



1949

# The Influence of the Juvenile Drama on the Works of Robert Louis Stevenson

Malcolm T. Carron  
*Loyola University Chicago*

---

## Recommended Citation

Carron, Malcolm T., "The Influence of the Juvenile Drama on the Works of Robert Louis Stevenson" (1949). *Master's Theses*. Paper 743.  
[http://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_theses/743](http://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/743)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact [ecommons@luc.edu](mailto:ecommons@luc.edu).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).  
Copyright © 1949 Malcolm T. Carron

THE INFLUENCE OF THE JUVENILE DRAMA  
ON THE WORKS OF ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

BY

MALCOLM T. CARRON, S.J.

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER  
OF ARTS IN LOYOLA UNIVERSITY

FEBRUARY

1949

## VITA AUCTORIS

Malcolm T. Carron, S.J., was born in Detroit, Michigan, May 15, 1917. He received his elementary school education at Barbour Hall, Nazareth, Michigan. His high school years, 1931-1935, were spent at the University of Detroit High School. In September, 1935, he enrolled at the University of Detroit, from which he was graduated in 1939 with the Bachelor of Arts degree.

In September, 1939, he entered the Society of Jesus at Milford, Ohio. Three years later he went to West Baden College, a branch of Loyola University at West Baden Springs, Indiana. Here he enrolled as a graduate student in the Department of English.

During the school years of 1945-1948, he taught at St. Ignatius High School, Cleveland, Ohio.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE APPROACH.....	1
Chesterton's starting contention---Toy theatre in Stevenson's childhood---The toy theatre and Stevenson's childlike nature---Limits of Chesterton's appraisal---Statement of thesis problem.	
II. SKELTERY.....	10
Wilson the main source---Making the play---The stage---Lighting---Characters---Scenery---The playbook---Putting on the play---Subject-matter and spirit of toy theatre---Language---Ballads---Characteristics listed.	
III. THE STUFF OF ROMANCE.....	25
Stevenson's debt to Skeltery---Horror scenes---Combats---Pirates and adventurers---Melodramatic speech---Songs and ballads---Cottage and inn interiors---Random references to Skelt.	
IV. SHARP BRIGHT IMAGERY.....	51
Chesterton's thesis again---Explanation of influence---Sharply outlined images---Bright backgrounds---Stevenson's use of Skelt colors.	
V. THE FINAL WORD.....	63
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	65

## FOREWARD

The word "Skelt" means practically nothing to the world today. But away back in the nineteenth century, it truly stood for something; for a man named Skelt was one of the more famous of the manufacturers of those nineteenth-century imaginative masterpieces known as toy theatres. Because Skelt played such an important part in the development of the miniature stage, Robert Louis Stevenson christened the toy theatre -- and everything connected with it -- "Skeltery."

In one of his essays instinct with warm feeling for a childhood pastime, Stevenson asks: "What am I? what are life, art, letters, the world, but what my Skelt has made them?" This is the general tenor of the essay entitled "A Penny Plain Twopence Coloured," in which Stevenson describes so enthusiastically his love for the Juvenile Drama.

Stevenson's frank admission of his love for Skeltery and his readiness to acknowledge its influence call for some attempt to evaluate the toy theatre's contribution to his writings. This, therefore, is the purpose of the following pages.

In this paper, incidentally, "toy theatre", "Juvenile Drama", and "Skeltery" will be used as synonymous terms.

CHAPTER I  
THE APPROACH

Piqued by a critic who claimed a similarity in the works of Stevenson and Poe, G. K. Chesterton, in his critical analysis of Stevenson,<sup>1</sup> rises up in vigorous protest. He says Stevenson is the very opposite of Poe. Poe is dark, brooding, and melancholy, while Stevenson's style is clear and bright, his atmosphere shadowless.

Chesterton, himself a worshipper at the shrine of Skelt, then goes on to point out that the toy theatre was responsible for this light, airy, romantic spirit of Stevenson. Of his method in reaching this conclusion, Chesterton says:

I have tried to take the stock and normal of his works first, and then note that it really does date in a special sense from his childhood; and that it is not sentimental and not irrelevant to say so.<sup>2</sup>

Writing with characteristic perspicacity, Chesterton begins with a sound psychological approach. He explains the basis of a writer's imagery in these terms:

...there is at the back of every artist's mind something like a pattern or a type of architecture. The original quality in any man of imagi-

---

1 G. K. Chesterton, Robert Louis Stevenson, Dodd, Mead, and Co., New York, 1928, 25-26.  
2 Ibid., 35.

nation is imagery. It is a thing like the landscapes of his dreams; the sort of world he would wish to make or in which he would wish to wander; the strange flora and fauna of his own secret planet; the sort of thing that he likes to think about.<sup>3</sup>

And this, continues Chesterton, holds true of all the author's imagery:

This general atmosphere and pattern or structure of growth governs all his creations however varied; and because he can in this sense create a world, he is in this sense a creator.<sup>4</sup>

So the writer in creating his images, creates them instinctively according to a pattern -- "the sort of thing that he likes to think about."

Now to discover what Stevenson liked to think about is comparatively easy. He himself tells that from his childhood he loved adventure, anything that smacked of romance, especially the romance of piracy. His poor health, you might say, was a factor that contributed greatly to this. A frail, sickly child, Stevenson was unable to share in the more rugged pleasures of robust childhood. Because of this he was forced to while away the long hours of the day in a world of make-believe -- a less strenuous, but nevertheless for him a most engaging occupation.

Part of Stevenson's world of fancy and imagination was the

---

<sup>3</sup> Chesterton, 27.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 27-28.

toy theatre. From the time that he was six years old he busied himself, often in the company of his cousin Robert Stevenson, staging the plays which even in later years held so much fascination for him. <sup>5</sup>

In his essay "A Penny Plain Twopence Coloured," Stevenson recalls how he often lingered about the stationer's shop where the toy theatres were sold, just to gaze with anticipation at the window display:

In the Leith Walk window, all the year around, there stood displayed a theatre in working order, with a "forest set," a "combat," and a few "robbers carousing" in the slides; and below and about, dearer tenfold to me! the plays themselves, those budgets of romance, lay tumbled one upon another. Long and often I lingered there with empty pockets. <sup>6</sup>

Even when not actually in possession of the plays, the toy theatre attracted him and fired the young lad's imagination.

However there were times when young Stevenson had the necessary penny for a play. Then, he tells us, his problem lay in the choice:

The crux of Buridan's donkey was as nothing to the uncertainty of the boy as he handled and lingered and doated on these bundles of delight; there was a physical pleasure in the

---

<sup>5</sup> Graham Balfour, The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1923, 42.

<sup>6</sup> R. L. Stevenson, "A Penny Plain Twopence Coloured," Memories and Portraits, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1925, 115.



sight and touch of them which he would jealously prolong; and when at length the deed was done, the play selected, and the impatient shopman had brushed the rest into the gray portfolio, and the boy was forth again, a little late for dinner, the lamps springing into light in the blue winter's even, and The Miller or The Rover, or some kindred drama clutched against his side -- on what gay feet he ran, and how he laughed aloud in exultation! <sup>7</sup>

Then once back home the joy of painting the characters and props:

I cannot deny that joy attended the illumination; nor can I quite forgive that child, who, wilfully foregoing pleasure, stoops to "twopence coloured." <sup>8</sup>

Stevenson was no mere dilettante in this matter of the Juvenile Drama. For him it was almost a passion. He owned numerous plays and in later years remembered the title of each one. In the opening lines of his essay on Skeltery he recites a long litany of plays he once put on:

I have, at different times, possessed Aladdin, The Blind Boy, The Old Oak Chest, The Wood Doeman, Jack Sheppard, The Miller and His Men, Der Freischutz, The Smuggler, The Forest of Bondy, Robin Hood, The Waterman, Richard I., My Poll and My Partner Joe, The Inchcape Bell (imperfect), and Three-Fingered Jack, the Terror of Jamaica; and I have assisted others in the illumination of The Maid of the Inn and The Battle of Waterloo. <sup>9</sup>

He immediately adds that in these plays, performed on his minia-

<sup>7</sup> Stevenson, "A Penny Plain Twopence Coloured," 116.  
<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 117.  
<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 114.

ture stage, we may find the proof of his childhood happiness:

In this roll-call of stirring names you read the evidences of a happy childhood; and though not half of them are still to be procured of any living stationer, in the mind of their once happy owner all survive, kaleidoscopes of changing pictures, echoes of the past. 10

So it is evident that as a man Stevenson still loved and felt deeply the romance of his Skeltery. There are those words of his -- "What am I? what are life, art, letters, the world, but what my Skelt has made them?" 11 The sincerity of the statement rings true. Certainly, if Chesterton is right about the pattern "at the back of every artist's mind," there was room for Skelt in the architecture of Stevenson's imagination. And the romantic atmosphere of Skeltery, as well as its other traits, was bound to show itself in the writings of so faithful a devotee.

What has been said should suffice for the bald fact of Stevenson's preoccupation with the Juvenile Drama. Chesterton, of course, takes for granted the importance of the toy theatre in Stevenson's early life. So he immediately proceeds with his analysis.

The thing Chesterton notices in the works of Stevenson is

10 Ibid., 114.

11 Stevenson, "A Penny Plain Twopence Coloured," 120.

that his images are very sharply outlined. They stand out. He expresses it thus:

The first fact about the imagery of Stevenson is that all his images stand out in sharp outline; and are, as it were, all edges. It is something in him that afterwards attracted him to the abrupt and angular black and white of woodcuts. 12

Then he remarks that these images seem "as if they were cut out with cutlasses." 13

However, according to Chesterton, this sharpness of outline is but one of Stevenson's characteristics. Another extremely important feature of his images is that they are "conspicuously clear and bright." 14 Chesterton expresses it this way:

Just as all the form can best be described as clean-cut, so all the colour is conspicuously clear and bright. That is why such figures are seen so often standing against the sea. Everybody who has been at the seaside has noted how sharp and highly coloured, like painted caricatures, appear even the most ordinary figures as they pass in profile to and fro against the blue dado of the sea. There is something also of the hard light that falls full and pale upon ships and open shores; and even more it need not be said, of a certain salt and acrid clearness of the air. 15

After setting down these two traits of Stevenson's technique, Chesterton asks the question, "Whence did that spirit come; and

---

12 Chesterton, 29.

13 Ibid., 29.

14 Chesterton, 30.

15 Ibid., 30.

how did the story of it begin?"<sup>16</sup> He finds the answer in the Juvenile Drama:

If therefore we ask, "Where does the story of Stevenson really start; where does his special style or spirit begin and where do they come from; how did he get, or begin to get, the thing that made him different from the man next door?" I have no doubt about the answer. He got them from the mysterious Mr. Skelt or the Juvenile Drama, otherwise the toy theatre, which of all toys has most of the effect of magic on the mind.<sup>17</sup>

This, in brief, is Chesterton's undeveloped thesis.

