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Stevenson in the Third Republic: Fiction and Liberalization

Robert Irvine

This essay analyzes the relation between literary fiction and its historical context in the case of two short stories by Robert Louis Stevenson, “Providence and the Guitar” (1878) and “The Treasure of Franchard” (1883). The immediate historical context in which I will situate these texts is the emergence of the third French Republic in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71 and the Paris Commune. Stevenson’s non-fiction accounts of his experiences in 1870s France in *An Inland Voyage* (1878) and *Travels with a Donkey* (1879) will provide a vital link between history and fiction, but my purpose is not to read any of these texts for their biographical content. Rather, I aim to trace the political effects that accompany Stevenson’s increasingly confident subordination of his historical materials to the demands of aesthetic form. We can understand Stevenson’s choice of the short story, rather than the historical novel in the mode of Sir Walter Scott, Honoré de Balzac, or Leo Tolstoy, in the light of Regenia Gagnier’s suggestion that “the rise of, and high demand for, the modern short story in the 1880s had something to do with the failure of the organic, panoramic view of the ‘realist’ novel to incorporate a world disintegrating into class and gender perspectives” (*Subjectivities* 124). For mutually incomprehensible class perspectives are exactly what we will find in “The Treasure of Franchard,” in which the professional gentleman and the vagrant boy are reconciled, not at the level of consciousness, by one learning at last to appreciate the values adhered to by the other (as typically happens in the historical novel), but at the level of agency, by the actions of one providing the material salvation of the other through the compact mechanism of the plot.

The politics at stake in Stevenson's formal strategies are liberal politics, and this essay will try to connect two stories that can be told about the category "liberal" in the second half of the nineteenth century. On the one hand, literary critics commonly identify a specifically liberal type of subjectivity established as a norm in a variety of written genres, including the novel, autobiography, and art criticism. In such genres, the liberal subject valorizes its own mental life, and reflects critically on that life, in ways that are conducive both to the cultivation of its own many-sided personality and openness to experience, and to a corresponding critical detachment or distance from the particular society in which it finds itself. This self-conception can, of course, be understood as a mystification of "bourgeois individualism" (Gagnier, *Subjectivities* 169) and thus as a naturalization of the economic individualism of nineteenth-century capitalism. However, recent critics have also reasserted the socially critical potential of the liberal subject by tracing its continuation in the aesthetic doctrines of the last three decades of the century. In *The Vulgarization of Art: The Victorians and Aesthetic Democracy* (1996), Linda Dowling argued that we were wrong to see the "Aesthetic Movement" of Matthew Arnold, Walter Pater, John Ruskin, William Morris, and Oscar Wilde as a "flight from politics" (1), incorporating as it does the essentially liberal ideals of disinterestedness and judging for oneself; Regenia Gagnier had already distinguished the "liberatory aesthetics" of the last three from the anti-politics of "Decadence" (Gagnier, "Critique" 270, 271). Two more recent works by Amanda Anderson and David Wayne Thomas have further explored the continuities between Victorian liberalism and aestheticism. Both do so by reassessing mid-century liberalism as a regulatory ideal of selfhood rather than an ideology—an aspiration to "detachment" (Anderson) or "many-sidedness" (Thomas) that remains implicit not only in the writing of Pater and Wilde but also in any critical thinking whatever, even that which in our own time attempts, from a

Foucauldian or Marxist perspective, to demystify liberal values as the effects of power (Anderson 23–33; Thomas 14–25).

On the other hand, social historians tell a different story about the “liberal” in the same period. Gareth Stedman Jones and Margot Finn, most notably, chronicle “liberalization” not a subjective stance, but a social process. “Liberalization” names the gradual incorporation within the political nation, after the final collapse of the Chartist movement in 1848, of a working class whose only effective agency had previously lain in revolutionary violence, either threatened or realized. This incorporation is most obvious in the extension of the franchise for the legislature and other government initiatives—in education, for example—but a pre-condition for these initiatives was the co-option of working-class agency itself by constitutional liberal politics. The historians tend to agree that the important changes in class relations that enabled this incorporation “primarily concerned not the attitude of the subaltern classes, but that of the ruling classes” toward them (Biagini 9). This change consisted in the recognition of the working man as a subject with at least the potential for political rationality. If that rationality were to any degree lacking in the present generation, it would have to be inculcated through compulsory education in the next.

