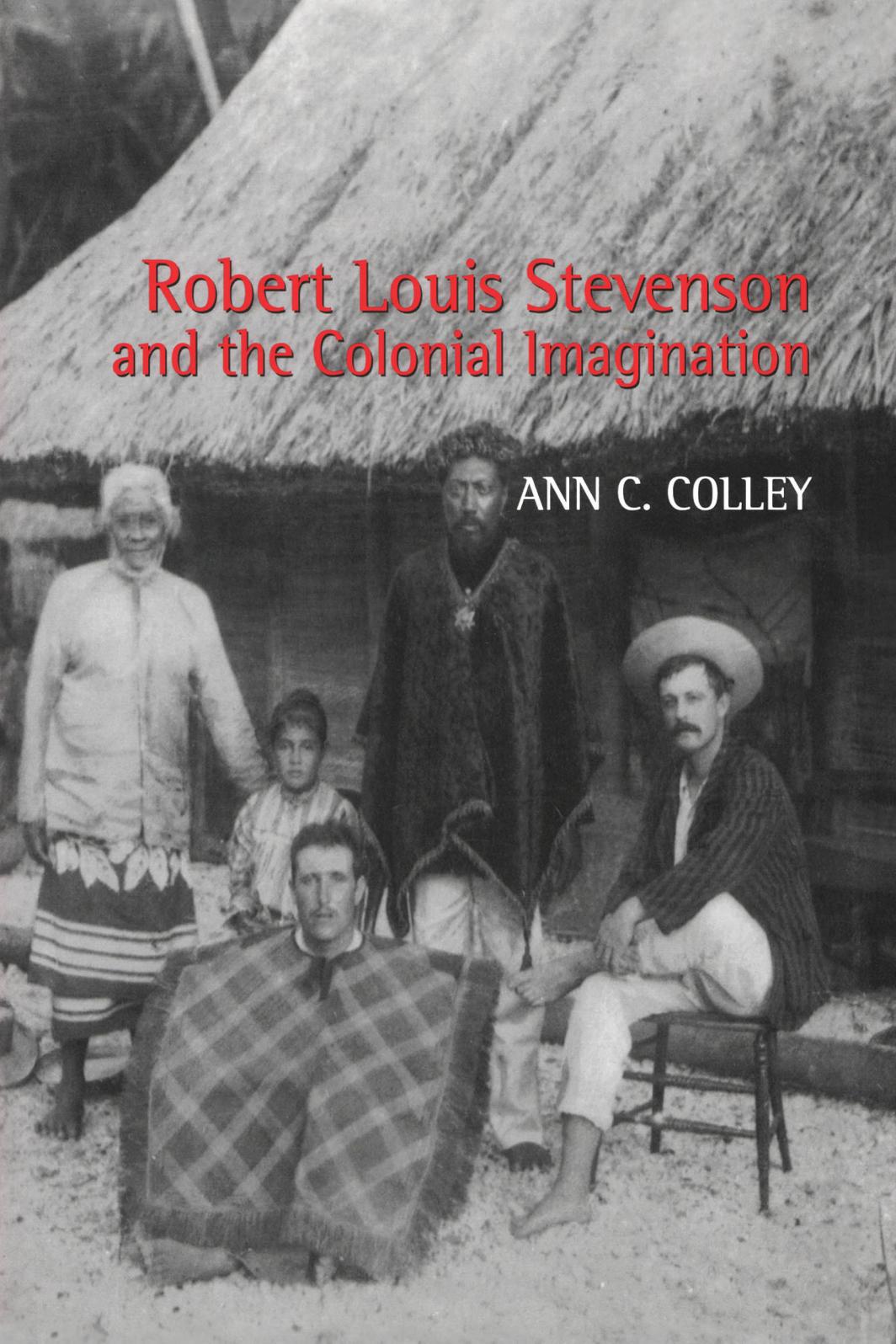


Robert Louis Stevenson and the Colonial Imagination

ANN C. COLLEY



ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON AND THE
COLONIAL IMAGINATION

To Frieda Manes and The Writing Group

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ANN C. COLLEY

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Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
Introduction	1
1 Stevenson and the South Sea Missionaries	11
2 Stevenson's Pyjamas	49
3 Colonies of Memory	73
4 Lighting Up the Darkness	99
5 Stevenson's Political Imagination	135
6 The Juvenile Missionary Magazines and <i>A Child's Garden of Verses</i>	179
<i>Bibliography</i>	203
<i>Index</i>	211