Now just why the toy theatre should have so strong and so lasting an effect may be explained by Stevenson's peculiar child-like temperament, partly by the unique nature of the toy theatre.

That Stevenson remained childlike has almost become a truism. As Brander Matthews says: "The boy in Stevenson survived instead of dying when the man was born."<sup>18</sup> His childhood never ended and he could pass back into that highly imaginative world without an effort.

Partly responsible for his prolonged childhood was his magnificent facility for remembering vividly his whole life. He

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>18</sup> Brander Matthews, "A Moral from a Toy Theatre," Scribner's Magazine, LVIII (1915), 410.

himself said he was one of the few people in the world who do not forget their own lives.<sup>19</sup> In line with this R. A. Rice, a Stevenson critic, says:

The remarkable thing is not that Stevenson had these experiences, which I believe are the common experiences of imaginative children, but that Stevenson continued all his life to be thus sensitive, and especially that he kept up a sensational memory of the past.<sup>20</sup>

Further evidence that Stevenson remembered and remembered clearly may be seen in his essays and letters. For instance most of the chapter on the author's early days in Balfour's Life of Stevenson is quoted directly from Stevenson's own writings.

However, more pertinent to this study is the striking memory of details in the essay, "A Penny Plain Twopence Coloured." Stevenson proves he not only remembered, but that he could recall with love and excitement all the particulars of the Juvenile Drama. The names of plays, where and from whom he purchased them, the characters, the props, the thrill of painting the cardboard cutouts -- all were set down as clearly as if the paraphernalia of the old toy theatres was at the moment piled on the author's desk as he wrote.

---

<sup>19</sup> R. L. Stevenson, Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson, Scribner's Sons, New York, 1901, III, 107.

<sup>20</sup> R. A. Rice, Stevenson: How to Know Him, Bobbs Merrill Co., Indianapolis, 1916, 27.

It is no mere fancy, then, that led Chesterton to believe the toy theatre exerted such a powerful influence on the style of Stevenson. But Chesterton has only set the stage for a more thorough investigation. His proposition needs clarification. The limitations of his appraisal are the limitations of a personal, informal essay. He cites none of Stevenson's texts, gives only a few random illustrations, and tells us practically nothing of the inner workings of the toy theatre.

The burden of the following chapters will be to substantiate Chesterton's remarks about Stevenson's style; and to extend the scope of the influence, which Chesterton claimed for the toy theatre, by including in it the content as well as the style of Stevenson's works.

## CHAPTER II

### SKELTERY

Few people today know much about the Juvenile Drama. Even those who have heard of it do not realize that the making of a play was an elaborate process. That is why it is highly important at this point to explain the whole make-up of the toy theatre and to show what labor, inventiveness, and real artistry went into the production of these plays. This chapter, therefore, will trace the play from the original sketch of the artist to the actual staging of the play by its youthful purchaser.

In his book Penny Plain Twopence Coloured,<sup>1</sup> A. E. Wilson has said practically all there is to say about the Juvenile Drama. He gives a detailed account of its invention and development, shows how the plays were made, gives brief descriptions of the plots, and illustrations of the characters and sets of the most popular plays published.

The subject-matter of the toy theatre was usually taken from the plays currently popular in England at the time. Of the source of these dramas, Wilson has this to say:

The play to be reproduced was chosen from one

---

<sup>1</sup> A. E. Wilson, Penny Plain Twopence Coloured, George G. Harrap and Co., Ltd., London, 1932.

of the current successes at the leading theatres -- and here the publishers acted with the keen appreciation of the topical that marks the skill of the art editor of the modern illustrated press. All the big "hits" of the theatrical season, all the favourite pantomimes, were to be obtained soon after their success had been established.<sup>2</sup>

Of course the plays were all condensed versions of originals. Sometimes the condensation was the work of a hired writer, but frequently the author himself boiled down his own play for the use of the miniature stage.<sup>3</sup>

Next step in the process was to send an artist to the theatre where the play was having its run. His was the job of sketching the characters, costumes, postures and businesses, scenes, wings, drops, furniture, and all other properties.<sup>4</sup> This effort to reproduce faithfully the original play did much to guarantee a true dramatic effect in the final staging of the drama.

From these sketches a complete set of scenes, "cutouts," wings, and characters was drawn. These were transferred to steel, copper, or zinc plates from which the prints were made.

The prints were then ready for coloring. Only four colors were used -- gamboge, Prussian blue, carmine, and black. But

---

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, 39.  
<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 39.  
<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 40.



sometimes these were combined to make brown, deep purple, and green.<sup>5</sup> According to Wilson these colors possessed an unusual permanence:

The durability of the colouring is to be noticed. The hues of the old prints are as brilliant today as they were when they were first laid on over a hundred years ago.<sup>6</sup>

Yet not all the plays were colored. Some were sold plain so the purchaser himself could add the color. The plain play cost only a penny, the colored, twopence. Thus arose the inspiration for Stevenson's now famous "penny plain twopence coloured," which has become a sort of sobriquet for the toy theatre.

What a youngster purchased from the stationer's shop, the customary distributors of the toy theatres, was a stage, the playbook (text of the play), and the sheets containing the characters, scenes, and props.

The wooden stage complete with the curtain and footlights was about two feet wide and two or three feet deep. An orchestra pit filled with musicians was sometimes simulated across the front below the footlights. Backstage there were grooves in the flooring into which the cardboard characters could be fastened.

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 41.

<sup>6</sup> Wilson, 41.

An extra word about the illumination of the stage is in order here since the lighting plays an important part in tracing the Skelt influence:

Besides the brilliant illumination in front of the green glazed calico curtain, there was a single wick-ed lamp placed on the side which brought into greater prominence the beauties architectural or arboreal of the wings.<sup>7</sup>

The scenery and props, of course, varied with the play. These were printed on sheets later to be cut out and pasted on cardboard. Besides the scenes and characters of the play, the toy theatre enthusiast could buy sheets of ghosts, skeletons, grave-stones; wings of half a house, entrances and exits, demons, fairies, gnomes, false faces, processions for funerals, coronations, Roman triumphs; equestrian combats, theatrical robbers, horizons, small stretches of sea, boats, good and evil geni.<sup>8</sup>

Speaking of the realism of the scenery, Wilson says:

...a tree was not ashamed to look like a tree, not like an isosceles triangle, as is today very often the tendency. Nor were velvet curtains deemed a suitable background for the romantic drama or for depicting the magnificences and pageantry of Shakespeare.<sup>9</sup>

Extremely life-like, he continues, were the woodland scenes:

<sup>7</sup> Wilson, 74, 83, 23.

<sup>8</sup> V. Pilcher, "Children of Skelt," Theatre Arts, IX (1925), 800.

<sup>9</sup> Wilson, 80.

The woodland sets with which the Juvenile Drama abounds show that the scene-painters of old excelled particularly in the depiction of luxuriant foliage and arboreal compositions.<sup>10</sup>

Stevenson, too, though in more impassioned phrases, recalls some of the drop-scenes of Skelt:

How the roads wander, how the castle sits upon the hill, how the sun eradiates from behind the cloud, and how the congregated clouds themselves uproll, as stiff as bolsters.<sup>11</sup>

Stevenson, though struck by the natural beauty of the scenes, seems to be well aware of their cardboard quality when he says "as stiff as bolsters."

A third item that went with the stage and scenery was the playbook, a very essential part of the whole process. This contained the text of the play and specific stage directions giving all the action of the play. These directions, helpful enough in their own way, gave the director come harried moments trying to follow them. For instance in The Miller and His Men:

Lothair retreats back L. Grindoff following, then put on Grindoff and Lothair combating L. H. ... Grindoff is wounded. Take off figures L.H.; put on Grindoff wounded ... near to mill at back, then enter Lothair and Claudine L.H.; the drawbridge is let down; they come over it or in front L.H.<sup>12</sup>

Then when the mill explodes, "loud explosions" are called for.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 80.

<sup>11</sup> Stevenson, "A Penny Plain Twopence Coloured," 119.

<sup>12</sup> Wilson, 91.

The scene of the mill in peaceful inaction is rapidly withdrawn, and another tableau is dropped, this one showing the explosion. At this moment the so-called "red-fire" is supposed to climax the spectacle.

So after buying the toy stage, the sheets of characters and the play-book with directions, the responsibility for good theatre was left entirely in the hands of the purchaser. First the figures and scenes were colored, then cut out and pasted on cardboard. After this the stage could be set up. When the theatre was ready, the curtain was drawn and the play was on. One boy read the play, while the other would strip the scenery and move the pasteboard figures by means of tin slides on and off the stage as their exits and entrances demanded.<sup>13</sup>

This should suffice for what Wilson calls "the making of play." However there is still much to be said of the subject-matter and the dramatic effect of the miniature stage, much that is pertinent to the main point of this paper.

Action was the keynote of the toy theatre play. The Miller and His Men, for instance, was typical Juvenile Drama fare, not only in the sense that it was popular, but also because it was an action-packed melodrama. And those plays that were not real

---

<sup>13</sup> S.C. Nott, "Penny Plain Twopence Coloured," Drama, XV (1925), 145.

melodramas were romances or fantastic adventure stories. A glance at Wilson's list of Juvenile Drama plays makes this apparent at once. Some of the plays listed are: Aladdin, Alone in the Pirates' Lair, The Battle of Waterloo, The Blood Red Knight, Black-Eyed Susan (described as the best nautical melodrama ever written), Blue Beard, The Bottle Imp, The Corsair, The Forty Thieves, Harlequin, Robin Hood, Red Rover, Sixteen-String Jack, Tom Daring or Far From Home, Therese or The Orphan of Geneva, True to the Core, Uncle Tom's Cabin.<sup>14</sup> These are just a few of the many plays that the toy theatre merchant sold. To meet the demands of the youthful imagination action-breathing drama had to be provided. And it was provided.

