

## ‘The unrest and movement of our century’: the universe of *The Wrecker*

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This paper will propose that *The Wrecker* offers a darkly original vision of culture and capitalism in a wholly modern theatre of transatlantic, Pacific, and indeed globalised travel, business, and ultimately, murder. The book’s amoral spirit is equally ‘modern’ for—despite a closing vision of greed and murder worthy of Chaucer’s ‘Pardoner’s Tale’—‘Our criminals are a most pleasing crew and leave the dock with scarce a stain upon their character.’<sup>1</sup>

The Stevenson/Osborne collaboration is a sprawling, episodic adventure story, a comedy of brash manners and something of a detective mystery whose youth-led plot is characterised by a kaleidoscopic versatility, an indefatigable optimism, and an innocent corruption. But the novel also offers a prophetically postmodern vision of a depthless world of travel, exile, novelty and rootlessness; of ‘discarded sons’ who inherit and confidently inhabit a world they neither fully understand nor fully belong to; of a ‘brave new world’ in which every character is somehow always already a castaway. It is a black comedy of capitalism and existential absurdity that plays ‘art’ against commerce, ambition against incompetence and accident against design, all in ‘an excellent example of the Blind Man’s Buff that we call life.’<sup>2</sup> Seen in these terms, *The Wrecker* is a significantly underestimated part of Stevenson’s oeuvre. (Apart from anything else it contains some of his best writing about the sea, the South Seas and sailing ships.) Its reputation may have been clouded by the collaboration with Lloyd Osbourne, or by the autobiographical echoes that recur throughout the book (especially in the

Parisian scenes), or by its lengthy picaresque progress; nevertheless, perhaps it is time to take another look at an almost forgotten Stevenson novel which, for a number of years after its first publication, actually outsold *The Master of Ballantrae*.<sup>3</sup>

Let us start with Stevenson's own estimate of his theme, from the Epilogue dedicated to Will H. Low:

Why dedicate to you a tale of a cast so modern:—full of details of our barbaric manners and unstable morals; full of the need and the lust of money, so that there is scarce a page in which the dollars do not jingle; full of the unrest and movement of our century, so that the reader is hurried from place to place and sea to sea, and the book is less a romance than a panorama—in the end as blood-bespattered as an epic? (*The Wrecker*, pp. 362-3)

In his correspondence Stevenson has a habit of depreciating his own work, and yet here, as in a letter to Charles Baxter written while he was working on *The Wrecker*, he allows himself a serious note:

I believe *The Wrecker* is a good yarn of its poor sort, and it is certainly well nourished with facts; no realist can touch me there; for by this time I do begin to know something of life in the XIXth century, which no novelist either in France or England seems to know much of.<sup>4</sup>

Stevenson's early distrust of 'realism' may have begun to change ('A Humble Remonstrance' was written in 1884, six years earlier) and the last chapter of *The Wrecker* contains an ironic reflection on such concerns when the crew is faking the log of the *Flying Scud* only to find entries already in it that seem less than convincing:

'Well, it doesn't look like real life—that's all I can say,' returned Wicks.

'It's the way it was, though,' argued Carthew.

'So it is; and what the better are we for that, if it don't look so?' cried the captain, sounding unwonted depths of art criticism. (p. 351)

But Stevenson is still no Balzac, whom he saw as being 'smothered under forcible-feeble detail',<sup>5</sup> and the novel makes significant use of symbolic devices, not the least of which is his consistent liking for using structures of the double, by which Loudon Dodd and Jim Pinkerton play against each other in a manner reminiscent (according to Edwin Eigner) of David Balfour and Alan Breck Stewart;<sup>6</sup> and more especially by his use of Norris Carthew as Loudon's doppelgänger—a shadowy 'other' whom he has to track down, in order to see what he himself might nearly have become:

'The fact is I think I know the man,' said I. 'I think I'm looking for him.

I rather think he is my long-lost brother.'