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List of Illustrations

i	Introduction. 'Polynesia Shewing Mission Fields, 1885'	x
1.1	'Map of New Guinea.' Rev. James Chalmers. <i>Pioneer Life and Work in New Guinea</i> (London: Religious Tract Society, 1895), 18	16
1.2	'Apia Sunday School, 1893.' LMS Archives: Photograph. [Central figure is Mr. Chambers, the USA Commissioner in Apia; the missionary is Miss A. E. Large]. Reproduced from London Missionary Society/Council for World Mission Archives	27
1.3	'Natives and Author at Murua, New Guinea.' Photograph, from Rev. George Brown. <i>An Autobiography</i> (London: Hodder, 1908)	32
2.1	'Barefooted Stevenson wearing a <i>lava-lava</i> . Fanny is seated next to him,' 1888. Photograph. Courtesy of the Writers' Museum, Edinburgh	56
2.2	Robert Louis Stevenson. Self-portrait on board the yacht <i>Casco</i> , presented to his old nurse 'Cummy' on her birthday in the year 1892. Oil. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University	57
2.3	Photograph of Vailima Staff. Courtesy of the Writers' Museum, Edinburgh	59
2.4	Isobel Strong. 'Samoan, White, Half-Caste.' Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University	61
2.5	'Talolo Vailima.' Photograph. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University	63
2.6	Lloyd Osbourne as Marquesan Warrior, 1888. Photograph. Courtesy of the Writers' Museum, Edinburgh	65
2.7	Lloyd Osbourne as Marquesan Warrior, 1888. Photograph. Courtesy of the Writers' Museum, Edinburgh	66
2.8	'Herman Swank.' Photograph, from Walter E. Traprock [George Shepard Chappell], <i>The Cruise of the Kawa: Wanderings in the South Seas</i> (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1921), facing 52.	67
3.1	'The Museum of the London Missionary Society.' Illustration from <i>Illustrated London News</i> (25 June 1859)	79
3.2	Henry Anelay, 'The Reverend John Williams on Board Ship with Native Implements, in the South Sea Islands.' Watercolor. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK 187. By permission National Library of Australia	83

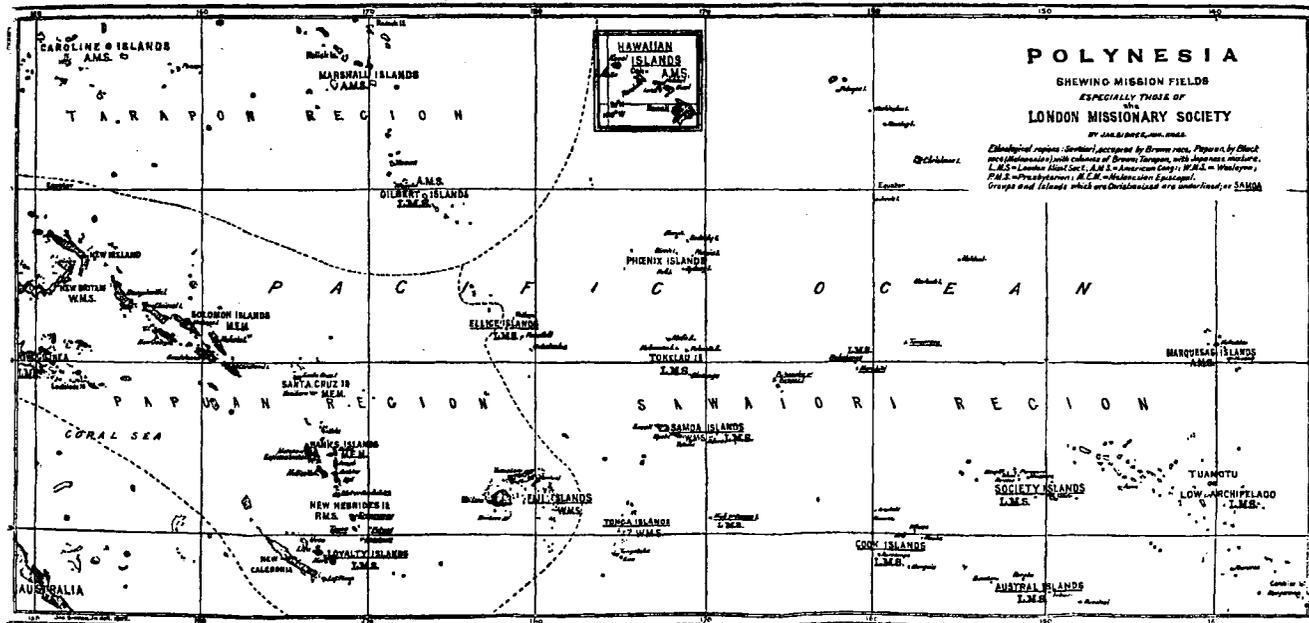
- 3.3 'Ferrante Imperato's Cabinet of Curiosities. Naples, 1599.' Illustration from Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor eds. *The Origins of Museums, the Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987). Plate 4. Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press 85
- 3.4 Wallis McKay, 'Niga and His Creed.' Illustration from Charles Warren Stoddard. *Summer Cruising in the South Seas* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1881), frontispiece 86
- 4.1 'Vaipuhiahi from the Harbour.' Pencil Sketch by Robert Louis Stevenson. Courtesy of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California 108
- 4.2 'Great Dance in Apemama Speak House.' Photograph. Courtesy of the Writers' Museum, Edinburgh 113
- 4.3 'Mrs. Stevenson Being Carried Ashore — Apiang.' Photograph . Courtesy of the Writers' Museum, Edinburgh 119
- 4.4 'Joe Strong Taking out his False Teeth.' Photograph. Courtesy of the Writers' Museum, Edinburgh 120
- 4.5 'Samoan Playing Cricket.' Photograph. Courtesy of the Writers' Museum, Edinburgh 120
- 4.6 'Headquarters of Wightman Bros. — Butaritari.' Photograph. Courtesy of the Writers' Museum, Edinburgh 121
- 4.7 "'Equator Town" by Moonlight.' Photograph. Courtesy of the Writers' Museum, Edinburgh 121
- 4.8 'Fanny, Stevenson, Nan Tok, and Nei Takauti. Butaritari, 1889.' Photograph. Courtesy of the Writers' Museum, Edinburgh 122
- 4.9 'Two Dancing Girls from Little Makin — Gilbert Islands.' Photograph. Courtesy of the Writers' Museum, Edinburgh 125
- 4.10 Isobel Strong. 'Drawing of Margaret Stevenson's Room at Vailima [showing camera].' Drawing. Courtesy of the Writers' Museum, Edinburgh 128