Wilson gives short sketches of some of the plays listed. However he gives a very thorough analysis of The Miller and His Men, that classic so popular among the toy theatre zealots. Not only typical of the plays, it seemed also to be part of the very essence of Skeltery:

That the toy theatre can be said to exist now or to be known at all is largely because of its association with this ancient, romantic play. Its very title is enough to conjure up at once a vision of the toy theatre in all its glory of our youth and to set the heart longing for lost delights.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Wilson, 116-118.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 83.

The Miller and His Men was a full-blooded melodrama, filled with desperate encounters, fierce combats, much sword-play, and wild carousings. The plot centers around a robber band posing as harmless, well-floured millers, so as to carry on their devilish deeds unsuspected. In true melodramatic form, the play is complete with "honest Lothair," the hero; Claudine, the pure, much persecuted heroine; Kelmar, her aged father; and Grindoff, the black villain, whose real name turns out to be Wolf.<sup>16</sup> After a series of dire threats and thrilling near-catastrophes, the play ends in an ear-splitting explosion. The miller and his men are "blown to bits." This, according to Wilson, was the secret of the play's powerful appeal to the juvenile imagination.<sup>17</sup>

An article in the Theatre Arts Magazine, a few years ago, describes this awful last scene of The Miller and His Men:

And now for the tremendous tenth and last scene! Enter Ravina with a torch, saying, "My work is nearly accomplished; from this spot I can see Lothair's signal, which will hurl the Banditti to instant destruction." Then enter and exit many men, fighting, and then "buzzz...sizzle...BANG." Shrieks...fumes of smoke rise from the four wings, while a drop falls quickly...and through the fire and brimstone we discern a hideous sight -- the wicked mill exploded -- its windwheels in splinters -- and bits of Banditti whirling through the lurid air.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Wilson, 89-90.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 89.

<sup>18</sup> Filcher, 797-798.

This grand effect was produced with the aid of a "red fire," purchased along with the play. The stage directions also specify the banging of "tin trays, the letting off of crackers," and whatever other effects suggested themselves to the ingenuity of the juvenile producer. "The whole of the Juvenile Drama," says Wilson, "affords no spectacle so satisfying or approaching it for horror."<sup>19</sup>

Besides the rogues of The Miller and His Men, the plays of Skeltdom are filled with pirates, thieves, sailors, princes and princesses, counts, monsters, pursued maidens, gay blades, knights, and forsaken orphans -- all the proper stuff of the romance and melodrama. S. C. Nott, in his article in Drama, tells us something of the leading characters of the toy theatre:

The men and women were of a definite character. There were no sex problems or complexes in those days. The hero was always a very young man of astounding morality and courage; the heroine incredibly chaste and pure; the villain, of course, a dastard of the deepest dye.<sup>20</sup>

Melodramatic plots and characters, therefore, were of the true essence of Skeltery. However there was something else, a third ingredient which combined with these to give the toy theatre its unique romantic atmosphere. This third ingredient was color. It was the contrasting crimsons and purples, the greens

---

<sup>19</sup> Wilson, 92.  
<sup>20</sup> Nott, 164.

and the blues, seen across the dull glow of the footlights that gave the never-to-be forgotten effect of Skeltery. It was the color that helped to give that sharp outline of which Chesterton speaks. That is why, we might say, the characters "struck out" and left an impression never to be erased.

A typical color combination is seen in The Miller and His Men. Kelmar, the old father, is dressed in a purple coat and crimson breeches; Claudine, the pure-hearted heroine, wore a green blouse and crimson skirt. It may well have been these characters Stevenson was thinking of when he described the colors he often used:

With crimson lake (hark to the sound of it -- crimson lake! -- the horns of elf-land are not richer on the ear) -- with crimson lake and Prussian blue a certain purple is to be compounded which, for cloaks especially, Titian could not equal. The latter colour with gamboge, a hated name although an exquisite pigment, supplied a green of such a savoury greenness that today my heart regrets it. 21

Some other important features ever present to heighten the romantic flavor of the toy theatre were the manly, full-blown speeches, the hearty ballads, and the homely cottage and inn interiors.

Wilson gives several examples of these pretty speeches. For

---

21. Stevenson, "A Penny Plain Twopence Coloured," 117.



instance in Guy Fawkes:

This situation most men would be afraid of (says Guy Fawkes administering comfort to himself in the dark vault), but I am not afraid to die. How many are there without whose feelings would paralyze them were they to hear one man lived who could thus willingly place himself upon the brink of death and looked into the dark abyss with more than mortal pleasure!

(Distant sound of trumpets)

Ha! the procession advances -- the King and Queen, the court will soon be seated, their minds riveted alone to stately splendour will not anticipate so short a road to eternity; and as St. Peter's clock strikes twelve the gaping crowd will view a desolation and dream that Heaven sent an individual bold enough to punish tyranny and give a great and powerful people freedom.<sup>22</sup>

And from Alone in the Pirates' Lair:

Mark Ambrose (in deep sonorous tones, to Jack Ruston, a very young sailor hero whom he had persecuted and at whom he is now presenting a brace of pistols): "Back, boy, back! Dread thy doom! For English Jack is a name I hate!"

Jack (snapping his fingers at both pistols): "And fear too! My bold, black-hearted senor!"<sup>23</sup>

Still another typical speech is found in The Woodsman's Hut.

The Count is suddenly interrupted while telling a very romantic tale:

If I mistake not this is a mission from Baron Hernhausen, the enemy of our house; excuse me, my friend, for even the theme of love must yield to the stern diction of honour.<sup>24</sup>

---

22 Wilson, 98.  
23 Ibid., 98.  
24 Ibid., 102.

Even with this formal, forthright talk, no "penny dreadful" was complete without several hearty songs sung with flourish and gusto. The drinking songs in Tom and Jerry are good examples:

Here we are met, all social boys  
That can enjoy a country spree;  
Friends of fox hunting, fun and noise,  
So toss your bumpers off with glee.<sup>25</sup>

From the same play:

Oh this is the scene of Parisian delight,  
Where beaming eyes of pleasure glancing,  
Laughing, jigging, good wine swigging  
Fills up life's gay measure.<sup>26</sup>

Skelt's scenery has already been mentioned. But a few more words should be added about the cottage and inn interiors, so homely and romantic. Stevenson gives a very good description:

Here is the cottage interior, the usual first flat, with the cloak upon the nail, the rosaries of onions, the gun and powder-horn and corner cupboard; here is the inn (this drama must be nautical, I foresee Captain Luff and Bold Bob Bowsprit) with red curtain, pipes, spittoons, and eight-day clock.<sup>27</sup>

"How well and accurately," says Wilson, "that describes the essential qualities of Skelt's plays..."<sup>28</sup>

By way of summary, then, this grand art of Skeltery was a gay array of romance and color. This is evident from its subject-

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>27</sup> Stevenson, "A Penny Plain Twopence Coloured," 119.

<sup>28</sup> Wilson, 54.

matter and technique. A few citations, however, from toy theatre critics should suffice to bolster the evidence already seen.

Speaking in general of Skeltery, S. C. Nott says:

...for sheer romance and color it would be hard to beat.... Those of us who are accustomed to think of the Victorian period as a dull and drab one will be surprised to learn that so far as the Juvenile Drama was concerned it was a riot of color and action.<sup>29</sup>

Another critic writing in Life and Letters Today:

If...you respond to rich colours, gaudy gesture, and unambiguous action in circumstances of high improbability you turn to Mr. King's Catalogue [of the toy theatre].<sup>30</sup>

But of all the toy theatre criticisms, Stevenson's was the most thorough and the one that catches best the spirit of Skeltery.

Of those "budgets of romance" Stevenson says:

Indeed, this name of Skelt appears so stagey and piratic, that I will adopt boldly to design these qualities. Skeltery, then, is a quality of much art. It is even to be found, with reverence be it said, among the works of nature. The stagey is its generic name; but it is an old, insular, home-bred staginess; not French, domestically British; not of today, but something smacking of O. Smith, Fitzball, and the great age of melodrama; a peculiar fragrance haunting it; uttering its unimportant message in a tone of voice that has the charm of fresh antiquity. I will not insist upon the art of Skelt's purveyors. These wonderful characters that once so thrilled our soul with their bold attitude, array of deadly engines, and in-

<sup>29</sup> Nott, 145.

<sup>30</sup> H.K. Fisher, "Times Twopenny Coloured Telescope," Life and Letters Today, XXVII (1940), 186.

comparable costume today look somewhat pallidly; the extreme hard favour of the heroine strikes me, I had almost said with pain.... So much fault we find; but on the other side the imperial critic rejoices to remark the presence of a great unity of gusto; of those direct clap trap appeals, which a man is dead and buriable when he fails to answer; of the footlight glamour, the ready-made, bare-faced transpontine picturesque, a thing not one with cold reality, but much dearer to the mind.<sup>31</sup>

But to avoid ambiguity and to facilitate the explanations and illustrations to follow, the romantic nature of the Juvenile Drama must be reduced to more concrete terms. In this fashion, therefore, we might say that the dominant note of the romance of Skeltery is action, action calculated to excite and stir the imagination. However, part and parcel of this action are 1) so-called melodramatic horror scenes; 2) duels and gunplay; 3) pirates, adventurers, and thieves; 4) strong, direct talk, sometimes of a stilted nature; 5) songs and ballads; 6) rugged scenery and homely cottage and inn interiors; and 7) color. These are the trappings of Skeltery; some of the elements we will illustrate in the romances and plays of Stevenson.

Such was the toy theatre of Stevenson, the toy that so attracted him as a child and haunted him as a man. As Pilcher whimsically says of Stevenson entering the stationer's shop:

---

<sup>31</sup> Stevenson, "A Penny Plain Twopence Coloured," 118.

"Ha!" the characters must have cried when he entered, "Here is a customer indeed! The greatest of all those children and the most loyal."32

CHAPTER III  
THE STUFF OF ROMANCE

Because Stevenson was a master romanticist, his novels were and had to be, packed with adventure. Action, therefore, was the very warp and woof of the Stevenson story. But it was a particular kind of action. It was a type designed to thrill, the type that was the peculiar brand of the "penny dreadful." So it is that we find so many horror scenes in Stevenson.

His romances have so many of these scenes involving duels and gunplay, pirates and adventurers -- all of the Skelt variety -- that it becomes easy to believe J. M. Brown's remark in the Saturday Review of Literature that "without Skelt and Company we might never have had 'Treasure Island,' 'Kidnapped,' or 'The Master of Ballantrae.'" <sup>1</sup>The same writer goes on to point out that

In their beguiling way these novels are only Skeltery housebroken, grown-up, turned self-conscious, but raised into art so that the dross is lost and pure gold glitters. For Stevenson worshipped the very name of Skelt -- "so stagey and piratical." <sup>2</sup>

These words, incidentally, were written as late as January, 1947.