'Not twins, anyway,' returned Stennis. (p. 282)

(In Stennis's wry rejoinder we hear Stevenson's own voice, in another self-aware art-critical interjection.) And of course Loudon ends up working for Carthew, ending the book as he began it, by playing the aesthete (this time in a lavishly furnished schooner cabin) supported once again by invisible money and an absent partner: 'He runs me now. It's all his money.' (p. 6). (One of the continuing themes in this novel is the author's often satirical view of the almost parasitical place of art in a world of harsh economic pressures and commerce—reflections born of his own social status, his never-ending financial imperatives and the long wrangle with his father.)<sup>7</sup>

So what *is* the nature of Stevenson's new found 'realism' in this 'panorama', in this 'tale of a cast so modern'? With this question in mind it will be useful to consider the book under three headings linked to economic, symbolic and finally to philosophical issues. The first section will consider Stevenson's insight into the world of business and the pursuit of profit as it reveals itself through Loudon Dodd's adventures in free trade. The second section 'Discarded Sons' will explore the symbolic resonance of these adventures as we see how closely Stevenson associates the spirit of capitalist enterprise with a strange kind of orphaned innocence, whose adolescent enthusiasm for getting ahead is blind to the moral implications and the human cost of its actions. In both sections Stevenson's account of the factual intricacies of this brave new world of affairs and profit can be said to have a realistic, if darkly satirical, grounding. In the final section, 'The Blind Man's Buff that we call life', Stevenson's characters' petty engagement with ambition, greed and chance can be seen to reveal a much wider philosophical vision on his part, in what amounts to an existential insight into the cruelty and absurdity at the heart of existence.

### **(1) Business life in the XIXth Century**

In effect the novel is a long ‘yarn’ retold by Loudon Dodd—including other narratives told within his own—but from the opening and self-consciously romantic scene from which Dodd tells his retrospective tale, the amoral and global economic ethos of the book is made abundantly clear, by Dodd himself, and by the cosmopolitan characters around him, all of whom take it wholly for granted:

The various English, Americans, Germans, Poles, Corsicans, and Scots—the merchants and the clerks of Tai-o-hae—deserted their places of business, and gathered, according to invariable custom, on the road before the club. (p. 4)

The talk turns to trade and affairs, initiated by Loudon’s remarks on a recent wreck and the ensuing insurance claim: ‘Talk of good business!’ he says, ‘I know nothing better than a schooner, a competent captain, and a sound reliable reef.’ (p. 9)

‘Good business! There’s no such thing!’ said the Glasgow man. ‘Nobody makes anything but the missionaries—dash it!’

‘I don’t know,’ said another; ‘there’s a good deal in opium.’

‘It’s a good job to strike a tabooed pearl-island—say about the fourth year,’ remarked a third, ‘skim the whole lagoon on the sly, and up stick and away before the French get wind of you.’

‘A pig nokket of cold is good,’ observed a German.

‘There’s something in wrecks, too,’ said Haven. (pp. 9-10)

Stevenson has already remarked at this point that if ‘one becomes used to a certain laxity of moral tone which prevails [. . .] on smuggling, ship-scuttling, barratry, piracy, the labour trade, and other kindred fields of human activity, he will find Polynesia no less amusing and no less instructive than Pall Mall or Paris.’(p. 9)

—Precisely: and for the rest of the novel, Stevenson’s proposal will be that the true mechanisms of the centres of civilisation can be most clearly discerned out here on the open margins of the new world. This is not a frontier ethic, in other words, but a fair reflection of what lies at home, in London, Paris or New York.<sup>8</sup> After all, this was exactly what Loudon’s early education at the Muskegon Commercial College was about, with its model stock market, to train young masters of the universe in shifting alliances and in the use of power and exploitation in both their personal and their economic affairs. (In this respect Stevenson’s novel looks like a forerunner to Tom Wolfe’s *Bonfire of the Vanities*, 1987, and *A Man in Full*, 1998).

An early review from the *Atlantic Monthly* had no doubts about what was being proposed: ‘if a home-truth should be carefully looked for amid all this immorality, it might be found in the similarity of the commercial scenes to the smuggling and wrecking ones.’<sup>9</sup> The reviewer has already noted that ‘It would not do for a Sunday-school prize’ and it is as if Long John Silver has moved from *Treasure Island* to the Bourse, to join Teach from *The Master of Ballantrae*; and indeed Dodd describes his partner Pinkerton by telling us that ‘Reality was his romance’:

Suppose a man were to dig up a galleon on the Coromandel coast [. . .] he should have no more profit of romance than Pinkerton when he had cast up his weekly balance-sheet in a bald office. Every dollar gained was like

something brought ashore from a mysterious deep; every venture made was like a diver's plunge; and as he thrust his bold hand into the plexus of the money-market he was delightedly aware of how he shook the pillars of existence, turned out men, as at a battle-cry, to labour in far countries, and set the gold twitching in the drawers of millionaires. (p. 85)

Here, as in *The Master of Ballantrae*, Stevenson is revisiting and significantly revising his own roots in adventure fiction. Of course *The Wrecker* is aimed at an adult audience and set in contemporary times, but the thrill of business in a free market—as he sees it—is still the adolescent thrill of daring and intrigue. The lantern bearers of Stevenson's boyhood carried a secret beneath their jackets, and this whole novel revolves around the unravelling of a bloody secret that will end by challenging, daunting and compromising Pinkerton and Dodd, while also defining them, indeed, as archetypally and irrecoverably adolescent.

