To jump or not to jump: Stevenson's kidnapping of Adventure.

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To jump or not to jump: Stevenson's *Kidnapping* of Adventure

> 'Here,' he would say, 'here's a dub for ye to jump, my Whiggie! I ken you're a fine jumper!'
>
> Robert Louis Stevenson, *Kidnapped*.

Kidnapped, published in the same year as *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, admittedly explores the same fundamental inner duality as Stevenson's mythical story: Alan Breck versus David Balfour, or the highlands versus the lowlands, Jacobites versus Whig Hanoverians, the dying feudal clan structure versus the modern industrialised kingdom – the two conflicting and intertwined impulses of Scotland's identity, in a time of historical mutation.[1] Yet David and Alan unexpectedly but compellingly present the reader with quite another type of duality: while romantic and courageous Alan is a dashing, indeed a heroic jumper, David, the unassuming first-person narrator, consistently cuts a rather poor figure when it comes to actual jumping, to the point that in times of quarrels, his clumsy jumps become an explicit and ironic bone of contention between the two friends.

Jumps can be marked as classical *topoi* of adventure stories, they constitute incidental moments of intensity, decisive moves and crucial episodes, they typically signal the beginning of adventure, accelerate the rhythm and concentrate the action, as much as they conjure up the necessary jubilatory ingredients of danger, imminence and disruption – pirates boarding ships, prisoners escaping, young girl eloping. Stevenson's adventure novels do not disprove the rule, and stage quite a number of spectacular jumps and leaps, so much so that the recurrence of the motif might help build an index of closeness to the adventure genre: fourteen occurrences of "leap" in *Kidnapped*, eighteen

[1] Jean-Pierre Naugrette analyses in close detail the ambivalent duality of *Kidnapped* in the general context of Stevenson's other novels in *Robert Louis Stevenson. L'Aventure et son double*. Paris: Presses de l'Ecole Normale Supérieure, 1987, pp. 91-99.

occurrences in *The Dynamiter*, no fewer than thirty-one occurrences in *Catriona* – to be read against Jim Hawkins's staunch and symptomatic refusal to jump in *Treasure Island*, despite the doctor's eager solicitations:

> 'Jim,' the doctor interrupted, and his voice was quite changed, 'Jim, I can't have this. Whip over, and we'll run for it.'
>
> 'Doctor,' said I, 'I passed my word.'
>
> 'I know, I know,' he cried. 'We can't help that, Jim, now. I'll take it on my shoulders, holus bolus, blame and shame, my boy; but stay here, I cannot let you. Jump! One jump, and you're out, and we'll run for it like antelopes.'
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> 'No,' I replied; 'you know right well you wouldn't do the thing yourself – neither you nor squire nor captain; and no more will I' (Stevenson, *Treasure* ch. 30)

In *Kidnapped*, Stevenson explicitly highlights, questions and transposes the usually taken for granted motif of the jump, and such mutation in the treatment of the jump exemplifies the mutation of the adventure novel at the turn of the century: Stevenson delineates the jump as a crucial and paradoxical theoretical space, as a formal tool to illustrate the modernity of the adventure novel, as a necessary break of continuity, as a temptation to stray from Zola's linear compactness and question French naturalism, and as a dynamic incentive to stimulate the mutation of the adventure novel that Stevenson pleaded for – thus seducing the French critics of the *NRF* into taking the audacious and unexpected leap for adventure, to desert naturalism and elect British adventure writers in general and Stevenson in particular as desirable lines of literary escape.