- 
- <sup>1</sup> J. M. Brown, "Children of Skelt; Alfred Lunt Collection of Miniature Theatres," Saturday Review of Literature, XXX (1947), 20.  
<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 20.

In Treasure Island, for instance, there are several hair-raising passages. One that haunts the memory is the death of the blind pirate Pew. Deserted by his fast-escaping comrades, the blind man cries out for them to wait for him. But no one hears him:

Him they had deserted, whether in sheer panic or out of revenge for his ill words and blows, I know not; but there he remained behind, tapping up and down the road in a frenzy, and groping and calling for his comrades. Finally he took the wrong turn, and ran a few steps past me, towards the hamlet, crying: --

"Johnny, Black Dog," and other names,  
"you won't leave old Pew, mates -- not old Pew!"

Just then the noise of horses topped the rise, and four or five riders came in sight in the moonlight, and swept at full gallop down the slope.

At this Pew saw his error, turned with a scream, and ran straight for the ditch, into which he rolled. But he was on his feet again in a second, and made another dash, now utterly bewildered, right under the nearest of the coming horses.

The rider tried to save him, but in vain. Down went Pew with a cry that rang high into the night; and the four hoofs trampled and spumed him and passed by. He fell on his side, then gently collapsed upon his face, and moved no more.<sup>3</sup>

There was something about the plight of the blind Pew that stirred the imagination of Stevenson. In three of his romances he injected blind men, and in each instance the tap tap of their

---

<sup>3</sup> R. L. Stevenson, Treasure Island, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1911, 38-39.

sticks gives the same terrifying effect. W. A. Raleigh calls it a true romantic device:

... The tapping of the stick of the blind pirate Pew as he draws near the inn-parlour, and the similar effects of inexplicable terror wrought by the introduction of the blind catechist in Kidnapped, and the disguise of a blind leper in The Black Arrow, are beyond the reach of any but the literary form of romantic art.<sup>4</sup>

Of the horrific nature of Pew, L. C. Cornford says: "The apparition of David Pew in Treasure Island, the tap-tapping of the blind pirate's stick is like a horror of sleep."<sup>5</sup>

Another incident in Treasure Island, of interest chiefly for its stark melodramatic effect, occurs when Jim Hawkins is almost discovered eavesdropping on the pirates. Hawkins is sitting in the apple barrel when he hears Silver say: "Dick, you just jump up, like a sweet lad, and get me an apple, to wet my pipe like." Jim then continues the narrative:

You may fancy the terror I was in! I should have leaped out and run for it, if I had found the strength; but my limbs and heart alike mis-gave me. I heard Dick begin to rise, and then some one seemingly stopped him and the voice of Hands exclaimed: --

"Oh, stow that; don't get sucking of that bilge, John. Let's have a go of the rum."<sup>6</sup>

- 
- <sup>4</sup> Walter Raleigh, Robert Louis Stevenson, Edward Arnold and Co., London, 1927, 55.  
<sup>5</sup> L. C. Cornford, Robert Louis Stevenson, Dodd, Mead and Co., New York, 1900, 143.  
<sup>6</sup> Stevenson, Treasure Island, 86.



The sudden danger arising in the situation and its just as sudden passing makes you want to read the passage again to make sure Hawkins really escaped being caught.

One more terrifying instance in Treasure Island comes to mind. It occurs when Israel Hands and Jim Hawkins are alone on the brig. Each attempts to outwit the other, realizing his life depends upon it. Finally Hands starts after Jim, who makes for the shrouds of the ship. Hands throws a dirk, but misses him by a half-foot. Once in the shrouds, Hawkins climbs up, only to be followed closely by Hands. Then Jim suddenly turns and confronts him with a brace of pistols. Hands stops, begins an attempt to pacify Hawkins. Then Jim relates:

I was drinking in his words and smiling away, as conceited as a cock upon a wall, when, all in a breath, back went his right hand over his shoulder. Something sang like an arrow through the air; I felt a blow and then a sharp pang, and there I was pinned by the shoulder to the mast. In the horrid pain and surprise of the moment -- I scarce can say it was by my own volition, and I am sure it was without a conscious aim -- both my pistols went off, and both escaped out of my hand. They did not fall alone, with a choked cry, the coxswain loosed his grasp upon the shrouds, and plunged head first into the water.<sup>7</sup>

The Master of Ballantrae and Ebb-Tide also have their share of horrifying moments. In the last pages of The Master the live-

---

<sup>7</sup> Stevenson, Treasure Island, 198.

burial of the Master is definitely in the "penny dreadful" spirit. It happens that the Master with the help of Secundra Dass has feigned death and is subsequently buried. When Henry Durrisdeer, the Master's brother and sworn enemy, receives word of his death, he refuses to believe it. As he puts it, "I have struck my sword throughout his vitals and felt the hot blood spirt in my very face, time and time again, yet he was never dead for that. Why should I think he is dead now? No, I won't believe it till I see him rotting." 8

Whereupon Henry and a small party set out to see the Master's grave in the wilderness. After traveling about sixteen hours the party comes upon Secundra Dass. To their surprise he is digging in the grave of the Master. The Indian admits excitedly that he has buried the Master alive. He only looked dead. It is an old oriental trick. Dass continues to dig:

The frost was not yet very deep, and presently the Indian threw aside his tool and began to scoop the dirt by handfuls. Then he disengaged a corner of a buffalo robe; and then I saw hair catch among his fingers; yet a moment more, and the moon shone on something white. Awhile Secundra crouched upon his knees, scraping with delicate fingers, breathing with puffed lips, and when he moved aside I beheld the face of the Master wholly disengaged. It was deadly white, the eyes closed, the ears and nos-

---

8 R. L. Stevenson, The Master of Ballantrae, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1911, 278.

trills plugged, the cheeks fallen, the nose sharp as if in death....The sight held us with a horror not before experienced, I dared not look my lord in the face, but for as long as it lasted, I never observed him to draw a breath; and a little in the background one of the men (I know not whom) burst into a kind of sobbing. 9

Secundra, working over the body of the Master, suddenly utters a cry of satisfaction:

... and leaning swiftly forth, I thought I could myself perceive a change upon the icy countenance of the unburied. The next moment I beheld his eyelids flutter; the next they rose entirely, and the week-old corpse looked me for a moment in the face.<sup>10</sup>

The ghastly horror of the situation is climaxed at this moment by the death of Henry:

For at the first disclosure of the dead man's eyes, my Lord Durrisdeer fell to the ground, and when I raised him up, he was a corpse. 11

In Ebb-Tide there is a scene of a bloodier nature. Huish, one of three thugs, intent on stealing the treasure of a lonely pearl-fisher, devises a fiendish plan. Under a flag of truce he approaches Attwater, the pearl-fisher. In his hands he carries a jar of vitriol which he intends to hurl into the face of the waiting Attwater. But Attwater, covering him with a Winchester,

Stevenson, The Master of Ballantrae, 288-289.

Ibid., 289.

Ibid., 290.

cautiously tells him to keep at a distance. After an exchange of words, heightening the suspense, Huish hurls the vitriol:

... the indomitable Huish decided to throw, and Attwater pulled the trigger. There was scarce the difference of a second between resolves, but it was in favor of the man with the rifle; and the jar had not yet left the clerk's hand before the ball shattered both. For the twinkling of an eye, the wretch was in hell's agonies, bathed in liquid flames, a screaming bedlamite; and then a second and more merciful bullet stretched him dead. <sup>12</sup>

In the last act of Stevenson's play Admiral Guinea, another blind Pew is involved in what Stevenson critic Walter Raleigh calls "the masterpiece of all the scenes of terror." <sup>13</sup> The blind man's tapping is heard as he enters the room. Pew, searching for a chest, does not realize he is being watched. He hears a movement, but thinking the room is dark he still believes he is safe. As he cautiously moves about the room, he puts his groping hand into the burning flame of a candle. The ruffian screams in panic fear when he realizes he has been watched and is now trapped. <sup>14</sup>

An episode like this is but one of many in Stevenson, which,

---

<sup>12</sup> R. L. Stevenson, Ebb-Tide, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1911, 393.

<sup>13</sup> Raleigh, 55.

<sup>14</sup> R. L. Stevenson, Admiral Guinea, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1911, 393.

according to Raleigh, "makes entrance to the corridors of the mind by blind and secret ways, and there awaken the echoes of primaeval fear." 15

Before getting to the next point it might be well to mention here, merely by way of an obiter dictum, the subject-matter of The Black Arrow. This romance, according to R. A. Rice, rings true to the Skelt melodramatic manner:

Compared to Treasure Island, it (The Black Arrow) is much like dreaming to order. In the first place, there is inserted, ready-made, almost every possible element of boy-and-girl melodrama, and of course a great deal of it is as good as such things can be. The very idea of the mysterious arrows which arrive one by one fascinates the imagination. The third of them, I think it is, crashes through the high, stained-glass window, when Dick and Sir Daniel are talking in the chapel, and sticks quivering into the long table. That is a pretty good place and the human eye in the tapestry of the Savage Hunter is a devilish good bit of old machinery. But the trouble is that here the whole principle of fitness is overdone, is carried out almost as completely as in the stories of Hayward and Skelt.... The castle has a secret passage, a trap door, a haunted room, a dark moat to swim -- everything that the word Castle stands for in the medieval mind of a small boy. At the end, the villainous bridegroom is shot at the altar, and the hero inherits. I have not counted the number of people who are killed in The Black Arrow, but I think there must be one for every page. 16

---

15 Raleigh, 54.

16 Rice, 179-180.

But the important point to keep in mind concerning these terrifying action scenes in Stevenson is not that these incidents may be duplicated in Skelt, but that they are definitely, whatever their subject-matter, in the spirit of Skelt. And they follow the Skelt design not so much because they are terrifying, but because they were meant to terrify, to arouse the imagination. They are situations which really have no business with the plot, but are wonderful flights of imagination, which, as Raleigh says, "could in every case be cut off from the rest of the story and framed as a separate work of art."<sup>17</sup> These words are echoed when Cornford makes the statement:

Open a novel of Stevenson's at random, or recall its perusal, and beautiful or striking passages will isolate themselves naturally from the context. And many of such passages are like the sublimation of a dream.<sup>18</sup>

So if the Juvenile Drama was a mass of romance and melodrama, with its stage a whirlpool of bloody adventure and terrifying incident, Stevenson too was ever thus. That is the reason why he has been hailed a master romanticist.