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'Polynesia, Shewing Mission Fields, 1885.'

Introduction

Adventures in the Archives

A strike at the British Library in 1999 radically altered the direction of this book. I had embarked on what I thought was to be a study of Robert Louis Stevenson and nineteenth-century anthropological thought when, one morning, I found my entrance to the reading rooms blocked by picketers. Polite notices announced that the British Library was to be closed until further notice. For several days I called the library hotline or walked along the noisy Euston Road with the vague hope that my anxiety would resolve the dispute.

As the days went by and the picket line grew, I decided an interim solution to my problem was to investigate a place I had originally planned to visit only at the end of my stay, believing it to be of marginal interest: the Archives of the London Missionary Society (LMS) at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). Once there I never left. Indeed, when the British Library strike was settled a few weeks later, I paid little attention, for after I had started sifting through the diaries, letters, publications, and miscellany of the missionaries who were in the South Seas during the time Stevenson was there, I soon realized that here was a context that was as yet not fully explored. These materials were really more germane to an understanding of Stevenson's life and work in the Pacific than were the books by armchair anthropologists reposing in the British Library. By discovering his indebtedness to the missionary world, I gained a fuller sense of Stevenson's struggles with personal and cultural identity. Here was a new and important approach to Stevenson's work.

In London, when I did choose to break away from the LMS archives, I moved temporarily to places like the photographic archives of the Royal Geographical Society where, in the basement, I searched through dusty files; I also climbed stairs leading to the remains of the library in what was once the Museum of Mankind, and into attics of magic lantern collectors to look at nineteenth-century slide images of the South Seas. In addition, I spent time in Edinburgh at the Writers' Museum and at the National Library of Scotland. Back in the United States, I continued my exploration not only in standard venues like the Huntington Library, the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Room, and the Yale Divinity School Library but also at the Magic Lantern Castle Museum in Texas. This museum (complete with drawbridge) was converted from a nightclub that lay next to a busy highway. Inside the museum, the owner has constructed a luxury windowless apartment for researchers where, for fear of losing his collection, he locks one in for the night and then departs, securing after him an electronic metal

fence. Imagine my apprehension when, in the middle of the night, I noticed the alarm system spelling out a message, MOTION IN OUTER OFFICE. I never discovered what was moving.

The Significance of the Missionary Culture

These various archival adventures allowed me to assemble scattered information so that I could begin to grasp the nature and the relevance of the missionary culture that surrounded Stevenson during the last six years of his life (1888-1894). My research uncovered hitherto unscouted routes by which to explore Stevenson's experiences while he was a traveler, cruising among the islands, and then while he was a resident colonial in Samoa. I soon realized the importance of his occasionally critical and difficult interactions with his missionary friends, who were also ethnologists, explorers, historians, politicians, and linguists. For Stevenson, these dialogues opened up ways of discerning his milieu; and for me, they illuminated his reactions to the complexities of the island cultures as well as to the tensions inherent within colonial rule.

The missionary culture of the South Seas provides a framework by which to consider what, for Stevenson, constitutes the nature of remembrance, alienation, images, language, and power. It allows one to ponder such seemingly disparate matters as the practice of collecting curios and the vagaries of an individual's memory. It also permits one to investigate, in detail, the intensity of Stevenson's political involvement in the South Seas. The context also adds to our view of the generous reach of Stevenson's imagination. The book opens with images of the South Seas available to Stevenson in his childhood and closes with his recollections of childhood in *A Child's Garden of Verses*. The way he deals with each reveals a mind that could exceed the boundaries and demands of the colonial pattern and burst through its limits to take another's part and to join the larger community of humanity.