Yet Stevenson's achievement (not unlike Tom Wolfe's) is to make us care about these people and to show us that the interplay between business and personal ethics is by no means as clear-cut as we might like it to be. Nor is family history irrelevant, as we learn about Loudon's father's bankruptcy (despite his 'Big Head' for business) and his maternal grandfather's propensity, as a jobbing builder, for using a good deal too much sand in his Portland cement.

The intertwining complexities of morality, loyalty, and pragmatic self interest are never better explored than in the dialogue in chapter 16 between the emphatically blunt Captain Nares (whom we trust) and Loudon Dodd over the bankruptcy of Jim Pinkerton and his request that Dodd should defraud their debtors by withholding whatever profit he has gained (much less than expected) from the

wreck of the *Flying Scud*. With a characteristically defusing frankness, and a not uncalculating charm, the chapter is entitled ‘In which I Turn Smuggler and the Captain Casuist’. But Nares’s so-called casuistry is challenging, nonetheless, in a long and complex exchange (by no means wholly ironic) in which he outlines how he sees Dodd’s position. A few examples will have to suffice:

‘The figure’s big enough to make bad trouble, but it’s not big enough to be picturesque; and I should guess that a man always feels kind of small who has sold himself under six ciphers. That would be my way, at least; there’s an excitement about a million that might carry me on; but the other way, I should feel kind of lonely when I woke in bed.’ (p. 219)

[. . .]

‘As a matter of principle, I wouldn’t look at this business at the money. “Not good enough,” would be my word. But even principle goes under when it comes to friends.’ (p. 220)

[. . .]

‘That’s an ugly way to put it,’ I objected, ‘and perhaps hardly fair. There’s right and wrong to be considered.’

‘Don’t know the parties,’ replied Nares. (p. 220)

If Dodd has his hectically enthusiastic and naive double in Pinkerton, he is haunted in curiously intimate fashion by another such figure—the shyster lawyer Bellairs, for whom the grey areas and moral swamps of the plot are nothing less than his native habitat. Dodd reflects on the liaison: ‘It will be seen that I had fallen into an ignominious intimacy with the man I had gone out to thwart. My pity for the



creature, his admiration for myself, his pleasure in my society, which was clearly unassumed, were the bonds by which I was fettered.’ (p. 260). —One of Stevenson’s finest creations, fawning and fulminating by turns, as a compromised and iconic figure of modernity, Harry Bellairs is more than fit to stand alongside Dostoevsky’s underground man, or Melville’s Bartleby the scrivener. (Put another way, he plays Gollum to Loudon’s Frodo.) When Loudon seems to criticise, and indeed to patronise him, Bellairs responds:

‘Excuse me if I seem to press the subject,’ he continued, ‘but if you think my life erroneous, would you have me neglect the means of grace? Because you consider me in the wrong on one point, would you have me place myself on the wrong in all? (p. 262)

These are questions that Dodd might very well ask of himself and here (as with *The Master of Ballantrae*, which was written during the same period) Stevenson has further developed the dualities of his earlier work, to the point where all such stabilising assurances of ‘right and wrong to be considered’ have been confused or compromised by the desperation of hungry men and their driving need to make a living. Bellairs asks Dodd to be charitable in his judgements: ‘Surely, sir, the church is for the sinner.’

‘Did you ask a blessing on your present enterprise?’ I sneered.

He had a bad attack of St Vitus, his face was changed, and his eyes flashed. ‘I will tell you what I did,’ he cried. ‘I prayed for an unfortunate man and a wretched woman whom he tries to support.’