But aside from what we have called "horror scenes," there are also a number of duels and gun battles in Stevenson, which are plainly of the Skelt vintage. For example the siege of the

---

<sup>17</sup> Raleigh, 58.  
<sup>18</sup> Cornford, 142.

roundhouse in Kidnapped is a bloody affair complete with pistols and cutlasses.

We remember how Alan Breck and David Balfour barricaded themselves in the roundhouse of the "Covenant" to withstand the attack of the ship's company. They gather weapons and ready themselves for the fight:

Alan drew a dirk, which he held in his left hand in case they should run in under his sword. I, on my part, clambered up into the berth with an armful of pistols.... It came all of a sudden when it did, with a rush of feet and a roar, and then a shout from Alan, and a sound of blows and some one crying out as if hurt. I looked back over my shoulder, and saw Mr. Shuan in the doorway, crossing blades with Alan.

"That's him that killed the boy!" I cried.

"Look to your window!" said Alan; and as I turned back to my place, I saw him pass his sword through the mate's body.... The whole place was full of smoke of my own firing, just as my ears seemed to be burst with the noise of the shots. But there was Alan, standing as before; only now his sword was running blood to the hilt.... Right before him on the floor was Mr. Shuan, on his hands and knees; the blood was pouring from his mouth, and he was sinking slowly lower, with a terrible white face. <sup>19</sup>

That was the first part of the battle. Later Balfour sees some real action, beginning when one of the men drops on him from the

---

<sup>19</sup> R. L. Stevenson, Kidnapped, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1911, 77-78.

skylight:

He had dropped his cutlass as he jumped, and when he felt the pistol, whipped straight round and laid hold of me, roaring out an oath; and at that either my courage came again, or I grew so much afraid as came to the same thing; for I gave a shriek and shot him in the midst of the body. He gave the most horrible groan and fell to the floor.<sup>20</sup>

After more bloodshed and dying groans, the besiegers finally made their retreat.

A similar battle is fought in Treasure Island, when the pirates storm the stockade;<sup>21</sup> and in The Master of Ballantrae there is a gruesome affair in which the Master's ship is boarded by pirates.<sup>22</sup>

But for sheer romance the duel scenes in Stevenson cannot be surpassed. The duel between the two brothers in The Master of Ballantrae is a picture which lingers in the memory.

Henry Durrisdere, goaded on by his brother, the Master, loses his temper and strikes him. The Master rises, crying, "I must have blood, I must have blood for this." They take swords from the wall and proceed to the garden just outside the house. It is a cold, black night. Mackellar bearing a pair of candles, leads the way. Mackellar, the narrator of the story, thus des-

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>21</sup> Stevenson, Treasure Island, 156-160.

<sup>22</sup> Stevenson, The Master of Ballantrae, 40-45.



cribes what took place that night:

I took up the candlesticks and went before them, steps that I would give my hand to recall; but a coward is a slave at best; and even as I went, my teeth smote each other in my mouth. It was as he had said, there was no breath stirring: a windless stricture of frost had bound the air; and as we went forth in the shine of the candles, the blackness was like a roof over our heads. Never a word was said, there was never a sound but the creaking of our steps along the frozen path.... He [the Master] looked at his brother with a smile; then made a fencing-room salute.

Never a word said Mr. Henry, but saluted too, and swords rang together.... It seems that Mr. Henry took and kept the upper hand from the engagement, crowding in upon his foe with a contained and glowing fury. Nearer and nearer he crept upon the man till, of a sudden, the Master leaped back with a little sobbing oath.... To it they went again, on fresh ground; but now methought closer, Mr. Henry pressing more outrageously, the Master beyond doubt with shaken confidence. For it is beyond doubt he now recognized himself for lost; or he had never attempted the foul stroke. I cannot say I followed it, my untrained eye was never quick enough to seize details, but it appears he caught his brother's blade with his left hand, a practice not permitted. Certainly Mr. Henry only saved himself by leaping to one side; as certainly the Master lunging in the air stumbled on his knee, and before he could move, the sword was through his body.

I cried out with a stifled scream, and ran in; but the body was already fallen to the ground, where it writhed a moment like a trodden worm, and then lay motionless. 23

The duel in St. Ives has not the feverish intensity stirred

by the hatred of the two brothers Durrisdeer, but it is curiously romantic in that it was fought with scissors. It occurs when hard feelings arise between Goguelot and St. Ives, both in prison. Goguelot insults Miss Flora, with whom St. Ives has fallen in love. St. Ives then challenges Goguelot to a duel. The incident is related by St. Ives himself:

So far as regards place and time, we had no choice; we must settle the dispute at night, in the dark, after a round had passed by, and in the open middle of the shed under which we slept.... At length a pair of scissors was unscrewed; and a couple of tough wands being found in a corner of the courtyard, one blade of the scissors was lashed solidly to each with resined twine...and with that, all being then ready, we composed ourselves and awaited the moment.

The evening fell cloudy; not a star was to be seen.... Laclas, the sergeant major, set us in our stations, engaged our wands, and left us...the chill of the night enveloped our bodies like a wet sheet....In the inky blackness it was impossible to see his eyes.... I made up my mind as soon as the signal should be given, to throw myself down and lunge at the same moment....

"Alley!" said the sergeant jamor.

Both lunged in the same moment with equal fury, and but for my manoeuvre both had certainly been spitted. As it was, he did no more than strike my shoulder, while my scissor plunged below the girdle into a mortal part; and that great bulk of a man, falling, from his whole height, knocked me immediately senseless.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> R. L. Stevenson, St. Ives, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1911, 21-22.

So much for duels and gunplay.

Another one of Skeltery's pre-occupations centered around pirates and thieves. Stevenson in turn loves these villainous rogues. They find their nefarious way into the pages of most of his romances. Even in his tales that do not deal strictly with the sea, as in The Master of Ballantrae, Stevenson manages somehow to work them in.

The following scene on the pirate ship in the early part of The Master shows us a pirate that most certainly could have stepped from the stage of the toy theatre:

Early next day, we smelled him [Teach, the pirate captain] burning sulphur in his cabin and crying out "Hell, hell!" which was well understood among the crew, and filled their minds with apprehension. Presently he comes on deck, a perfect figure of fun, his face blacked, his hair and whiskers curled, his belt stuck full of pistols; chewing bits of glass so that the blood ran down his chin, and brandishing a dirk.... The first that came near him was the fellow who had sent the rum overboard the day before; him he stabbed to the heart, damning him for a mutineer; and then capered about the body, raving and swearing and daring us to come on.<sup>25</sup>

More cutthroats appear in The Master during the expedition into the wilderness of America:

The crew that went up the river under the

---

<sup>25</sup> Stevenson, The Master of Ballantrae, 44-45.

joint command of Captain Harris and the Master numbered in all nine persons, of whom (if I except Secundra Dass) there was not one that had not merited the gallows. From Harris downward the voyagers were notorious in that colony for desperate, bloody-minded miscreants; some were reputed pirates, the most hawkers of rum; all ranters and drinkers; all fit associates, embarking together without remorse, upon this treacherous and murderous design.<sup>26</sup>

All, we might add, fit subjects for the miniature stage.

Among the pirates in Treasure Island, Billy Bones is perhaps the most typical of the Stevenson brand:

I remember him as if it were yesterday, as he came plodding to the inn door, his sea-chest following behind him in a hand-barrow; a tall, strong, heavy, nut-brown man; his tarry pigtail falling over the shoulders of his soiled blue coat; his ragged and scarred, with black, broken nails; and the sabre-cut across one cheek, a dirty livid white. I remember him looking around the cove and whistling to himself as he did so, and then breaking out in that old sea-song that he sang so often afterwards: --

"Fifteen men on the dead man's chest --  
Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!"<sup>27</sup>

John Silver, the one-legged sea-cook, is still another pirate of true romantic timber. He is best described armed to the hilt, with his parrot, Captain Flint, sitting on his shoulder:

Silver had two guns slung about him -- one before and one behind -- besides the great cutlass at his waist, and a pistol in each

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 257.

<sup>27</sup> Stevenson, Treasure Island, 3.

pocket of his square-tailed coat. To complete his strange appearance, Captain Flint sat perched upon his shoulder and gabbling odds and ends of purposeless sea-talk.<sup>28</sup>

The pirate called "Black Dog" should also be mentioned -- especially since he could well have been suggested by one of Stevenson's favorite toy theatre plays, "Three-Fingered Jack."<sup>29</sup> Black Dog is described as follows:

He was a pale, tallowy creature, wanting two fingers of the left hand; and though he wore a cutlass, he did not look much like a fighter.<sup>30</sup>

However Black Dog turns out to be an extremely treacherous fellow.

There are other good examples of black-hearted ruffians in Kidnapped, David Balfour, Ebb-Tide, The Black Arrow, and The Wrecker. Even Stevenson's shorter romances, like A Lodging for the Night, abound in "penny dreadful" characters.

Already mentioned as a characteristic of the Skelt play was the melodramatic speech put into the mouths of the characters. The talk was formal, even stilted, but with all this it contained a certain hearty bravado very becoming to the melodramatic situations of the toy stage.

Similar talk is found in Stevenson. Typical is the speech

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 238.

<sup>29</sup> Stevenson, "A Penny Plain Twopence Coloured," 114.