Stevenson in the South Seas

When Stevenson first entered the Pacific in 1888, he had not come directly from Scotland, but indirectly via Bournemouth (England), Saranac Lake (New York), and San Francisco. 1887 was the year of his second trip to the American continent, and this time he had arrived a celebrity. The success of *Treasure Island* (1883), *Kidnapped* (1886), and *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) had won him the public's eager attention and had added to his reputation as a travel writer (*An Inland Voyage*, *Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes*, and *The Silverado Squatters*) and an essayist (*Virginibus Puerisque*, *Familiar Studies*, *Memories and Portraits*). He had left behind the rains and chills of Bournemouth and traveled across the Atlantic to the dry, cold air of the Adirondack Mountains. In coming to

Saranac Lake, famous for its sanitarium, he hoped to find a place that would provide a palliative to his chronic ill health and prevent the hemorrhages that periodically bound him motionless to a bed.

While at Saranac Lake Stevenson received an invitation from Samuel S. McClure to write a series of travel articles on the South Seas for a syndicate of newspapers. The request was too tempting to ignore, especially since Stevenson and his wife Fanny¹ had been thinking for a while about a trip through the Pacific islands. In a way, McClure's commission was a dream come true, for as a young lad, Stevenson had indulged in reveries about the islands and had written the first installment of an adventure story set in the South Seas. Also, he loved the sea (he had sailed in the rough northern waters with his father on inspection tours of the lighthouses engineered by the Stevenson family), and believed its air good for his health. A few months later, on 28 June 1888, after poring over A. G. Findlay's *Directory for the Navigation of the South Pacific Ocean* and musing over visions of cascading tropical streams, Stevenson, with Fanny, his stepson Lloyd Osbourne, and his mother, Margaret Stevenson, sailed from San Francisco out into the Pacific. For the next six months, on board the yacht *Casco*, they visited the Marquesas, navigated past the valley described by Herman Melville in *Typee*, spent time in Fakarava, and went on to Tahiti where it was discovered that the mainmast of the *Casco* was dangerously weakened by dry-rot. Stevenson fell seriously ill, so Fanny moved him from Papeete Bay to the less populated Tautira, where they stayed for almost two months. When the boat was repaired, they sailed from Tautira on Christmas Day and arrived in Honolulu in January, 1889.

Much taken with the pleasures, the novelty, the excitement, as well as the dangers, of cruising, Stevenson planned another journey, this time on the yacht *Equator*. On board were Stevenson, his wife, his stepson, and Joe Strong (the husband of his stepdaughter Belle). Stevenson's mother had returned to Scotland to spend time with an ailing sister. For several months, from June to December, 1889, they sailed through the Gilbert Islands, spent time in Butaritari and Apemama, and eventually reached the Samoan Islands. It was while they were in Samoa that Stevenson first considered remaining in the South Seas and settling on the island of Upolu. Stevenson was gradually coming to realize that if he were going to survive, he would have to remain where the climate was the least harmful to his damaged lungs. Although he periodically thought about visiting Britain, he was never able to leave the South Seas. Sickness, family responsibilities, and eventually a lack of will intervened and thwarted his intentions. Before making this permanent move, however, Stevenson, who had fallen ill and needed to get out of Sydney, decided to take a third voyage to help him recover. As a result, on 11 April 1890 he with Fanny and Lloyd boarded the steamer the *Janet Nicoll*. During this voyage he revisited some of the islands he had seen on previous trips and continued north into the Marshall Islands; he then turned south, passed by the New Hebrides, and disembarked at the French colony of New Caledonia. The ship also briefly visited Noumea.

Throughout these travels he met beachcombers, traders, plantation owners, islanders, slaves, chiefs, missionaries, naval officers, and colonial officials, all of whom, from their own perspectives, introduced him to island life and forced him to realize that he had stepped out of a familiar context and entered territories for which he had no ready overarching or facile metaphor. His commentary appearing in McClure's newspapers reveals his assiduous notetaking and illustrates his attempts to make sense of what he was seeing. When he was to combine these articles with his journal notes to assemble his semi-anthropological study of the region, *In the South Seas*, he left behind a record of a person who was dedicated to his task, yet struggling to come to grips with his encounters and to render them as truthfully and as completely as possible. After Stevenson had built his home, Vailima, near Apia, the main port on the Samoan island of Upolu, and had become a resident, he continued to study Pacific culture. He also became entangled in the intricacies of colonial politics — a natural development, since he was living near Apia, which had the largest population of whites and was the location not only for the headquarters of the London Missionary Society, agents of foreign and political interests, but also for the offices of the three competing colonial powers: Germany, Britain, and the United States.