The utility of this socio-historical perspective for the literary critic lies in its reminder that the liberal subject’s relationship to other types of subjectivity did not have to be one of simple denial but could be a dynamic one of recognition and incorporation. In *Subjectivities* (1991), Gagnier brilliantly denaturalizes the liberal subject by identifying it as one social possibility among others, but while she attends in detail to these others, their relationship to the liberal subject remains one of mutual antagonism. More often, working-class alternatives to liberal subjectivity appear in literary-historical accounts only as the vestigial threat of revolution and thus the occasion for the formulation of liberal priorities. Dowling begins her book with Matthew Arnold watching his neighbour’s windows being smashed by a working-

class crowd during the Hyde Park riots of July 1866 (1); Arnold goes on to write *Culture and Anarchy*, and Dowling goes on to argue for the origins of his aesthetic liberalism in aristocratic culture rather than in any attempt to address or accommodate the energies of the rioters. In *Cultivating Victorians*, Thomas notes how “high romantic conceptions of original agency” (xiii)—unreflective, passionate, committed—while emerging from middle-class resistance to aristocratic rule at the beginning of the century, “had come to signify lower-class contention with middle-class hegemony” by the 1840s (xiv). But this specifically working-class subjectivity reappears in Thomas’s book only in the context of the Tichborne claimant, where it usefully forces the articulation of “the normative force and the integrity of a principled, as opposed to an emotional, foundation for conduct” (100) that is the focus of Thomas’s interest. The Tichborne case can also be read, however, as an episode in the process whereby ruling-class writers and politicians recognized their labouring brethren as potential bearers of political agency, producing the imperative voiced at the time of the Second Reform Bill in Liberal MP Robert Lowe’s often-cited words, “We must now educate our new masters” (qtd. in Thomas 101). It is this more productive relationship between the liberal subject and its others that will inform my reading of Stevenson’s French fictions.

Robert Louis Stevenson is a particularly interesting writer to examine in this context because, while fully participating in aestheticism’s commitment to artistic form and freedom as well as in its revival of non-realist genres such as romance, fable, and allegory, he is deeply skeptical about the liberal politics with which Gagnier, Dowling, Thomas, and others have aligned it. In “The Treasure of Franchard,” we find something like a satire on the liberal educational project, endorsing as it does a resistance to liberal assumptions that parallels the “ethic of immediate moral conviction” that Thomas finds among the supporters of the Tichborne claimant (101). But I want to place this story in the context of Stevenson’s preceding textual representations of France in order to demonstrate that his development of

his French material, from non-fictional travelogue through increasingly sophisticated fictional forms, itself acts out a process of “liberalization,” as the figure of the identified revolutionary is transformed, in the passage from one text to the next, into something more amenable to the aesthetic norms (if not the political ideals) of liberal culture. This revolutionary is a Communard, not a Chartist, and the state to which he must be reconciled is the Third Republic, not the United Kingdom after the second Reform Acts. Nevertheless, I suggest that these texts use contemporary France to explore the relationship between liberal and aesthetic values that critics have found at the centre of late nineteenth-century British literary culture.

An Inland Voyage and “Providence and the Guitar”

When Stevenson first passed through Paris as an adult, on his way south in November 1873, the city was still under martial law following the suppression of the Commune in May 1871. Many of the forty thousand who had been arrested as suspected Communards were still in prison awaiting trial and possible execution or deportation to France’s tropical possessions; the trials continued until 1875, and only in 1880 was a general amnesty granted to all ex-Communards. At least twenty thousand Parisians had been killed when the army of the new French Republic stormed the barricades of the insurgent city during *la semaine sanglante* (“bloody week”) of 21 to 28 May 1871. Stevenson arrived in a Paris from whose electoral registers from three years earlier some ninety thousand working men had vanished (Wilson 1). In the six years that followed that first adult visit, Stevenson made frequent and often lengthy visits to a nation whose head of state was President Marshal Patrice de Mac-Mahon, a reactionary monarchist, who regarded the republic as a provisional arrangement until a new king could be found. Stevenson’s letters confirm his awareness of the political turbulence that marked the slow consolidation of the Third Republic. In his first from Paris, on 6 November

1873, Stevenson mentions Mac-Mahon's address to the National Assembly on the previous day, an address that requested and won the extension of his presidential powers for another seven years, to allow the attempt to restore the monarchy to continue (*Letters* 1: 257). Four years later, in 1877, Stevenson gives an extended description of the campaign for the election of 15 October, an election that was intended by the government to break what had become a solid Republican majority in the National Assembly. This situation produced the paradoxical scene described by Stevenson in a letter to his father on 10 October.

The elections are coming on, and Paris is full of the strangest manifestoes from this or the other candidate. Some—mostly the Republicans—simply state their name, and that they have been one of the majority turned out by the Marshal.