<sup>30</sup> Stevenson, Treasure Island, 12.

of David Balfour in Kidnapped, when he and his Uncle Ebenezer are getting acquainted:

"I confess sir;" said I, "when I was told that I had kinsfolk well-to-do, I did indeed indulge the hope that they might help me in my life. But I am no beggar; I look for no favours at your hands, and I want none that are not freely given. For as poor as I appear, I have friends of my own that will be blithe to help me." 31

Alan Breck in the same story expresses himself eloquently to the captain of the brig, just before the siege of the round-house:

"Do ye see me?" said Alan. "I am come of kings; I bear a king's name. My badge is the oak. Do ye see my sword? It has slashed the heads off mair Whigamores than you have toes upon your feet. Call up your vermin to you, sir, and fall on! The sooner the clash begins, the sooner ye'll taste this steel throughout your vitals." 32

Herrick's daring directness in addressing Huish in Ebb-Tide is also worth noting:

"I stand by the Captain," said Herrick, "that makes us two to one, both good men; and the crew will all follow me. I hope I shall die very soon; but I have not the least objection to killing you before I go. I should prefer it so, with no more remorse than winking. Take care, take care, you little cad!" 33

Herrick later speaks out again, but this time with a true kind of

31 Stevenson, Kidnapped, 16.

32 Stevenson, Kidnapped, 76.

33 Stevenson, Ebb-Tide, 305.

melodramatic pathos:

"Oh! what does it matter?" cried Herrick.  
 "Here I am. I am broken crockery; the whole of my life is gone to water; I have nothing left that I believe in, except my living horror of myself. Why do I come to you? I don't know. You are cold, cruel, hateful; and I hate you, or I think I hate you. But you are an honest man, an honest gentleman. I put myself helpless in your hands. What must I do? If I can't do anything, be merciful, and put a bullet through me; it's only a puppy with a broken leg!" 34

Yet for clear drama climaxing a thrilling situation, the words of the Master of Ballantrae would be hard to surpass. The Master has just been struck by his brother:

The Master sprang to his feet like one transfigured; I have never seen the man so beautiful. "A Blow!" he cried. "I would not take a blow from God Almighty." 35

The Black Arrow, too, has its fine speeches. Dick Shelton tells his guardian, Sir Daniel, that he has been grateful and faithful to him. To which Sir Daniel answers:

"It is well," said Sir Daniel; and then, rising into anger: "Gratitude and faith are words, Dick Shelton," he continued; "but I look to deeds. In this hour of my peril, when my name is attainted, when my lands are forfeit, when my wood is full of men that hunger and thirst for my destruction, what doth gratitude: what doth faith? I have but a little company remaining; is it grateful

34 Ibid., 370.

35 Stevenson, The Master of Ballantrae, 119.

or faithful to poison me their hearts with your insidious whisperings? Save me from such gratitude! But come, now, what is it ye wish? Speak; we are here to answer. If ye have ought against me, stand forth and say it." 36

In phrases less gracefully turned than those of Sir Daniel, John Silver makes a threatening little speech after his peace terms have been rebuffed at the block house on Treasure Island:

"Before an hour's out, I'll stove in your old block-house like a rum puncheon. Laugh, by thunder laugh! Before an hour's out, ye'll laugh on the other side. Them that die'll be the lucky ones." 37

A threat like this thrills the hearts of Stevenson's readers, just as similar words thrilled the habitues of Skeltdom. And if Stevenson loved Skeltery -- as we know he did -- it is reasonable to think that he also loved the language of Skelt, so often bombastic and profuse. It was natural, then, that in later years he use such language to quicken the pulse of his own romances.

But a good deal of Stevenson's romantic atmosphere can also be traced to the numerous songs and ballads in his novels. Just as Skelt's children found time to sing even while in the throes of adversity, so Alan Breck and the Master himself are

---

36 R. L. Stevenson, The Black Arrow, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1911, 103-104.

37 Stevenson, Treasure Island, 152.



discovered giving vent to hearty ballads. For instance after repelling the first attack on the roundhouse, Alan sits down and with his bloody sword in hand sings lustily, composing the song as he goes: Since the song was in Gaelic, David Balfour renders the translation:

This is the song of the sword of Alan  
 The smith made it,  
 The fire set it;  
 Now it shines in the hand of Alan Breck.

Their eyes were many and bright,  
 Swift were they to behold,  
 Many the hands they guided:  
 The sword was alone.

The dun deer troop over the hill,  
 They many, the hill is one;  
 The dun vanish,  
 The hill remains.

Come to me from the hills of heather,  
 Come from the isles of the sea.  
 O far-beholding eagles  
 Here is your meat. 38

The ballad does not make too much sense, but the picture of Breck singing after battle remains truly romantic.

However the Master's songs strike a far different note. At one time he sings as he tries to woo Alison, his brother's wife. He sings of a poor girl's aspirations for an exiled lover. Stevenson gives us only one verse of the ballad:

O I will die my petticoat red,  
 With my dear boy I'll beg my bread,

Though all my friends should wish me dead,  
For Willie among the rushes, O! 39

Later in the tale, the Master sings again. This time he strikes an eerie, pathetic note, very disconcerting to Mackellar. The lines are from Twa Corbies:

"And over his bones whay they are bare  
The wind sall blow for everwair! 40

Other songs in Stevenson are the "Fifteen men on a dead man's chest," which is repeated a couple of times in Treasure Island,<sup>41</sup> and the ballads in Ebb-Tide and The Wrong Box. In Ebb-Tide the captain sings "John Brown's Body" and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot";<sup>42</sup> also a quaint air which goes as follows:

"O honey, with pockets full of money,  
We will trip, trip, trip,  
We will trip it on the quay;  
And I will dance with Kate,  
And Tom will dance with Sall,  
When we're all back from South Amerikee." 43

The Wrong Box has Gideon serenading Julia with "There's the Land of Cherry Isle." 44

So these songs, as well as the terror scenes, the bloody cutlass play, and the melodramatic speeches are true matter for

39 Stevenson, The Master of Ballantrae, 104.

40 Ibid., 251.

41 Stevenson, Treasure Island, 3,73.

42 Stevenson, Ebb-Tide, 241.

43 Ibid., 276.

44 Stevenson, The Wrong Box, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1911, 161.

romance. But there are other, even more striking references in Stevenson, which give evidence of romantic qualities, and which recall to mind the old plays of Skelt. These are small items, random details, but they appear as compelling evidence when seen against the background of Stevenson's words: "What am I? what are life, art, letters, the world, but what my Skelt has made them?"

Stevenson, in his essay "A Penny Plain Twopence Coloured," quoted so often already, devotes a few lines to the typical Skelt cottage interior.<sup>45</sup> Oddly enough the setting for the first scene of Stevenson's play Admiral Guinea reproduces with a little elaboration the same cottage he describes in his essay:

The stage represents a room in Admiral Guinea's house: fireplace, arm-chair, and table with Bible ... Corner cupboard ... cutlasses, telescopes, sextant, ... a ship clock. <sup>46</sup>

Then too there is the inn interior. Stevenson in his essay thus describes it: "Here is the inn...with the red curtain, pipes, spittoons, and eight-day clock."<sup>47</sup> Now observe the duplication in Act II of Admiral Guinea, which begins with a scene in the "Admiral Benbow" inn:

Fireplace, R., with high-packed settles on each

---

45 Stevenson, "A Penny Plain Twopence Coloured," 119.  
 46 Stevenson, Admiral Guinea, 335.  
 47 Stevenson, "A Penny Plain Twopence Coloured," 119.

side.... Tables L., with glasses, pipes etc.  
 ... window with red half-curtains; spittons;  
 candles on both front tables.<sup>48</sup>

Red curtains, by the way, again make their appearance in a cottage of Ebb-Tide<sup>49</sup> and in the "Spy Glass" inn of Treasure Island.<sup>50</sup>

The duplication of these toy theatre scenes makes more apparent Brander Matthews' comment about the depth of the Skelt influence on Stevenson. He speaks of Stevenson the boy being wrapped in the "sinuous coils of Skeltery." "The impression," he continues, "was then so deep that it could not be effaced in maturity." <sup>51</sup>

Sir Arthur Pinero also noticed the Skelt influence in Stevenson's work and blamed it for his failure as a playwright. Commenting on Admiral Guinea, he says:

Here, you see, he draws in every detail upon his memories of the toy-theatre. And in writing the play his effort was constantly, and one may say confessedly, to reproduce the atmosphere of conventional melodrama.<sup>52</sup>

Though the limitations of Stevenson's stagecraft do not fall

48 Stevenson, Admiral Guinea, 352.

49 Stevenson, Ebb-Tide, 383.

50 Stevenson, Treasure Island, 59.

51 Matthews, 410.

52 A.W. Pinero, "Robert Louis Stevenson: the Dramatist," In Stevensoniana, edited by J.A. Hammerton, John Grant, Edinburgh, 1910, 206.

within the scope of this paper, another remark of Pinero's concerning the weight of Skelt influence is very much in order:

The unfortunate thing is that even to his dying day he continued to regard the actual theatre as only an enlarged form of the toy-theatres which had fascinated his childhood -- he continued to use in his dramatic colouring the crimson lake and Prussian blue of transpontine romance -- he considered his function as a dramatist very little more serious than that child's play with paint-box and paste-board on which his memory dwelt so fondly. He played at being a playwright; and he was fundamentally in error in regarding the drama as a matter of child's play. 53

Swinerton also comments on the similarity of Admiral Guinea and the toy theatre:

... the play is likest of all to those non-descripts which Stevenson as a little boy must have performed upon his toy stage, with paper figures pushed hither and thither in tin slides upon the boards.... More it would be impossible to claim for Admiral Guinea without seeing it performed: again we have types roughly mannered to serve as persons of the play; but they are types clearly in accordance with tradition, and they preserve their interest fully until they are done with and put away with the footlight-wicks, and the tin slides, and the other paraphernalia of the toy stage -- paper figures, a penny plain and twopence coloured. 54

However, even though we were to grant that Skeltery was a bad influence when Stevenson turned to play writing, nevertheless the

53 Pinero, 203.

54 Frank Swinerton, R. L. Stevenson, George H. Doran Co., New York, 1923, 102-103.

influence is there. And that is all we are concerned about at present.

Lastly, and least important, there are some references to toy theatre matter that appear rather casually on Stevenson pages. For instance in The Wrong Box:

Doubtless he had long ago disposed of the body -- dropping it through a trapdoor in his back kitchen, Morris supposed, with some hazy recollection of a picture in a penny dreadful. 55

In the same story:

He had a wild dream of having seen the carriage double up and fall to pieces like a pantomime trick. 56

Similarly in Ebb-Tide there are a few echoes of Skelt: "Well," said Attwater, "you seem to me to be a very two penny pirate."<sup>57</sup> Then Herrick, on another page of this tale, refers to Frieschutz,<sup>58</sup> a favorite of the toy stage enthusiasts and a play that Stevenson himself lists as one he owned.

There are just a few other facts in Stevenson that point to the Skelt influence. His fantastic story entitled The Bottle Imp reminds us that the play of the same name was another favorite of the Juvenile Drama. Again, Stevenson relates the joy of

---

55 Stevenson, The Wrong Box, 179.

56 Ibid., 22.

57 Stevenson, Ebb-Tide, 361

58 Ibid., 231.

staging Arabian Entertainments on the miniature stage;<sup>59</sup> then we recall that he wrote his own version of these tales, The New Arabian Nights. Finally, Stevenson mentions "Macaire" as an enticing Skelt character;<sup>60</sup> of his four plays, one bears the title Macaire.