These experiences, obviously, could not help but affect the course of his fiction. He continued to write extensively, often romantically and lovingly about Scotland, and to revisit its highlands and lowlands through his work on *Catriona* (*David Balfour*), *The Master of Ballantrae*, and *Weir of Hermiston*. But Stevenson also launched upon what has now come to be known as his South Seas or Pacific fiction. In these texts he took as his subject the white man's presence in the Pacific and depicted, as forthrightly as he was able, the encounters between colonials and islanders and the ensuing frictions among the various groups populating the beach. These texts plus his study of Samoa's contentious and difficult past (*A Footnote to History*, 1892) reveal just how schooled he was by these disturbing realities. Consequently, as many have documented, Stevenson periodically broke away from the glorified narratives of boys' adventure stories and the pervasive imperial myth of Robinson Crusoe, to write ballads based upon Samoan legends and to compose tales, fables, and short novels that drew upon his immediate experiences as a colonial. He laid bare the contradictions, the ambiguities, and the complications (as well as the humor) attending the overlapping of cultures and the imposing of one assumption upon another. The missionaries played a major role in this drama.

Stevenson and Empire

When Stevenson sailed through the islands and finally landed in Upolu, he arrived, whether he intended to or not, as a representative of the British Empire, and, therefore, as a person of consequence. Like a visiting foreign dignitary, he was constantly courted by chiefs or officials and offered special privileges: in Hawaii,

he dined with royalty, and in Apemama, he lived in accommodations especially constructed for him by the High Chief Tembinoka. Such was the aura of importance given to him as a distinguished British subject that once, for all too brief a moment, several natives, including the King, in Butaritari believed he was Queen Victoria's son or intimate personal friend, an error of which Stevenson took a winking advantage so that he and his household might be spared the intrusion of riotous, drunken islanders.²

Stevenson had, in a sense, merely joined the large number of Scots who already lived in the South Seas and had cast their lot with Empire. Scottish financiers, engineers, missionaries, shipbuilders, ironsmelters, and explorers had spread throughout India, Africa, and into the Pacific.³ As a result, when Stevenson traveled around the South Sea islands, he frequently conversed with people from home: with Mr. Robert Stewart, a Fifeshire man trading in the Marquesas; with Mr. McCallum, of Hiva-oa, who still carried his Burns with him; with Duncan Cameron, an old dissenting Highlander, long settled in Tahiti, 'but still breathing of the heather of Tiree' (*In the South Seas* 131); and with Dr. Samuel Davies, a LMS missionary, who had studied medicine in Edinburgh and with whom Stevenson had 'an age-long talk about Edinburgh folk' (*Letters* 7: 45).

Scotland and Empire were both available through these reminders of home, but, paradoxically, Scotland was even more valuable as a point of reference that helped him understand his new surroundings. As Julia Reid and others have remarked, Stevenson often relied on his Scottish past to gain access to the South Seas. Scotland offered parallels by which, for instance, he could better understand the structure of island society (through its clan system) and its political dilemmas.⁴ Scotland had, after all, been a victim of English policies as some areas of the South Seas had been subjected to foreign rule. Furthermore, Stevenson recognized a similarity between the 'savage' South Sea islanders and the 'barbaric' Highlanders exploited and harmed by fellow Scots (lowlanders) who, as Jenni Calder points out, 'regarded them as primitive savages speaking a barbaric language' and 'holding back the progress of civilisation'. That circumstance placed Stevenson in the odd position of thinking of himself both as a victim and as an intrusive colonial. Calder explains: 'Stevenson as a Lowlander is, vis-à-vis the Highlands, an "intrusive colonial", but as a Scot is a victim of English cultural imperialism.'⁵ Such an ambiguous situation is probably responsible for many of the tensions and incongruities one runs across when considering his reactions to his new surroundings.

Wherever Stevenson traveled, he could not avoid reminders of the British Empire and of his own place in it. Portraits of Queen Victoria pasted inside islanders' dwellings, and photographs of her affixed to saloon walls, to the forecabin in the *Casco*, or projected through magic lantern slides onto a dark island night were rarely far from view. The monarch was a person, as Margaret Stevenson remarked, with whom most islanders were familiar, and who, when they saw her image, cried out, 'Victoreea!' (Balfour 95-96).⁶ When Stevenson moved to Samoa

(and displayed a British flag from the roof of Vailima), he drew yet closer to the powerful symbols of Empire. He was constantly in sight of the British trading vessels and warships that populated the port of Apia. Officers from these men-of-war visited the Stevensons, frequently supplied medical advice, and arranged entertainments, even circuses, for the whites and for the islanders. Moreover, Stevenson rubbed shoulders and exchanged words, sometimes angry ones, with British officials who represented the Crown. And, of course, he maintained close contact with the LMS missionaries who, in spite of their growing autonomy, were, in their own way, still agents of Empire. When one of Stevenson's missionary friends lectured before the Royal Geographical Society, he described his native preachers in New Guinea as 'true Britons to the backbone', who 'swear by Queen Victoria and her officers.' The Reverend James Chalmers added, 'often have I seen uncouth savages listen with staring eyes and open mouth when "Victoria's" greatness and goodness have been told' (195).