There are indeed two very distinct types of jump in *Kidnapped*. On the one hand Alan, as a character, dutifully takes the conventional spectacular leaps in order to gratify the aficionados of Adventure, and thus takes the novel along the incidental and disruptive course that Stevenson favoured. On the other hand, I will argue that David's fragmented little bounces and unassuming half-jumps are not so deficient after all, and read as subversive attempts to displace, to deconstruct the genre:

they trigger an essential literary mutation as it was best expressed by Jacques Rivière, followed by the whole of the *NRF*: "L'aventure, c'est la forme de l'œuvre plutôt que sa matière" (Rivière 69). As he hesitates right in the middle of his jumps, he forces the reader to pause and focus on the formal use of the jump, to consider it not only as a necessary ingredient of Adventure, as contractual content, but as a dynamic form the structural characteristics of which can be imported in the form of the novel itself. It is above all *as a narrator* that David marks the jump as a crucial, problematic space: importing the jump as a form, as a break of continuity, he follows Jim's example and comes up with a narration that favours gaps, imminence, fragmentation, perpetual advent. Stuck in the middle of the river, "upon the middle rock" (Stevenson, *Kidnapped* 137) – "So there we stood, side by side upon a small rock slippery with spray, a far broader leap in front of us" (Stevenson, *Kidnapped* 137) – adequately defining himself as "betwixt and between" (Stevenson, *Kidnapped* 60), David does not refer to his political preference only, and does not only situate himself in the line of Scott's Waverleyian heroes: it is as one of Stevenson's first-person narrators that he elects the Middle as a favourite dynamic space of literary innovation, certainly in between Whigs and Jacobites, but above all in between naturalism and modernism, in a neutral intensive opening, right in the middle of a jump from one literary system to another. David's physical misgivings thus contrast with his being a very bold *narrative* jumper: he forces the readers to mind the gap, to explore it as an open space, as a tool for literary mutation.

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To jump or not to jump: Alan versus David.

Alan is unquestionably characterised by his striking heroic jumps in *Kidnapped* – no fewer than three decisive and highly dangerous leaps, that in turn condition the course of the story. Unanticipated, totally heterogeneous, he bursts in the middle of nowhere, and literally boards the story with a dashing jump. His thoroughly unexpected irruption on the *Covenant* jumpstarts and sidetracks the adventure for David: his particularly intense jumping feat accelerates the story, he

intervenes as a radical, as an emphatic incident[1], as the essentially adventurous advent of the unexpected, illustrating Rivière's definition of adventure: "L'aventure c'est ce qui advient, c'est-à-dire ce qui s'ajoute, ce qui arrive par-dessus le marché, ce qu'on n'attendait pas. Un roman d'aventure c'est le récit d'événements qui ne sont pas contenus les uns dans les autres" (Rivière 66). Whereas the collision proves deadly for the rest of the crew, Alan alone survives, thanks to a particularly intense jumping feat, and changes David's fate: "At the moment of the blow, the stern had been thrown into the air, and the man (having his hands free, and for all he was encumbered with a frieze overcoat that came below his knees) had leaped up and caught hold of the brig's bowsprit" (Stevenson, *Kidnapped* 56). During their flight in the heather, Alan once more pumps adrenaline in the story and defies death through a particularly hazardous double jump: "Alan looked neither to the right nor to the left, but **jumped clean upon** the middle rock and fell there on his hands and knees to check himself, for that rock was small and he might have pitched over on the far side. [...] Then, putting his hands to his mouth and his mouth to my ear, he shouted 'Hang or drown!' and turning his back upon me, **leaped over** the farther branch of the stream, and landed safe" (Stevenson, *Kidnapped* 137). Finally, as the soldiers are close on their heels and threaten to catch up with them, Alan once more saves the day and jumps up a rock to provide them both with a safe shelter: "It was only at the third trial, and then by standing on my shoulders and leaping up with such force as I thought must have broken my collar-bone, that he secured a lodgement" (Stevenson, *Kidnapped* 138).