I cannot pretend that I found any repartee. (p. 262)

Bellairs is adrift in the same sea as Dodd and Pinkerton, and in fact the book contains an entire cast of similarly rootless individuals, all marked by the same eager enterprise, not unconnected to the largely self-centred and immature optimism that Stevenson seems to see as characteristic of late 19<sup>th</sup> century capitalism—perhaps especially in its North American manifestations.<sup>10</sup> Such rootless mobility is another feature in how Stevenson understands the modern world, located (as Loudon Dodd is in San Francisco) ‘on the extreme shore of the West and of today’ (p. 107). This theme will be taken a little further in the next section.

## **(2) Discarded sons**

It is Norris Carthew, Loudon’s elusive doppelgänger and ultimate benefactor, who is referred to as a ‘discarded son’ in chapter 22 ‘The Remittance Man’ (p. 294); and indeed he has been cast-off by his family and is adrift in Australia at the beginning of his own strange yarn, never quite having grown up: ‘Some men are still lads at twenty-five; and so it was with Norris.’ (p. 290). But in fact the novel turns out to be full of ‘discarded sons’, and what is said about Norris could equally well be said of Loudon and Jim Pinkerton, and also of Norris’s fellow crew members aboard the *Currency Lass*, especially Tommy Hadden and Hemstead, and of Mac, the volatile, violent and sentimental Northern Irishman. Carthew is discarded as a result of family and financial disgrace, having already squandered a fortune, and the early death of Loudon’s father and the failure of his inheritance throw him on to his own resources in similar manner. And Pinkerton has had to fend for himself since the age of twelve: ‘Whether he had run away, or his father had turned him out, I never

fathomed.’ (p. 38). Yet Pinkerton sees Dodd and himself as ‘born to be heirs’ of the ‘magnificent continent’ of America, and ‘under bond to fulfil the American Type [. . .] the hope of the world is there. If we fail, like those old feudal monarchies, what is left?’ (p. 39). What is left indeed, for neither of them seems to have gained very much from the ‘feudal monarchies’ of paternal and familial support, despite early promises made to Dodd and Carthew. Nor is Tommy Hadden very different as ‘heir to a considerable property, which a prophetic father had placed in the hands of rigorous trustees.’<sup>11</sup> (p. 296). Within the recurrent ‘doubling’ structures of the novel, Hadden plays ‘Pinkerton’ to Carthew’s ‘Dodd’, and if Jim’s was ‘the romance of business’, then Tommy Hadden, with his creative accounting and boyishly and boundlessly ill-founded optimism, is ‘its Arabian tale’ (p. 298). And his is the moving spirit behind the adventure of the rotten old schooner *Currency Lass* (formerly the *Dream*) and their fateful meeting with the *Flying Scud*.

They sail to the strains of ‘Home Sweet Home’, played on the banjo by little Hemstead, an unemployed minor handyman, fated to have his brains bashed-in by Goddedaal on the *Flying Scud*:

It appeared he [Hemstead] had no home, nor had he ever had one, nor yet any vestige of a family, except a truculent uncle, a baker in Newcastle, N.S.W. His domestic sentiment was therefore wholly in the air, and expressed an unrealised ideal. Or perhaps, of all his experiences, this of the *Currency Lass*, with its kindly, playful, and tolerant society, approached it the most nearly. (pp. 311-12)

In pursuit of the mystery that leads to his own ruin and then to his ultimate salvation (through Carthew), Loudon Dodds imagines this other crew, on a voyage not so very different from his own:

It is perhaps because I know the sequel, but I can never think upon this voyage without a profound sense of pity and mystery; of the ship (once the whim of a rich blackguard) faring with her battered fineries and upon her homely errand, across the plains of ocean, and past the gorgeous scenery of dawn and sunset; and the ship's company, so strangely assembled, so Britishly chuckle-headed, filling their days with chaff in place of conversation [. . .] the whole unconscious crew of them posting in the meanwhile towards so tragic a disaster. (p. 312)

—Commerce on the high seas and the chimera of easy trade and rootless profit is memorably symbolised here, in a ship of lost boys. Their home from home is a modern ship of fools. Nor is it any coincidence, symbolically speaking, that Loudon's search for wealth should take him to the self-same scene of the crime.<sup>12</sup>

Stevenson's description of the murders on the *Flying Scud* was felt by many contemporary reviewers to be 'quite unnecessarily brutal', permeated by 'the scent of sickening blood and disgust', 'irredeemably unpleasant' or 'diabolical' and a 'dramatic defect.'<sup>13</sup> Readers today, however, are more likely to claim it as one of his most effective pieces of writing, whose sudden and then shockingly long-drawn out horror is a wholly necessary counterpart to the comedic ambitions of those discarded sons and their children's crusade. Without this weighted and darker conclusion to the book (the murder scenes are only revealed in the very last chapter, after which

the narrative seems to come to an abrupt conclusion) the whole novel would be no more than an adventure yarn of commercial ambition and youthful error. Even so, the lighter spirit of the novel still somehow survives its darkest closing pages in a way that is closer to postmodern black comedy than it is to the more soberly grounded fictions of Joseph Conrad, Stevenson's contemporary writer of yarns.