The question that all this raises is to what degree Stevenson was really 'Victoria's son' (no matter how convincing he appeared to be in Butaritari!). Recently critics have wanted to release him from such a parentage and have emphasized his antagonism to imperialist doctrines and to colonial intervention.⁷ Indeed, as several chapters in this book will discuss, Stevenson did rebel against certain elements of imperialistic ideology, wrote stories that undermined the ethos of colonial intervention, questioned various notions of racial superiority, despised the common ignorance that regarded races 'in a lump' (*In the South Seas* 60), and was quite willing to consider the behavior of his own culture as being more barbaric than what he encountered during his travels. However, much as he rebelled, Stevenson seems still, in some respects, to be Victoria's son. Looking closely at Stevenson's reactions to the missionary culture and the Samoan political environment, one has to recognize, or, perhaps, reluctantly admit to oneself, that there are significant moments when he supports the colonial imperative and values its presence, indeed finds solace in it as well as hope for an island's future. One would rather stay with the last scenes of Stevenson's life when he openly opposed or resisted the ruling foreign interests by defending Mataafa, the deposed Chief, and helped his warriors who had been thrown in jail by bringing food and negotiating their release. However, it would not be honest to confine oneself to such examples.

Stevenson and Particularity

The value of engaging the later part of Stevenson's biography is that it forces the careful reader to struggle with the tensions of actually living within the site of Empire and, therefore, to deal with its contradictions. A study of Stevenson's relations with the missionary culture helps one to realize this dilemma and to immerse oneself in the dialogues that occupied Stevenson and helped to direct the

multi-voiced South Seas fiction. One must not look for a system or a universal, but, instead, for the shifting tones of the particular experiences, as one voice or circumstance replaces another.

The ensuing tensions, however, do not compromise Stevenson's integrity. I suggest that, in addition to being a corrective to or a revision of our understanding of him, the paradoxes and incongruities are more aptly a reminder that it is not always appropriate to march out such routine terms as 'imperialism' to frame a discussion of Stevenson's life and work. Such terminology weighs down the nuance and topples the delicate and shifting freight of life and thought. To impose a concept like 'imperialism' on Stevenson's work tends to exclude, and, consequently, to exile or discard what does not fit into its space. We lose too much and we invent where perhaps nothing exists. Reading about Stevenson's life and thinking, especially about his interactions with the missionaries, confirms how necessary it is to be suspicious of ideologically weighted language. It is better to engage the individual encounter and continuously renegotiate, as did Stevenson, the impact of the particular episodes as they occur. I find that I agree with Jonathan Lamb, Vanessa Smith, and Nicholas Thomas, who, as editors of *Explorations and Exchange: A South Sea Anthology 1680-1900*, identify with a number of scholars 'who have become increasingly attendant to the particular rather than the universal aspects of colonial encounter.' They are suspicious of generalizations that obliterate 'the specificity of each enterprise' (xvi).

When Stevenson went to the South Seas, he not only moved away from familiar metaphors; he also moved into a region of thought that encouraged him to discard generalities and to honor, instead, the moment separated from its surroundings. He realized, as Irving Massey observes, that 'every experience equips itself with a space around it' (282). This is why he could move with such facility from one person or concern to another, and work, as he did, on multiple projects. He felt no need to tie everything together; he accepted non-closure, inconsistency, and the transitory. He also accepted the relativity of social practice: nakedness in Scotland might be one thing; in Samoa it is another. Neither state is responsible for or reflects upon the other. Only in this way could he survive the ambiguities and the perplexities of his new life. Imperialism, therefore, is not a very useful term to describe the character of Stevenson's experiences in the South Seas, even though he is the child of Empire.

Stevenson once told a friend that in the South Seas exclusiveness was impossible; it was necessary to embrace multiplicity (*Letters* 6: 381). I believe we should heed his thought. For Stevenson (and, I should hope for us; when reading him) it is the particular, not the framing term, that counts. He is not interested in developing a policy or a hierarchy of thought; rather, he is committed to recording a series of horizontal experiences or what Benedict Anderson in his *Imagined Communities* terms 'a succession of plurals' (32). It is this simultaneity that creates meaning, not a ruling system. As a result, Stevenson's *In the South Seas* starts to resemble what Clifford Geertz (following Gilbert Ryle) calls 'thick description' (6,

21, 23) amassing detail after detail and, in the end, refusing to impose either a structure or an ideology. The culture that emerges is not a system but an assembly of events, of dialogues, and finally of particulars.