The others, the so-called Conservatives—have a big poster of statements here and there, backwards and forwards, some of them about personal qualifications, some of them about the Marshal's policy. It is altogether a curious spectacle for an Englishman; and most curious of all, the troops are pouring in hour by hour, drums beating, and the tricolor at a bayonet end, to protect the freedom of elections. Is it not a strange land and a strange state of society?

Above all, these troops being marched in with the flag of the Republic, to intimidate Republicans, seems to me a curious sign of the time, and you will surely be surprised to hear that up to the present day (or at least five days ago, when I heard it repeated) the Marseillaise and "Vive la République" are supposed by the peasantry to be songs proscribed in Republican France. (*Letters* 2: 223)

The intimidation did not work: the Republican majority in the National Assembly held up, finally ending monarchist dreams of restoration. Mac-Mahon held on until 1879 before resigning, clearing the way for the official recognition, later that year, of *La Marseillaise* as

the national anthem and, in 1880, the amnesty and the official adoption of the tricolour as the national flag. What Ambrosini and Dury call Stevenson's "immersion in French life in the period 1874 to 1878" (2) coincided with this period of conservative domination and constitutional uncertainty: not *la belle époque* of the end of the century but *l'ordre moral* of Mac-Mahon.

As Laurence Davies has recently noted, Stevenson finds the constitutional controversy still under way the year after the election in the mountain village of Le Monastier-sur-Gazeille, the starting point of his *Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes* (78). Le Monastier is a tiny place divided between "Legitimists, Orleanists, Imperialists, and Republicans" who "all hate, loathe, decry, and calumniate each other" in a microcosm of the national situation (Stevenson, *Inland Voyage* 145). The goal of Stevenson's journey is the heartland of an earlier conflict, the Protestant Camisard revolt of the early eighteenth century. Suppressed with enormous violence by the government as it was, the earlier civil war is "resonant" with the memory of the Paris Commune (Davies 79). But it is equally striking that *Travels with a Donkey* does not develop this resonance into a clear note of comparison. Stevenson insists instead on the comparison of the Camisards with the Scottish Covenanters of the seventeenth century in terms of the extent to which the older conflict is at once remembered and transcended. The village of Florac, he learns, remains "part Protestant, part Catholic; and the difference in religion is usually doubled by a difference in politics." Yet in explicit contrast to Le Monastier, "the population lived together on very quiet terms." The history of the Cevennes thus presents the 1870s with a reassuring example of the ameliorating effect of the passage of time: "the dust being a little laid with several centuries, we can see both sides adorned with human virtues and fighting with a show of right" (234). It should not be surprising that this sounds like the attitude of a historical novelist in the mode of Scott; Scott's Covenanter novel *Old Mortality* (1816) set the precedent for several French historical

novels that had already rehabilitated the Camisards in just these terms.¹ As a result, Stevenson's trek from Le Monastier to Florac can be seen as a journey away from the actual divisions of contemporary politics and toward the consoling perspective of a particular type of fiction. My essay will show how Stevenson's other representations of France from this period follow just this path, from an explicit allusion to the aftermath of the Commune in the non-fiction *An Inland Voyage*, via the fictionalization of people Stevenson encountered in his early French journeys in "Providence and the Guitar," to the accomplished moral parable of "The Treasure of Franchard."

An Inland Voyage was Stevenson's first book, published in 1878, and describes a canoe journey along the canals of Northern France in 1876. In one episode, Stevenson and his companion stay at an inn at Origny Sainte-Benoîte, where their fellow guests include a peddler, "a quiet, subdued person, blond and lymphatic and sad" (61). We also meet the landlady's husband, a factory worker by day, who, in contrast, is something of a loudmouth and whose catchphrase is "I am a proletarian, you see" (63). His bluster contrasts starkly with the reticence of the bagman. That evening, the latter can be prompted to say nothing more controversial than "'I am afraid there is less liberty of opinion in France than you may imagine.' And with that he dropped his eyes, and seemed to consider the subject at an end" (65). His air, Stevenson decides, is that of a martyr, and their conversation the following morning is at cross-purposes because Stevenson assumes that he is talking to a fellow Protestant. But he is not:

As for our friend's martyrdom, he was a Communist, or perhaps only a Communard, which is a very different thing; and had lost one or more situations in consequence. I think he had also been rejected in marriage; but perhaps he had a sentimental way of considering business which deceived me.

