotland, dying with the *Weir of Hermiston* left unfinished. "I shall never take that walk by the Fisher's Tryst and Glencourse," he wrote plaintively to a friend, "I shall never see Auld Reekie. I shall never set my foot again upon the heather. Here I am until I die, and here will I be buried. The word is out and the doom written" (Daiches 108). The confidence with which he wrote in "Keepsake Mill," where all adults are drawn back from all corners of the globe, all "handy to home," could not be literally true for Stevenson, but its imaginative meaning remained intact. When he wrote, "Here he lies where he longed to be," the glad echo of the sad words in his letter, "he could not have known where the 'here' would be" (Daiches 110). He longed to be everywhere, and he longed to be home. "On the last day of his life," writes Daiches, "his imagination inhabited Scotland." The world of the garden, in which things are never lost, had to be the world of the imagination, where some sort of homecoming is always available.

His last-ever visit to Edinburgh was for the funeral of his father, on whose tomb Stevenson had written the epitaph, "By whose devices the great sea lights in every quarter of the world now shine more brightly." He wrote of his father:

About the death, I have long hesitated, I was long before I could tell my mind; and now I know it and can but say that I am glad. If we could have had my father, that would have been a different thing. But to keep that changeling – suffering changeling, any longer, could better none and nothing. Now he rests; it is more significant, it is more like himself; he will begin to return to us in the course of time as he was and as we loved him.

My favourite words in literature, my favourite scene – "O let him pass," – Kent and Lear – was played for me there in the first moments of my return. I believe Shakespeare saw it with his own father. I had no words, but it was shocking to see. He died on his feet, you know; was on his feet the last day, knowing nobody – still he would be up. This was his constant wish; also that he might smoke a pipe on his last day, that was not quite granted, but he did smoke a cigarette on the Wednesday. The funeral – abominable business, as ever I saw – would have pleased him: it was the largest private funeral in man's memory here. (*Letters* 1820)

Stevenson himself was a bit of a changeling, for his name, originally "Lewis" after his maternal grandfather, was changed after his father took a "violent dislike to a radical named Lewis and changed the spelling of his son's name...to prevent even an orthographical association with the man" (Daiches 6). That irascible father was the one that Stevenson had quarreled with, but also contained the rowdy soul that loved the sort of villainous adventure tales that would become *Treasure Island*. The strict father was disappointed that his son did not follow him into the family business, but would "accost... school-children carrying their loads of books to and from school, and advise...them merrily to learn only what they liked, or even, if they preferred, to have nothing to do with book-learning at all" (Daiches 8). The religious father was disappointed by Stevenson's rejection of his orthodox beliefs, but rather unconventionally himself "was fond of dogs, believing that they had souls" (Daiches 8).

Treasure Island, which appeals directly to his father's story loves, contains everything of Stevenson's father in the competing forces of fatherhood that dramatize the two camps. The upright Squire Trelawny, Dr. Livesey and the rest of the gentlemen whom Jim signs on with are the sort of men his father was in society, but the pirates, led by the matchless Long John Silver, offer another lawless version of fatherhood. Jim, who Savater describes as "go[ing] into a frenzy of escapes" once they land on the island, goes back and forth between the ship and the stockade, between the gentlemen fathers and the imaginative fathers, and we are never quite reconciled to which he ought to choose, or who he really imaginatively chooses.

Treasure Island is unable to reconcile Stevenson fully to any figure of the father, and he once rather bitterly concluded that all the adults in the story are "a bunch of swine." "Regret for childhood," observes Peter Coveney, "takes on the same obsessive emotional quality as the exile's nostalgia for 'home'" (193), as though one can come to terms with neither childhood or home, perhaps because the notion of home seems to rest so securely in that of childhood. Stevenson's last homecoming was not so much to Edinburgh as it was to his father, converted through the alchemy his suffering to a figure that Stevenson could finally see clearly, that could manage the negotiations of love that escaped Jim. In a letter to his father, Stevenson wrote of a "most unkind reticence, which hung on me then, and I confess still hangs on me now, when I try to assure you that I do love you" (*Letters* 1482), and in the father's death, in his return to himself and his family, Stevenson too is somehow healed as a son. Stevenson was a bit of what is called a "black sheep," "doomed in his early years," as Morgan says, "to disconcert his parents" (38).

“Leave them alone, and they’ll come home,” the nursery rhyme tells us of lost sheep, and in the end, it was true both of Stevenson and of his father.

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