In the writing of this book, I have, in a sense, taken my cue from the anthropologist or the fieldworker who travels to a strange area and attempts to make sense of what she finds. As a result, instead of imposing a system, I have chosen to record the multiplicity of details that sometimes reveals an underlying pattern but, what is more important, continually places one in the very dilemmas that make Stevenson and his South Sea writing intriguing. Each of the following chapters honors this fraternity of particulars. The first chapter, 'Robert Louis Stevenson and the South Sea Missionaries' gives a history of the missionaries in the Pacific and concentrates on Stevenson's criticism of, yet ultimate support for, their work and how these attitudes help shape his South Sea fiction. The next three chapters, 'Stevenson's Pyjamas', 'Colonies of Memory', and 'Lighting up the Darkness', focus on other aspects of Stevenson's interactions with the missionary culture. These various exchanges articulate Stevenson's struggles with personal and cultural identity in the South Seas, and provide a means through which to comprehend what, in Stevenson's mind, constitutes the nature of memory, alienation, and class. In addition these chapters suggest new ways of thinking about the style and the subject matter of his writing. 'Lighting up the Darkness' also touches upon his interest in photography, panoramas, and magic lantern shows, revealing Stevenson's sensitivity to the ways light plays upon darkness to create meaning. The fifth chapter, 'Stevenson's Political Imagination', explores the nature of Stevenson's commitment to political issues and his thoughts about power and nationhood. Once more returning to the presence of the South Sea missionaries, the chapter also examines Stevenson's protracted conflicts with one of his missionary acquaintances who became entangled in Samoan politics. The final chapter, 'The Juvenile Missionary Magazines and *A Child's Garden of Verses*', dwells upon Stevenson's recollections of his childhood not only to suggest an unacknowledged source for the collection of poems (the juvenile missionary magazines) but also to illuminate the generous reach of his imagination that exceeds the formulae of the missionary culture and the boundaries of the colonial construct. This assemblage of topics discloses Stevenson's fluctuating adjustment to the novel and as yet unassimilated conditions of his life in the South Seas.

Notes

1. Stevenson had met Fanny Matilda Vandegrift when in July, 1876 he had gone to an artist colony in France. At that time Fanny was estranged from, but still married to, Samuel Osbourne. They lived in California. She had three children: Hervey who died at the age of four (in 1876), Isobel (Osbourne), and Lloyd (Osbourne). Fanny was ten years Stevenson's senior. Eventually in August, 1879 Stevenson set sail from England and followed Fanny to California. His account of this trip became *The Amateur Emigrant*. After her divorce, they married on 19 May 1880. Stevenson was close to and supported Fanny's remaining two children, Isobel (sometimes referred to as Belle), now a young adult, and Lloyd a few years younger than she. All of them shared his life in the South Seas and lived with him in Samoa. For a while Isobel was married to Joe Strong, a painter and photographer, and lived in Hawaii. She had a son Austin. After Isobel's divorce from Strong, Stevenson became Austin's official guardian.
2. Stevenson describes the situation that elicited the drama. He explains that the day after a drunken brawl had threatened their safety, one of his acquaintances, Mrs. Ricks the only white woman on the island and the wife of the American consular agent, told the King of Butaritari, who was himself suffering from a bad hangover, that 'I was an intimate personal friend of Queen Victoria's; that immediately on my return I should make her a report upon Butaritari; and that if my house should have been again invaded by natives, a man-of-war would be despatched to make reprisals.' Stevenson continues, by saying that the sick monarch 'had conceived the notion (he said) that I was a man of some importance, but not dreamed it was as bad as this; and the missionary house [where Stevenson was staying] was *tapu*'d under a fine of fifty dollars' (*In the South Seas* 181). Later, others on the island believed him to be Victoria's son.
3. For a discussion of Scotland and empire, see Martin Green. *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire*. New York: Basic Books, Inc. 1979; and Linda Colley's review 'We Are All Scots Here' of Michael Fry's *The Scottish Empire* in *London Review of Books*. Volume 24, No. 24. 12 December 2002. 14-15.
4. For examples of the parallels that Stevenson saw between Scotland and the South Seas, see his discussion of the Marquesas in *In the South Seas*:

It was perhaps yet more important that I had enjoyed in my youth some knowledge of our Scots folk of the Highlands and the Islands. Not much beyond a century had passed since these were in the same convulsive and transitional state as the Marquesas of to-day. In both cases an alien authority enforced, the clans disarmed, the chiefs deposed, new customs introduced, and chiefly that fashion of regarding money as the means and object of existence. The commercial age, in each, succeeding at a bound to an age of war abroad and patriarchal communism at home. In one the cherished practice of tattooing, in the other a cherished costume, proscribed. In each a main luxury cut off: beef, driven under cloud of night from Lowland pastures, denied to the meat-loving Highlanders; long-pig, pirated from the next village, to the man-eating Kanaka. The grumbling, the secret ferment, the fears, and resentments, the alarms and sudden councils of Marquesan chiefs, reminded me continually of the days of Lovat and Struan. (12)

5. I am grateful to Jenni Calder for these remarks she made in a letter to me, dated April, 2003.
6. Another example of this recognition occurs in *The Beach of Falesá* when, Uma, the native woman, recognizes the picture of Queen Victoria, calls her 'Victoreea' and exclaims 'he big chief' (Menikoff 162).
7. A sampling of this approach can be found in Elleke Boehmer. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*. New York: Oxford UP. 1995. Patrick Brantlinger. *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914*. Ithaca: Cornell UP. 1988. Linda Dryden. *Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance*. Houndmills: Macmillan Press Ltd. 2000. Rosalyn Jolly, Ed. *South Sea Tales*. Oxford: Oxford UP. 1996. Wendy R. Katz. *Rider Haggard and the Fiction of Empire: A Critical Study of British Imperial Fiction*. New York: Cambridge UP. 1987. Katherine Bailey Linehan. "Taking up with Kanakas: Stevenson's Complex Social Criticism in "The Beach of Falesá".' *English Literature in Transition, 1889-1920*. Volume 33, No. 4. 1990. 407-22, and in Andrea White. *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition: Constructing and Deconstructing the Imperial Subject*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 1993.