He was a mild, gentle creature, anyway; and I hope he has got a better situation, and married a more suitable wife since then. (66)

Davies picks up on Stevenson's explanation for the misunderstanding ("It seems possible for two Scotsmen and a Frenchman to discuss during a long half-hour, and each nationality have a different idea in view throughout" [65]) to make a point about the writer's sense of his national identity here. But by foregrounding the reason for his misinterpreting the bagman, Stevenson neatly sidelines what the bagman actually said. Just as at Florac in *Travels with a Donkey*, the point of the episode becomes the differing national mentalities of France and Scotland—"Nothing could be more characteristic of the two countries. Politics are the religion of France" (65)—rather than the *particular* politics of France that it might otherwise illuminate. In *Powers of Distance*, Amanda Anderson takes "cosmopolitanism" as her paradigm of liberal "detachment" and notes that mid-century Arnold and *fin-de-siècle* Wilde share "the tendency to make interracial or international expansiveness, rather than interclass understanding, the site of ethical development" (151). In the present case, this liberal "tendency" has become a tactic on the part of a narrator: Stevenson's confident comparison of nationalities serves to efface a rival politics of class. When the text does turn, as an afterthought ("As for our friend's martyrdom ..."), to the content of their discussion, the bagman's politics are imprecisely remembered ("a Communist, or perhaps only a Communard") and then assimilated to a merely personal disappointment in marriage.

The liberal subject's suppression of the political in this scene, the effort the text makes to locate its meaning elsewhere, invites the reader to reconstruct what is actually going on. Davies is clearly right to identify the bagman of Origny Sainte-Benoîte as "a *communard* who has suffered for his affiliations" (77). His reticence, his sadness, are not explained by communism: the landlady's husband is a communist, and he boasts about it. The bagman only makes sense as a survivor of the Commune, keeping his head down back in the

provinces, in a job that keeps him moving from place to place, for fear of arrest, trial, and execution or deportation. If his arrest was actually unlikely in 1876, we should remember that this was still a full four years before the general amnesty; we should also keep in mind the continuing paranoia mentioned in Stevenson's letter the following year, the peasantry's belief "that the Marseillaise and 'Vive la République' are ... songs proscribed in Republican France." The bagman is one of the working men who vanished from the electoral register of Paris in 1871.

"Providence and the Guitar" was published in the same year as *An Inland Voyage*, and its hero, Léon Berthelini, is a version of another acquaintance described in that book, M. de Vauversin. De Vauversin is a Parisian actor turned wandering minstrel who accompanies his wife's singing on the guitar. He is also a philosopher of art as a way of life. As an itinerant performer, he often has trouble with the authorities:

The Maire, a man worth a million of money, sat in the front seat, repeatedly applauding Mlle. Ferrario, and yet gave no more than three *sous* the whole evening. Local authorities look with such an evil eye upon the strolling artist. ... Once, M. de Vauversin visited a commissary of police for permission to sing. The commissary, who was smoking at his ease, politely doffed his hat upon the singer's entrance. "Mr. Commissary," he began, "I am an artist." And on went the commissary's hat again. No courtesy for the companions of Apollo! "They are as degraded as that," said M. de Vauversin, with a sweep of his cigarette. (107)

Léon and his wife perform in the same way as de Vauversin and Mlle. Ferrario, with a tombola to conclude the show. The incident of the Commissary's hat is repeated in the later story, and the Berthelinis get the same scant remuneration from the *maire* (although in the fiction, the mayor's lack of musical appreciation is literalized as deafness). And as in *An*

Inland Voyage, the travelling musician offers himself as the paradigm of the artistic vocation as such, with both its rewards and necessary sacrifices. “Art is art,” says Léon; “It is not water-colour sketches, nor practising on a piano. It is a life to be lived” (“Providence and the Guitar” 294).

What Stevenson adds in “Providence and the Guitar” is a specific *political* inflection to this encounter between village authority and the wandering musicians. The story is set in the historical present, the 1870s; the defeat at Sedan (1 September 1870) is mentioned (269). The opposition of Léon to the Commissary of Police embodies the opposition between the ideals that French Republicanism inherited from the first French Revolution and the oppressive actuality of the existing Republic. When he is brushed aside by the Commissary, Léon thinks, “Oh, France, and is it for this that we made ’93!” invoking the execution of the king and queen and the seizure of power by the Jacobin party, in 1793 (271). It was from the Jacobins that the Communards inherited the principle that popular participation in politics was based on the spontaneous agency of the urban crowd, rather than on the election of representatives.² The Commissary, for his part, identifies with the Third Republic that had crushed its Jacobin rival on the barricades of May 1871:

The spirit of his dignity had entered into him. He carried his corporation as if it were something official. Whenever he insulted a common citizen, it seemed to him as if he were adroitly flattering the Government by a side wind; in default of dignity he was brutal from an overweening sense of duty. (270)

An Inland Voyage offers no hint of the political opinions of de Vauversin; nor is there any suggestion of a wider political context for the non-fictional Commissary of Police. But in “Providence and the Guitar,” Stevenson aligns the petty bullying of the village policeman with the precarious and oppressive authority of the new state, and aligns the rejection of bourgeois mores by the itinerant performer with the radical ideology of the Communard

bagman of Origny Sainte-Benoîte. Where the bagman endures itinerancy out of economic (and perhaps political) necessity, “Providence and the Guitar” elevates it into an aesthetic choice, a condition of art as “a life to be lived.”