Nevertheless, after such a conclusion (and with the benefit of hindsight) the reader might be forgiven for thinking that there is something more than a little chilling about the urbane complacency with which Dodd introduces his tale in the Prologue. Here is a comfortable and portly man, still dabbling with sculpture (which is what he was doing when his tale began as a young art-student in Paris) reflecting on how his plans to blackmail Carthew broke down:

‘Why, what was wrong, then? Couldn’t you get hands on him?’

‘It took time, but I had him cornered at last; and then—’

‘What then?’

‘The speculation turned bottom up. I became the man’s bosom friend.’

‘The deuce you did!’

‘He couldn’t have been particular, you mean?’ asked Dodd, pleasantly. ‘Well, no; he’s a man of rather large sympathies.’ (p. 11)

The moral and physical rootlessness of these discarded sons, clinging together for mutual support, is entirely in keeping with the universe of *The Wrecker*, and this brings us to the final section and a more philosophical note.

**(3) ‘... the Blind Man’s Buff that we call life’ (p. 34)**

I would argue that *The Wrecker* (1891-2) is marked by the same proto-existential vision of a random universe that can be seen in ‘Pulvis et Umbra’ (1888); *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889) and most especially in *The Ebb-Tide*, which was published in 1893. Indeed, the same insight appeared as early as the short story ‘The Merry Men’ (1881), which tells about another wrecker who is ultimately overcome by his vision of life as a ‘charnel-ocean [. . .] out here in the roaring blackness, on the edge of a cliff [. . .].’<sup>14</sup> If the spirit of *The Wrecker* is lighter-hearted than these texts, it still depicts an utterly contingent universe, in which the vagaries of the stock market and indeed the rise and fall of Fortune’s wheel itself are specifically linked to the sign of the dollar.

*The Wrecker* is a comedy of reversals, of getting and spending and losing and getting again, of inheritances seemingly guaranteed only to be lost and then—absurdly—restored. Loudon’s father dies bankrupt, only for Loudon—at a later stage—to benefit from his maternal grandfather’s legacy. Carthew is virtually disinherited by his father, only to come into the family fortune (again on the death of the patriarch) at the very moment when his own attempts to fill his coffers have ended in the most ghastly sequence of murders. The mixed record of Jim Pinkerton’s commercial career is a hilarious roller-coaster of ups and downs, of ingenious schemes and outright scams. The very plot of the novel itself operates by way of a similarly fluid conglomeration of coincidences, changing ambitions and confusions of identity, just as its physical settings flit from Paris to Muskegon, from San Francisco to Sydney, from Edinburgh to the Marquesas. It is as if the model stock-market and the free-floating and unstable principles of the Muskegon Commercial College have become a reflection of, or even a template for, the universe at large—the most fitting of all theatres for these rootless boys, cut off

from, or at odds with the symbols of stability, continuity and authority (sometimes capricious) as represented by their various fathers.

To conclude: the final vision of *The Wrecker* (and the title *is* significant) is to see life as a game of blind man's buff, as a matter of amoral existential play. And business, and art, and the business *of* art, and in the last analysis capitalism itself, are only further reflections of that black comedy. Again and again in this sprawling novel Stevenson gives us little vignettes of this insight, none more telling, perhaps, than the search for opium, which the partners assume must be hidden in the hold of the shipwrecked *Flying Scud*. The symbolic force of this passage is all the greater when we remember that Loudon Dodd had once experienced near starvation in the streets of Paris. *The Flying Scud*, we recall, was carrying a cargo of rice:

It was our task to disembowel and explore six thousand individual mats, and incidentally to destroy a hundred and fifty tons of valuable food. Nor were the circumstances of the day's business less strange than its essential nature. Each man of us, armed with a great knife, attacked the pile from his own quarter, slashed into the nearest mat, burrowed in it with his hands, and shed forth the rice upon the deck, where it heaped up, overflowed, and was trodden down, poured at last into the scuppers, and occasionally spouted from the vents. About the wreck, thus transformed into an overflowing granary, the sea-fowl swarmed in myriads and with surprising insolence. The sight of so much food confounded them; they deafened us with their shrill tongues, swooped in our midst, dashed in our faces, and snatched the grain from between our fingers. The men—their hands bleeding from these assaults—turned savagely on the offensive, drove their knives into the birds,

drew them out crimsoned, and turned again to dig among the rice, unmindful of the gawking creatures that struggled and died among their feet. We made a singular picture: the hovering and diving birds; the bodies of the dead discolouring the rice with blood; the scuppers vomiting breadstuff; the men, frenzied by the gold hunt, toiling, slaying, and shouting aloud: over all, the lofty intricacy of rigging and the radiant heaven of the Pacific. Every man there toiled in the immediate hope of fifty dollars; and I, of fifty thousand. Small wonder if we waded callously in blood and food. (pp. 204-5)

This is both the literal and the symbolic summation of the whole novel, despite the charm of its lost-boy protagonists, and a narrative that is frequently feckless, solemn and hilarious by turns. In an epiphany of slaughter, greed, blood, money and food, the point could not be more powerfully or vividly made.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Henry James, 25? May 1892, *Selected Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Ernest Mehew (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 493.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Wrecker*, in *Tales of the South Seas: Island Landfalls; The Ebb-Tide; The Wrecker* (Edinburgh: Canongate Classics, 1996), ed. and introduced by Jenni Calder, p. 34; henceforth cited in text.

<sup>3</sup> J. C. Furnas, *Voyage to Windward. The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952), p. 358.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to Sidney Colvin, 9 or 10 November 1891, *Selected Letters*, p. 475.

<sup>5</sup> Letter to Bob Stevenson, 30 September 1883, *Selected Letters*, p. 234.

<sup>6</sup> Edwin M. Eigner, *Robert Louis Stevenson and Romantic Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 98-110. Eigner sees the doubling of Dodd and Carthew as two parallel but quite separate tales: one of 'manners' and one of 'violence'. I argue here for their moral and structural inseparability.



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<sup>7</sup> The Prologue has one of the characters remark that writing sensational fiction is 'as much of a trade as underwriting, and a dashed sight more honest.' (p. 10). William Gray has written well on the play between 'art' and 'real life' in this novel: 'Stevenson's "Auld Alliance": France, Art Theory and the Breath of Money in *The Wrecker*', *Scottish Studies Review*, III, 2, (Autumn 2002), 54-65.

<sup>8</sup> Gordon Hirsch has traced some of the historical contexts of the novel in 'The commercial world of *The Wrecker*', *Journal of Stevenson Studies*, II, 2005, 70-97.

<sup>9</sup> Anonymous review: '*The Naulahka* and *The Wrecker*', *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol 70, 420, October 1892, 548.

<sup>10</sup> London reviewers were perhaps predictably quick to scoff at what they took to be Stevenson's exposé of American mores. In its own review of *The Wrecker*, however, the Boston-published *Atlantic Monthly* also noted 'that curious versatility or aimlessness of the American character by which one man in the course of an ordinary lifetime, goes through seven or more professional ages, being in turn broker, preacher, editor of a paper, inventor of a machine, and head of a college.' It concluded by observing that 'No aspect of our life is more diverting than this to Europeans.'

<sup>11</sup> Hadden was based upon Jack Buckland ('Tin Jack') a well-known remittance man and copra trader in Sydney. (*Selected Letters*, p. 418, n. 3.)

<sup>12</sup> If the crew of the *Currency Lass* are sailing on a ship that was once 'the whim of a rich blackguard', we might reflect—uncharitably perhaps—that this is no more than Dodd is doing when he sails into the Marquesas on Carthew's schooner to begin the tale.

<sup>13</sup> Consecutively: from *The Spectator*, 23 July 1892; from Margaret Oliphant in *Blackwood's*, October 1892, both in *Robert Louis Stevenson, The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Paul Maixner (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 396-407; from the *Atlantic Monthly*, op cit; from *The Globe*, Toronto, 23, 1892.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson, *Shorter Scottish Fiction*, introduced by Roderick Watson, (Edinburgh: Canongate Classics, 1995), p. 193.