These and the many other illustrations given should indicate how much Stevenson took away from the subject-matter of the Juvenile Drama of his youth. It seems that, after all, the roots of his imagination did absorb much of the romance of Skelt. As Chesterton puts it, speaking of Stevenson's reaction to the growing pessimism of his day:

Stevenson seemed to say to the semi-suicides drooping round him at the cafe tables; drinking absinthe and discussing atheism: "Hang it all, the hero of a penny dreadful play was a better man than you are! A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured was an art that you are all professing. Painting pasteboard figures of pirates and admirals was better worth doing than all this, it was fun; it was fighting; it was a life and a lark; and if I can't do anything else, dang me but I will try to do that again." <sup>61</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Stevenson, "A Penny Plain Twopence Coloured," 116.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>61</sup> Chesterton, 73.

## CHAPTER IV

### SHARP BRIGHT IMAGERY

Chesterton, we remember, maintained that the toy theatre exerted a profound influence on Stevenson's imagery. He says that the images in Stevenson stand out; they are clear-cut, bright, and colorful.<sup>1</sup> When Stevenson described anything there was nothing hazy or vague about it. As Chesterton says, "His Highland tales have everything Scotch except Scotch mist.... There is very little mist on the mountains of Stevenson."<sup>2</sup>

Chesterton states that Skeltery was responsible for this; but he makes little attempt to show how the toy theatre could work such an influence. However, it does become more apparent after a study of the mechanics of the toy stage.

Recall, for a moment, the structure of the miniature stage, with its oil-lamp footlights in front, lamps at the sides and rear. Simply because it was a "miniature" stage, it had to be well lighted -- especially in the background -- or else the tiny figures would not show up.

The light in the background, then, was highly important.

---

<sup>1</sup> Chesterton, 29-30.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 31.



Stevenson, as the boy-producer of a play, had to work the lights and scenery in such a way that his figures would stand out. It was usually a matter of putting in a brightly colored drop-scene -- perhaps a sunny winding road or a deep blue sea; and with the proper adjustment of the lights at the wings and rear, the figures could be seen clearly.

Now the same technique is evident in so many of Stevenson's descriptions. Here and there a scene strikes the eye so forcefully and clearly as to be unforgettable. On closer scrutiny the images nearly always are detected standing out against sunlit or moonlit backgrounds, or against the blue sea and white clouds.

But no matter what background Stevenson uses, he seldom, if ever, sets his images in the utter blackness of night. In Stevenson's night there is always a moon, a candle, or a lamp.

One good example of this, one that stands out in Chesterton's mind as a sort of symbol of the sharp outline of Stevenson's images, is the duel scene in The Master of Ballantrae. The passage has already been quoted at length, so there is no need to repeat it here.

In this episode "the description insists not on the darkness

of night but on the hardness of winter." <sup>3</sup> The background of the scene is heavy with white frost glowing in the candlelight. Even after the duel, and the body of the Master lies deserted, the image is clearly outlined against the white frost and the candlelight:

I ran after him [Henry Durrisdeer], leaving the candles on the frosty ground and the body lying in their light under the trees. <sup>4</sup>

Alfred Noyes also mentions the use of light in the duel scene of The Master:

Another wonderful use of candlelight is in The Master of Ballantrae, where the duel is fought between the two brothers among the frosted trees by the steady light of two candles. You remember what use he makes of those two points of light to enhance the deadly stillness of the scene; how the body of the Master was left lying in their light under the trees; and how later on, Mr. Mackellar creeps back, guided by their distant brightness, to find one of the candlesticks overthrown, and that taper quenched; the other burning steadily, making all within its circle of light, by force of contrast with the surrounding darkness, brighter than day. <sup>5</sup>

Similarly A Lodging for the Night puts a great emphasis on the heavy whiteness of snow against the black background of

<sup>3</sup> Chesterton, 32.

<sup>4</sup> Stevenson, The Master of Ballantrae, 123.

<sup>5</sup> Alfred Noyes, "Stevenson," Robert Louis Stevenson: His Work and Personality, ed. by St. John Adcock, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1924, 218.

night:

The air was raw and pointed, but not far below freezing; and the flakes were large, damp, and adhesive. The whole city was sheeted up. An army might have marched from end to end and not a footfall given alarm. If there were any belated birds in heaven, they saw the island like a large white patch, and the bridges like slim white spars, on the black ground of the river. High up overhead the snow settled among the tracery of the cathedral towers. Many a niche was drifted full; many a statue wore a long white bonnet on its grotesque or sainted head.... The cemetery of St. John had taken its own share of the snow. All the graves were decently covered; tall white housetops stood around in grave array.<sup>6</sup>

That same contrast giving a sharp outline to the images is found in Treasure Island, when Jim and his mother search the dead pirate's trunk by candlelight;<sup>7</sup> in the moonlit death of Pew, which Hawkins and his mother watched from the brush at the side of the road;<sup>8</sup> and again in the torchlit funeral procession in St. Ives.<sup>9</sup>

Stevenson uses yet another device for achieving the hard lines of his images when he sets his figures against the blue horizon of the sea. David Balfour has several such passages. At one time David comments: "Only a little further on, the sea

---

6 R. L. Stevenson, A Lodging for the Night, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1911, 287-288.

7 Stevenson, Treasure Island, 30.

8 Ibid., 39.

9 Stevenson, St. Ives, 126-127.

appeared and two or three ships upon it, pretty as a drawing."<sup>10</sup>

At another time he looks out on the sea from a high bluff and sees the brig Thistle:

...we were able to creep unperceived to the front of the sandhills, where they look down immediately on the beach and sea.... Then they awoke on board the Thistle, and it seemed they had all in readiness, for there was scarce a second's bustle on deck before we saw a skiff put round her stern and begin to pull lively for the coast. Almost at the same moment of time, and perhaps half a mile away towards Gillane Ness, the figure of a man appeared for a blink upon a sandhill, waving with his arms; and though he was gone again in a flash, the gulls on that part continued a little longer to fly wild.<sup>11</sup>

In this passage the sea serves as a perfect drop to bring out the small figures seen in the distance. At another point in the story David sees buildings sticking out against the sea:

There began to fall a greyness on the sea; little dabs of pink and red, like coals of slow fire, came in the east.... The sea was extremely little, but there went a hollow plowter round the base of it. With the growing of the dawn I could see it clearer and clearer; the straight crags painted with sea-birds' droppings like a morning frost, the sloping top of it green with grass, the clan of white geese that cried about the sides, and the black, broken buildings of the prison sitting on the sea's edge.<sup>12</sup>

The contrast here is good. You have the green grass, white

---

<sup>10</sup> R. L. Stevenson, David Balfour, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1911, 338.

<sup>11</sup> Stevenson, David Balfour, 134.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 144.

geese, and black buildings -- all outlined against the gray sea and pink red sky.

Other romances, too, have their pictures framed against the sea, illustrating rather well that these sharp, well-lighted scenes were instinctive with Stevenson. In Ebb-Tide the point of view is once again the beach from which the ship Farallone is seen:

The schooner Farallone lay well out in the jaws of the pass, where the terrified pilot had made haste to bring her to her moorings and escape. Seen from the beach, through the thin line of shipping, two objects stood conspicuous to seaward, -- the little isle, on the one hand, with its palms, and the guns and batteries raised forty years before in defense of Queen Pomare's capital; and out-cast Farallone upon the other, banished to the threshold of the port, rolling there to her scuppers, and flaunting the plague flag as she rolled. A few seabirds screamed and cried about the ship, and within easy range a man-of-war guard-boat hung off and on, and glittered with the weapons of marines. The exuberant daylight and the blinding heaven of the tropics picked out and framed the picture. <sup>13</sup>

Stevenson paints another vivid picture in The Wrecker, in which the wreck is sighted "pencilled on heaven.":

An endless wildness of ranging billows came and went and danced in the circle of the glass; now and then a pale corner of sky, or the strong line of the horizon rugged with heads of waves; and then of a sudden...one glimpse of what we had come so far and paid so dear to see: the masts and rigging of a

---

<sup>13</sup> Stevenson, Ebb-Tide, 262.

brig pencilled on heaven, with an ensign streaming at the main, and the ragged ribbons of a topsail thrashing from the yard. Again and again, with a toilful searching, I recalled that apparition. There was no sign of any land; the wreck stood between the sea and sky, a thing the most isolated I had ever viewed.<sup>14</sup>

Sometimes Stevenson can give his images that hard line by a mere phrase, as he does in Treasure Island when he describes the sailor with the "mahogany face."<sup>15</sup> Or he might use a simile as in Ebb-Tide where he says: "...images in the lagoon like things carved of metal."<sup>16</sup>

Again, there are pictures in Stevenson's romances, less notable for their sharpness, but remarkable for their brightness. So many of his incidents, no matter how villainous or bloody, take place in the full light of the day's sun. Kidnapped's fight in the roundhouse,<sup>17</sup> Treasure Island's storming of the stockade,<sup>18</sup> -- each is a picture bright with sun. Even Silver's cruel murder of Tom is a clear, sunlit scene:

Just before him Tom lay motionless upon the sward; but the murderer minded him not a whit, cleansing his knife the while upon a wisp of grass. Everything was unchanged, the sun still shining mercilessly on the streaming marsh and the tall pinnacle of the moun-

- 
- 14 Stevenson, The Wrecker, 237.  
 15 Stevenson, Treasure Island, 61.  
 16 Stevenson, Ebb-Tide, 373.  
 17 Stevenson, Kidnapped, 76-84.  
 18 Stevenson, Treasure Island, 153-160.

tain, and I could scarce persuade myself that murder had been actually done, a human life cruelly cut short a moment since, before my eyes. 19

There are also some well-lighted, colorful scenes in The Wrecker during the voyage of the Norah Creina:

I love to recall the glad monotony of a Pacific voyage, when the trades are not stinted, and the ship, day after day, goes free. The mountain scenery of trade-wind clouds, watched (and in my case painted) under every vicissitude of light -- blotting stars, withering in the moon's glory, barring the scarlet eve, lying across the dawn, collapsed into the unfeatured morning bank, or at noon raising their snowy summits between the blue roof of heaven and the blue floor of sea.... Day after day the sun flamed; night after night the moon beacons; or the stars paraded their lustrous regiment. 20

A description like this, so clear and colorful, plays an important role in a Stevenson romance. Such scenes when repeated set up an atmosphere, which may last through a whole story, an atmosphere the exact opposite of gloomy and utterly devoid of brooding darkness.