This transference of a political identity from the peddler to the musician recalls Thomas’s claim for aestheticism, that “artists, writers, and critics subsequently claimed for art the very idea of self-determining agency that had been at the core of ... liberal many-sidedness” (x). This insight should prompt us to think again about what “art” might mean in a text like this. It is easy to read in Léon’s doctrine of art as a way of life an articulation of Stevenson’s own project in going to France in the first place, a project usually understood as the pursuit of an aesthetic vocation without any political inflection: “Only by physically going to France ... could he assimilate the atmosphere of art and become himself an artist” (Ambrosini and Dury 2). Later in his life, in the Paris chapters of *The Wrecker* (1892), Stevenson would indeed represent France as simply the enabling setting for the artist’s freedom, a space emptied of politics. In “Providence and the Guitar,” however, the aesthetic *ethos* is understood as the mode in which a revolutionary consciousness can survive in a period of social and political reaction. In Thomas’s terms, the artist claims for art the “self-determining agency” that had previously been a political aspiration. Now, Léon’s is not the liberal *consciousness* that Thomas is discussing, but quite the opposite: in place of “liberal many-sidedness” one would need to substitute something like “Jacobin collective action” in the sentence quoted at the start of this paragraph before it could describe the shift from *An Inland Voyage* to “Providence and the Guitar.” Stevenson thus gives Léon’s aestheticism a more radical lineage than the one proposed in *Cultivating Victorians*. Mac-Mahon’s regime can hardly be counted a “liberal” one, and Léon’s survival hardly amounts to his reconciliation to that regime. However, when we place *An Inland Voyage* and “Providence and the Guitar” side by side, an aesthetic version of the liberalizing *process* begins to emerge,

in which a potentially revolutionary agency is accommodated within a new social order by being displaced into a particular version of “art.” Where the revolutionary affiliation of the bagman was evaded by the narrator of the non-fictional text, Léon’s identical affiliation can be recognized and celebrated, at once assimilated to his status as artist and contained within the aesthetic autonomy of a work of fiction.

“The Treasure of Franchard”

In “The Treasure of Franchard,” Stevenson once more stages an encounter between an itinerant performer and a complacent village loyalist of the Third Republic. Set in Grez-sur-Loing, south of Paris, “The Treasure of Franchard” depicts two very different exiles from the city. One is Dr Desprez, who has already lost a fortune in the capital on gambling and mistresses and now lives quietly in this rural backwater at the insistence of his wife, Anastasie. Here, he celebrates his escape from the corrupting clutch of the metropolis, hymns his healthy country life, and devotes his time to an unfinishable work of medical science. The other exile is a boy, Jean-Marie, a tumbler and former thief, who is left behind when his mountebank master dies in Grez, and whom Desprez then adopts as an educational experiment. One of the principles in which the doctor drills his charge is that Paris is a scene of moral corruption. Should Desprez ever decide to return, he tells Jean-Marie, the boy must stop him: “save me from that part of myself which I disown. If you see me falter, do not hesitate; if necessary, wreck the train!” (197). In the event, the boy acts on this command. When Desprez discovers the buried treasure of the ruined monastery at nearby Franchard, he immediately begins to plan his triumphant return to the capital. But Jean-Marie, true to his teacher’s instruction, steals and hides the treasure before it can be sold. He reveals it again only after the doctor and his wife are ruined by the simultaneous collapse of their ramshackle

house and of the investments that afford them their modest income. Now that it can no longer ruin him morally, now that he can only use it to restore his quiet life in the country, the treasure can be safely returned to Desprez.

“The Treasure of Franchard” is a polished moral parable, in which the sensually indulgent and morally complacent middle-aged man is saved from himself by the impulsive actions of the unselfconscious boy. Like “Providence and the Guitar,” it is also a story about the Third Republic. But in 1883 Mac-Mahon was long departed from office, the Republicans were in government, and the French state was one we can now recognize as “liberal.” Mass education was at the heart of Republican plans for national regeneration. In a speech rallying the constitutional left after the horrors of 1870 to 1871, its leader, Léon Gambetta, had blamed the defeat by Prussia on “the inferiority of our national education” and claimed that the priority now was “to flood the country with education” (qtd. in Bury 26). Further, the Catholic Church, which operated many of the existing schools, had become closely identified with the monarchical cause, so the new education system would be secular (Randell 34). The education that Desprez plans to inflict on Jean-Marie shares these priorities. The little schooling that the boy has enjoyed has been from a priest: Desprez offers to teach him lessons “which will be infinitely more to the purpose for a lad of your stamp than those of all the priests in Europe” (186). More specifically, for Stevenson’s readers in 1883, this concern with the secular education of French children would have immediately brought to mind the recently passed *lois Ferry*, among the more radical of the measures undertaken by the Republican governments of the 1880s. The first of these laws, passed in June 1881, made attendance at all public primary schools free of charge; the second, passed in March 1882, made primary education mandatory and state schools secular. Primary education was to be both massively expanded and taken out of the hands of the French Catholic church in order to raise the new generation as loyal and active citizens of the Republic.³ This legislation thus