Chapter One

Stevenson and the South Sea Missionaries

Introduction

When Stevenson was an infant, the *Juvenile Missionary Magazine of the United Presbyterian Church* (Edinburgh, 1851) announced a magic lantern exhibit featuring a series of 'Dissolving Views of Scenes in the South Seas' to be held every evening at 8 o'clock in the Elysian Rooms. The purpose was to illustrate the missionary operations through brightly lit images that took the young audience into the interior of a New Caledonian Chief's House, where the children might view 'heathen Customs', and let their eyes wander through scenes displaying 'the first fruits of fifteen years' Missionary labour on the islands of Tahiti' ('South Sea Island Evangelised' 144). The running commentary would have stressed the successes and struggles of the enterprise as well as the mandate to save one's pennies so that even a young person could contribute to the noblest work on earth.

Nearly forty years later, between 1888 and 1894, Stevenson was to translate and qualify these didactic dissolving views through the medium of his own travels in the Pacific islands — experiences that were often framed by the missionary presence. Even though his perception of island culture was no longer subject to the missionary magazine patter, it was still dependent upon his interactions with the missionaries and their institutions. As we shall see, the missionaries constituted one of the most enduring and significant entities in the Pacific and were important to Stevenson in his orientation to his new surroundings. And, as we shall subsequently discover, although Stevenson knew that these missionaries had contributed to the destruction of island cultures, he also understood that in the context of the late 1800s, when Pacific communities were increasingly threatened by other foreign invasions, the missionary and his culture had paradoxically become a buffer against these new incursions, helping to protect the integrity of the island life. The shaping of his imagination and the composing of his South Sea stories are indebted to such paradoxes as well as to the complexities and ambiguities attending the missionaries' policies. Much of the tension within Stevenson's South Sea discourse is obligated to this reality.

Missionaries in the South Seas

Stevenson came to the islands almost a hundred years after the first missionaries had set foot on their shores. Among the first groups to establish stations was the London Missionary Society (LMS), composed largely of Congregationalists and Presbyterians. In 1795, encouraged by the region's pleasant climate and provoked by vivid, if not startling, reports of the area's depravity and barbarous customs, a group of individuals founded the LMS and made plans to enter a territory that in their minds was ripe for salvation.¹ They were eager to reach a place where infanticide and cannibalism supposedly thrived among the worship of heathen idols. After raising significant amounts of money, they gathered twenty-nine missionaries who set sail from England aboard the *Duff* on 10 August 1779. Although there were a few clerics, the majority of the passengers were the 'godly mechanics' selected not only for their religious zeal but also for their practical skills. The *Duff* arrived in Tahiti in March, 1797, the place that seemed, through the various explorers' accounts, to be the most tantalizing and ready for conversion. After leaving the bulk of the missionaries there, the ship moved on and deposited the rest of the passengers elsewhere, for instance, on the Marquesas, where the Society hoped to spread its influence.

Immediately the vulnerability of the missionary endeavor became obvious. There were communication difficulties, for these pioneers had trouble learning the various languages. The few vocabulary aids given them by a survivor of the mutiny of the *Bounty* had proved impossible to master; consequently, they found themselves relying on the linguistic skills of beachcombers who, after deserting a trading vessel or surviving a wreck, were scraping together a living on the island and mingling intimately with the natives. From the Society's perspective, these outcasts were not the most moral or desirable of intermediaries. There were also problems with disease, conflicts among themselves and with the natives, and, eventually, crises in faith. Hardship and circumstance compromised their evangelism and conspired to bring an end to their efforts.

In 1817, what is known as the second generation of LMS missionaries left England and came back to the South Seas to try once more. Among these were William Ellis and John Williams, two giants in the missionary field who succeeded in staking claims, acquiring land, and convincing various chiefs, such as Pomare II of Tahiti, to destroy their heathen idols and hurl them from their native thrones (Ellis 1: 257). Through their tireless labors, they set up stations throughout the Pacific: in the Cook Islands, Tonga, the Marquesas, the New Hebrides, and the Society Islands.² Ellis believed it was important to bring the written word, so he traveled with a printing press and set up a series of what Vanessa Smith refers to as 'literary-textual encounters' that spread the word, through translated, printed texts, and excited the converts, especially those with authority, for literacy enhanced their power. The missionaries taught people to read. News of success, very much exaggerated in the missionary magazines that boasted of mass and instantaneous conversions, made Ellis and Williams celebrities in Britain. In 1834, on a furlough,