Naturally enough, color is an element that enhances the bright vividness of Stevenson's images. The solid colors of Skeltery have already been mentioned -- the crimson, blue, green, and black used in painting the miniature figures. Oddly enough

---

19 Ibid., 108.

20 Stevenson, The Wrecker, 220-221.

these are the colors Stevenson uses most, especially red. He seems to employ red paint in his romances with the same relish he had for the crimson of Skelt. Remember his words when describing the colors of Skeltery! "With crimson lake -- hark to the sound of it! Crimson lake!"

The Stevenson romance, you might say, is peppered with red. Paging through Stevenson, you find here and there: "a servant lass with a red face";<sup>21</sup> the "red haired Fox";<sup>22</sup> a man in a "red night cap";<sup>23</sup> "his face itself as red as a red ensign";<sup>24</sup> "red in the face";<sup>25</sup> "a red bearded Scot";<sup>26</sup> "reddish hair";<sup>27</sup> "Att-water smiled like a red Indian";<sup>28</sup> "red syrup";<sup>29</sup> "his face crimson";<sup>30</sup> "the great red fire".<sup>31</sup>

David Balfour is itself a study in red. Whenever Neil of the Tom is mentioned, his red hair is also noted. He is introduced as a "red-haired, big headed man";<sup>32</sup> later the "red head of

21 Stevenson, Kidnapped, 164.

22 Ibid., 144.

23 Stevenson, Treasure Island, 158.

24 Ibid., 196.

25 Ibid., 105.

26 Stevenson, The Wrong Box, 78.

27 Ibid., 123.

28 Stevenson, Ebb-Tide, 394.

29 Ibid., 236.

30 Stevenson, St. Ives, 138.

31 Stevenson, Weir of Hermiston, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1911, 33.

32 Stevenson, David Balfour, 9.



Neil of the Tom" is seen;<sup>33</sup> again Alan Breck says: "I like the appearing of this red-headed Neil as little as yourself";<sup>34</sup> and finally David refers to his "friend red-headed Neil."<sup>35</sup>

Along with red-headed Neil, other spots of red appear on the pages of David Balfour. A few instances are: "the face like scarlet";<sup>36</sup> "red-mad about the Gregara";<sup>37</sup> and "a coat of fire."<sup>38</sup>

In the killing of the red-haired Thevenin in A Lodging for the Night, Stevenson appears to apologize for his use of the color red, as though he were guilty of an obsession. Montigny, after murdering Thevenin, whose "bald head shone rosily in a garland of red curls,"<sup>39</sup> looks down at him and says: "What right has a man to have red hair when he is dead?"<sup>40</sup> With these words Stevenson seems to say, "I'm sorry, but I love red. I simply must work it in somehow."

Harking back again to Skelt, it is interesting to note the preference for red in his figures. In most of Wilson's illustrations it is evident not only in the costumes, but also on the countenances of the miniature Thespians. It is possible that

33 Ibid., 82.

34 Ibid., 97.

35 Ibid., 240.

36 Ibid., 299.

37 Ibid., 266.

38 Ibid., 54.

39 Stevenson, A Lodging for the Night, 290.

40 Ibid., 294.

Stevenson, even in his younger days, became used to giving a slight dash of red even to the faces of his heroes and heroines and villains. Nor could he resist the temptation when writing his romances in later years.

For Chesterton, again, the "Painted Rock" in St. Ives is still another symbol of Stevenson's style, a style that "was always vivid with color."<sup>41</sup> "The landscapes of Skelt," he says, "consisted entirely of painted rocks."<sup>42</sup> The "Painted Rock" to which he refers is really called "The Painted Hill." But rock or hill it indeed makes a striking image:

The old name of that rock on which our prison stood was (I have heard since) the Painted Hill. Well, now it was all painted a bright yellow with our costumes; and the dress of the soldiers, who guarded us being of course the essential red rag, we made up together the elements of a lively picture of hell.<sup>43</sup>

Yes, the bright yellow and red of the "Painted Hill" is symbolic -- it stands for all the splashes of color that appear in quick flashes in Stevenson's works. There is Alan Breck's "Red waistcoat, breeches of black plush, blue coat with silver bottoms and handsome silver lace";<sup>44</sup> the man "with green eyes";<sup>45</sup>

41 Chesterton, 144.

42 Ibid., 144.

43 Stevenson, St. Ives, 5.

44 Stevenson, Kidnapped, 66.

45 Ibid., 49.

the "greencoated gentleman";<sup>46</sup> the "yellow-eyed man";<sup>47</sup> the "ungodly buccaneer with the blue face";<sup>48</sup> Silver's green and yellow parrot;<sup>49</sup> "inkily blue sea";<sup>50</sup> "the long vermillion feather of its tail";<sup>51</sup> the man "in kilts of blue";<sup>52</sup> and finally "the blue trousers and brown socks" on the corpse.<sup>53</sup>

Little details! But all are the solid, durable colors of Skelt, and how they brighten the pages of heart-throbbing romance!

- 
- 46 Stevenson, St. Ives, 111.  
 47 Stevenson, Treasure Island, 216.  
 48 Ibid., 250.  
 49 Ibid., 76, 167.  
 50 Stevenson, Ebb-Tide, 306.  
 51 Ibid., 306.  
 52 Ibid., 316.  
 53 Stevenson, St. Ives, 126.

CHAPTER V  
A FINAL WORD

Illustrating an influence is much like trying to prove Peter is the living image of his father. Both can be difficult. For when you say, "Peter is a chip off the old block," there are always a few who will look at you doubtfully. They see no resemblance, either because they know little about father and son, or because they simply had not thought of it before.

However, if you explain a bit, pointing out that Peter has his father's hair-line, his hands, and his gait, you may get a smile, but still be quite unimpressive. So far you have not said enough. Until you explain that Peter, like his father, has the same hobby, expresses himself in the same clipped phrases, is orderly and business-like in everything he does -- and perhaps the family enters the picture to nod agreement to your words -- will the skeptical see the resemblance and admit it.

To say that Skelt and Stevenson are alike as father and son puts no great strain on the simile. The similarity between the two has been amply illustrated; they have much in common. Each has the melodramatist's subject-matter, the pirates, the thrilling incidents, the combats; each the flair for color, the insis-

tance on bright clear backgrounds -- to mention only the more important traits treated. But it was anticipated that mere illustrations would not be totally conclusive. The approving nod would be needed from intimates of both Skelt and Stevenson. Chesterton, who knew them well, lends the weight of his approval to the evidence at hand.

Nor is Chesterton the only man to detect the bold face of Skelt on Stevenson's pages. There are others; men like Raleigh, Cornford, Rice, and Swinnerton, -- each one a recognized authority on Stevenson. Pinero and Noyes also are capable of giving extremely valid criticism.

Yet in a way the critics are not needed to testify to Skelt's influence, for Stevenson's own voice is loud enough to hear, his own words frank and unblushing. With relish he repeats them once again: "What am I? what are life, art, letters, the world, but what my Skelt has made them?"

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Primary Sources

Stevenson, R. L., Works of Robert Louis Stevenson, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911, 26 vols.

-----, Works of Robert Louis Stevenson, South Seas Edition, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925, 32 vols.

-----, Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson, Biographical Edition, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911, 4 vols.

### Books and Articles on Stevenson

Adeock, Arthur St. John, Robert Louis Stevenson: His Work and Personality, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1924.

Balfour, Graham, The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915.

Chesterton, G. K., Robert Louis Stevenson, New York, Dodd, Mead and Co., 1928.

Cornford, L. C., Robert Louis Stevenson, New York, Dodd, Mead and Co., 1900.

Cunliffe, John W., "Robert Louis Stevenson," English Literature of the Last Half-Century, New York, Macmillan Co., 1923, 87-100.

Dalglish, Doris R., The Presbyterian Pirate, Oxford, Eng., Oxford University Press, 1937.

Dark, Sidney, Robert Louis Stevenson, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1931.

Dawson, W. J., "Robert Louis Stevenson," The Makers of English Fiction, New York, Fleming H. Revell Co., 1905, 241-267.

Hammerton, John A., Stevensoniana, Edinburgh, John Grant Co., 1910.

- Johnson, Lionel, "R. L. Stevenson," Post Liminium, London, Elkin Mathews, 1912, 106-111.
- Lang, Andrew, "Mr. Stevenson's Works," Essays in Little, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901, 24-35.
- Masson, Rosaline, Robert Louis Stevenson, New York, W. and R. Chambers, 1923.
- Quiller-Couch, (Sir) Arthur T., "Robert Louis Stevenson," Adventures in Criticism, New York, Putnam, 1925, 83-106.
- Raleigh, (Sir) Walter A., Robert Louis Stevenson, New York, Longmans, Green, 1908.
- Rice, R. A., Robert Louis Stevenson: How to Know Him, Indianapolis, Bobbs Merrill Co., 1916.
- Steuart, J. A., Robert Louis Stevenson, Boston, Brown, Little Co., 1924, 2 vols.
- Swinnerton, Frank, R. L. Stevenson, New York, George H. Doran Co. 1923.
- Wagenknecht, E. C., "Romance Resurgent: Robert Louis Stevenson," Cavalcade of the English Novel, New York, Henry Holt Co., 1943, 373-385.

#### Books and Articles on the Juvenile Drama

- Brown, J. M., "Children of Skelt; Alfred Lunt Collection of Miniature Theatres," Saturday Review of Literature, XXX (1947), 20-23.
- Fisher, H. K., "Time's Twopenny Coloured Telescope - Victorian Plays Seen Through 19th Century Toy Theatre Plates," Life and Letters Today, XXVII (1940), 184-196.
- Lane, M., "Juvenile Drama," New Statesman and Nation, XXVII (1944), 155.
- Matthews, Brander, "A Moral from a Toy Theatre," Scribner's Magazine, LVIII (1915), 406-410.

- Nott, S.C., "Penny Plain Twopence Coloured," Drama, XV (1925), 145-147.
- Pilcher, V., "Children of Skelt," Theatre Arts, IX (1925), 792-803.
- Wilson, A. E., Penny Plain Twopence Coloured, London, George G. Harrap and Co., 1932.



APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Malcolm T. Carron, S.J., has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English, West Baden College, West Baden Springs, Indiana.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

June 30, 1948  
Date

John B. Courath, S.J.  
Signature of Adviser