“ensured the permanent marriage of republicanism and anti-clericalism” (Pilbeam 16).

Desprez’s plans for Jean-Marie are not only a personal peccadillo but also replicate in miniature the government’s measures to consolidate the new political order. This explains why he sees Jean-Marie’s education in ultimately *national* terms: “education, philosophers are agreed, is the most philosophical of duties. What can be more heavenly to poor mankind than to have one’s hobby grow into a duty to the State?” (192).

Seen in this context, Desprez is an instance of a very particular type, specific to his nation and his historical moment. If Desprez imagines his “hobby” pre-existing and “growing into” his duty to the state, it is because democrats like himself had worked through national organizations such as the *Ligue de l’enseignement* to establish secular primary education, in a series of local initiatives, for two decades before Minister of Public Instruction Jules Ferry made it compulsory. The *lois Ferry* marked the ultimate triumph of, in the words of Katherine Auspitz, “the commitment of generations of French citizens, stalwarts of the Centre and of the Left, to free, compulsory, secular education,” a “radical bourgeoisie” preparing the ground for democracy in their provincial towns and cities (2). Desprez is best understood as an example of this specific political personality, the provincial secular-democratic bourgeois. He is also marked as one of this type by his “militant rationalism” (Auspitz 5). Commenting to Jean-Marie that in the Middle Ages, he (Desprez) would have been either a hermit or a court jester, he adds: “Until the sun of the Positive arose, the wise man had to make his choice between these two” (201). The capitalized term implies that Desprez borrows his equation of rationalism with social progress directly from Auguste Comte, and the influence of Comte on republican thinking in this period was great enough (despite Comte’s own anti-democratic stance) that one historian has called Ferry, Gambetta, and their associates “the Positivist generation” (Eros 274).

Yet although Desprez's plans for Jean-Marie figure the Third Republic's great liberalizing project of mass education and he claims for himself the detachment demanded by science, he is a very poor example the sort of liberal self-government described by Anderson and Thomas. If we define liberal "detachment" in Anderson's terms as "a set of willed practices that become habitual" (7, 20), then Stevenson's joke is that the will behind Desprez's practices is never, in fact, his own. His wife has insisted on a simple life in the country; the boy ensures they stay there. If Desprez sees himself as engaging in what Thomas calls "a liberal heroics of self-management" (33), then this amounts only to his appropriation to himself as "heroism" of a course of action that is forced on him by others. His "detachment" consists not in the liberal endeavour to stand aside from his own interests in assessing a moral situation but in a readiness to claim any situation that arises (short of the apocalypse that visits his house and finances) as in his moral interest. "This has been, on the whole, a most amusing episode," he concludes, after the treasure has been stolen: "We are not a penny the worse—nay, we are immensely gainers. Our philosophy has been exercised"; and, he continues, they still have the luxury goods he has bought in anticipation of a new fortune (222). But the same post-hoc reconciliation to events allows Desprez to represent a return to the luxury of his old life in Paris as his moral duty as a citizen, in the shape of election to the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of the Third Republic:

Now that I am once more in possession of a modest competence ... it becomes my superior duty to proceed to Paris. My scientific training, my undoubted command of language, mark me out for the service of my country. Modesty in such a case would be a snare. (207)

There is something admirable in the robustness that this attitude lends his self-regard in the face of crisis, but in the face of temptation, Desprez's liberal consciousness is revealed to be grounded in self-delusion, not self-management. As the narrator comments of his "wreck the

train” speech, “Doubtless the doctor enjoyed these little scenes, as a variation in his part; they represented the Byronic element in the somewhat artificial poetry of his existence”; but even Jean-Marie is “dimly aware of their theatricality” (197). “It is not good for men of my years to be violently dissevered from their habits,” the doctor tells the boy (198), but this is because his habits have been insufficient to turn the restraint imposed by rustication into a permanent moral personality.

To find a permanent moral personality, we must turn instead to Jean-Marie. From the start, Jean-Marie represents unpromising raw material for an education in liberal selfhood. He first strikes Desprez as an uncanny return of something from the past:

It was not merely that these eyes were large, or steady, or the softest ruddy brown. There was a look in them, besides, which thrilled the doctor, and made him half uneasy. He was sure he had seen such a look before, and yet he could not remember how or where. It was as if this boy, who was quite a stranger to him, had the eyes of an old friend or an old enemy. (172)

In one respect the last line quoted is proleptic: Jean-Marie will prove both an enemy to Desprez (he will not be amenable to his educational program, and he will steal the treasure) and a friend (he will save Desprez from himself and from financial ruin). But at the time, Desprez’s impression is of an *old* enemy, and an *old* friend. The boy is not a blank slate on which the rights and duties of modern citizenship can be inscribed but already the carrier of an ancient inheritance, perhaps a racial one: Desprez, quickly examining the boy’s skull “from an ethnological point of view,” categorizes it as “Celtic” (174). Whatever its origins, the natural tendency of Jean-Marie’s subjectivity is toward the opposite of detachment, whether that is understood as a capacity for self-reflection or as a scientific objectification of nature:

When he was by himself, his pleasures were almost vegetable. He would slip into the woods towards Achères, and sit in the mouth of a cave among grey birches. His soul stared straight out of his eyes; he did not move or think; sunlight, thin shadows moving in the wind, the edge of firs against the sky, occupied and bound his faculties. He was pure unity, a spirit wholly abstracted. A single mood filled him, to which all the objects of sense contributed, as the colours of the spectrum merge and disappear in white light. (198–99)

This capacity for a blissful emptying-out of the self into the world may be that which, in Desprez's eyes, makes Jean-Marie "old" or "Celtic"; but the scene at the inn in which the doctor makes this diagnosis also gives us the landlady's opinion that "they are all the same, these mountebanks, tumblers, artists, and what not. They have no interior" (172). Lacking an interior, Jean-Marie is incapable of the skepticism and self-scrutiny required of the liberal subject:

Certainly Jean-Marie adopted some of his master's opinions, but I have yet to learn that he ever surrendered one of his own. Convictions existed in him by divine right; they were virgin, unwrought, the brute metal of decision. He could add others indeed, but he could not put away; ... and his spiritual pleasures had nothing to do with turning them over or justifying them in words. (198)

As in "Providence and the Guitar," an itinerant performer provides the story's point of resistance to the established social order, but this resistance now takes the form not of a consciously held ideology such as Léon Berthelini's but of a small boy's recalcitrance in the face of his teacher's aspirations for him, which are also, we have seen, the aspirations of the Third Republic. That convictions exist in Jean-Marie by "divine right" suggests the political

resistance that they represent to the republic's plans for an education in citizenship. That they consist of "the brute metal of decision" suggests the extent to which they provide a permanent basis for moral agency, as Desprez's habits do not—and the story, of course, confirms this.

To shed light on Jean-Marie's illiberal mode of agency, we might glance at Stevenson's 1878 essay "Child's Play." Desprez wants to understand the boy in terms of "imagination," exclaiming at one point, "Thank God you have imagination!" (187), and at another, "You have no imagination" (202). But as "Child's Play" warns us, this term can be misleading when applied to the child:

People struck with these spectacles [of active play] cry aloud about the power of imagination in the young. Indeed there may be two words to that. It is, in some ways, but a pedestrian fancy that the child exhibits. It is the grown people who make the nursery stories; all the children do, is jealously preserve the text. (110)

This is borne out by Jean-Marie's actions in the story. If he performs a redemptive role in hiding the treasure, it is not because he embodies a principle of autonomous "imagination" natural to the child (such as Jim Hawkins enjoys in *Treasure Island*, for example); it is because he doggedly acts out a story that Desprez has already told him. His action consists precisely in "jealously preserving" Desprez's text: "'If necessary, wreck the train,' thought he, remembering the doctor's parable.... 'If necessary, wreck the train,' he repeated" (212). Jean-Marie saves Desprez, not by any autonomous thinking on his own part, such as would constitute him as a liberal subject, but by obediently following a simple moral precept in which he has been drilled. We have already been told that "His faith in the doctor was a stout piece of goods" and that even when Desprez was drunk, "the adopted stable-boy would not permit himself to entertain a doubt that savoured of ingratitude" (198). The jealous

preservation of the text, faith, and gratitude: Desprez's teaching has a decisive and beneficial effect only where he elicits the same response as the priests he so despises.

Jean-Marie's political significance thus lies not in loyalty to the rival, Jacobin, version of citizenship invoked by Léon Berthelini in "Providence and the Guitar" but in passive resistance to his political categorization as any kind of potential citizen. This recalcitrance is equated, in the figure of Jean-Marie, with an archaic union with nature and an instinct not of intellectual autonomy as required of the liberal subject but of obedience to the authority of the patriarch. And the quality in Jean-Marie that resists Desprez's methods returns to save Desprez. On this reading, "The Treasure of Franchard" becomes something like a political allegory of the Third Republic: that which grounds the nation, and will save it in times of crisis, is more deep-rooted and instinctual than secular education, science, citizenship, or any of the other institutions of modernity. Indeed, the survival of the modern state (figured by Desprez) in time of crisis (figured in the collapse of his house) is found to depend on precisely those ancient hierarchical impulses of personal loyalty and gratitude that the modern state, in the name of democracy, ostentatiously disowns. The republic's old enemy turns out also to be its old, and most valuable, friend.

Conclusion

"The Treasure of Franchard," then, mocks the self-misrecognitions of liberal consciousness. However, it also represents the culmination of Stevenson's development of his French material in a direction that acts out an aesthetic version of the liberalization process in its portrayal of the itinerant outsider of the Third Republic. In *An Inland Voyage*, the bagman of Origny Sainte-Benoîte seems to be an actual survivor of the Commune. Léon Berthelini, in "Providence and the Guitar," proclaims allegiance to the same political tradition as the real-

life bagman, but his outsider status is now more directly the result of his vocation as “artist” in the philistine regime of *l’ordre moral*. Finally, in “The Treasure of Franchard,” the wandering tumbler Jean-Marie has no political consciousness at all. In him, the outcast-figure exercises a spectacular and decisive agency; but where the liberalization process of nineteenth-century Britain, and the educational initiatives of the Third Republic, granted working men a *political* agency within a democratizing state, Stevenson’s story grants Jean-Marie an *aesthetic* agency in achieving the formal goals of a romance plot within a carefully crafted work of art. These texts progressively de-politicize the figure of the vagabond expellee of the new social order, while progressively assimilating them to an ideal of “art” instead. But the de-politicization of this figure ultimately serves a political end: in “The Treasure of Franchard,” a critique of the way in which the liberal state imagines its own operations of political incorporation and enfranchisement. The bourgeois liberal is rescued by the outcast, but *not* because the latter has been trained in liberal self-consciousness and recognized as an equal under the title of “citizen.” Jean-Marie is thus the carrier of a negative political meaning, representing not any positive alternative that the Third Republic rejected when it crushed the Commune but what it hides from itself in claiming to be founded on equality and reason rather than on hierarchy and indoctrination. And *that* is a claim made by every liberal society, not only the Third Republic, explaining the relevance of these texts to Stevenson’s immediate, anglophone readership.

Stevenson’s development of his French material, then, culminates in this story’s satire on the liberalization process, even while the story is itself the product of an aesthetic version of the same process. The progressive effacement of revolutionary politics in these texts is accompanied by their increasing literary sophistication until Jean-Marie can play his central part in the subtle allegory and accomplished naturalization of romance topoi (the foundling, the buried treasure) of “The Treasure of Franchard.” Of course, there is another liberal

consciousness in this story, other than the self-deluding Desprez's: that of the narrator, whose detachment from the perspectives of both Desprez and Jean-Marie allows him to put the one into play against the other. But as with these texts' version of liberalization, this is a matter of literary form, which refuses any correspondence with the story's representation of political praxis. The case of Stevenson's French texts should warn us that the continuities identified by Dowling, Anderson, and Thomas between mid-Victorian liberalism and late-century aesthetic practice do not *necessarily* reflect a continuity of liberal political values. Stevenson's aestheticism is certainly no "flight from politics," but neither is it a liberal politics: in his work, the aesthetic resources of liberal culture are put in the service of an essentially anti-liberal political stance. "The Treasure of Franchard" certainly suggests that *only* in art can we cultivate a liberal detachment, for social practice must be built on something at once cruder and more durable.

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¹ For details, see *The Cevennes Journal* (Stevenson 151n15).

² On the opposition between Jacobin and liberal versions of French republicanism, see Lehning (7–11). It is possible that Léon Berthelini, a stage name, was chosen by Stevenson (or, indeed, has been chosen by Léon himself) to echo the name of Léon Gambetta, the leader of the Republican opposition to the Mac-Mahon regime. This would explain why Léon, born Duval, while affecting "something Spanish in his air" (267) to match his instrument, has given himself an Italian surname rather than a Spanish one. Gambetta himself was of Genoese descent.

³ The classic discussion of the imposition of French identity through education is to be found in Weber; see especially 332 and 336.