Alan thus intervenes in the story as a pure, autonomous event, as an improbable, random disruption, as "a talisman

[1] The notion of "incident", the idea that the form of a novel should be "incidental", was crucial to Stevenson. In a letter to Henry James, he thus pleaded with his friend: "Could you pitch the incidents [...] in a slightly more emphatic way – as if it were an episode from one of the old (so-called) novels of adventure?" Ernest Mehew (Ed.), *The Selected Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson.* p. 272.

against the naturalist credo"[1]. He embodies Stevenson's desire to break the causal linearity of naturalist narration: as a "brute incident", he jumps lines of escape open by diverting the smooth, planned course of the story, he himself generates a narrative jump, an unbridgeable gap, a solution of continuity. In an article on Zola, James expressed the same desire as Stevenson to make narration less determined, less necessary and continuous than the naturalists had strived to build it: "*Vérité* marks the rigid straightness of his course from point to point. He had seen his horizon and his fixed goal from the first, and no cross-scent, no new distance, no blue gap in the hill to right or to left ever tempted him to stray" (James 405). Alan intervenes in the narration precisely as a perpetual cross-scent, as a series of "gaps in the hill", jamming the course of the narration, placing the story in an unstable state of constant happening, replacing causality by chance, and construction by circumstances. He brilliantly materialises the reason why the French literary critics, converted by Marcel Schwob's introduction of Stevenson in France[2], opted for adventure, because "owing to realism and human logic, the French writers have exiled the unexpected from the novel, and yet most of life is unexpected [...]. Defoë, Fielding, Dickens, Stevenson had a passion for adventure: they bathed their characters in it, as in a vividly coloured reagent".[3] Alan definitely is one of those incidental characters that helped unsettle and derail the naturalist machinery: his jumps efficiently break up and dissolve narrative linearity, and explicitly mark out Stevenson's groundbreaking and dissident choice for a discontinuous, random progression of the text.

Now David is another, more complicated story: he visibly does not quite measure up to Alan in terms of actual jumping, as the latter is rather too prompt to underline it, thus

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[1] In *Une Amitié littéraire : Henry James Robert Louis Stevenson*, Paris: Payot, 1987, Michel Le Bris defines "the event" as "le seul talisman contre le credo réaliste", p. 30.

[2] Marcel Schwob, *Spicilège*, Paris : Mercure de France, 1960 (1896).

[3] My translation of "Sous prétexte de réalisme et de logique humaine, les romanciers français ont exilé du roman l'imprévu, l'imprévu qui est presque toute la vie [...]. Un Defoë, un Fielding, un Dickens, un Stevenson ont la passion de l'aventure : ils y baignent leurs personnages comme dans un réactif vivement coloré", in Henry Ghéon, « *L'histoire de Mr Polly*, par H.G. Wells », *NRF*, janvier 1912, p. 126.

explicitly calling attention to the jump as a noteworthy space of discussion: " 'Ye're not very gleg at the jumping,' said he" (Stevenson, *Kidnapped* 138), or even as a bone of contention: "'Here,' he would say, 'here's a dub for ye to jump, my Whiggie! I ken you're a fine jumper!'" (Stevenson, *Kidnapped* 172). Indeed, whereas Alan steadily leaps *up*, jumps clean *upon*, leaps *over*, David's jumps all seem to dysfunction, and to fall short of the required level of excitement in adventure novels. As contrasted with Alan's active bound onto the ship, David's jump out of the wrecked *Covenant* amounts rather to a passive fall: "at the sudden tilting of the ship I was cast clean over the bulwarks into the sea" (Stevenson, *Kidnapped* 89), and the passive form is once more resorted to when David finally lands on the island: "I was cast upon a little, barren isle, and cut off on every side by the salt sea" (Stevenson, *Kidnapped* 92). Later, when it is time to leave the islet, the rescue is everything but spectacular, the escape far from adventurous: when the laughing fishermen eventually manage to make him understand that Earraid is not much of an island after all, and that the low tide allows him to wade across "a little trickle of water" (Stevenson, *Kidnapped* 89), David pathetically hops back to his starting point, and his diminutive backward little bounces heavily contrast with Alan's ample forward bounds: "At that I turned tail upon their boat (where my adviser had once more begun to tee-hee with laughter) leaped back the way I had come, from one stone to another" (Stevenson, *Kidnapped* 98). Finally, the crucial episode of the river jump leaves David stranded on a rock, in the middle of the river, in a suspended half-jump. The first half of the jump is a kind of mechanical, reflex bound on the part of David, who instinctively follows Alan's impetus: "I had scarce time to measure the distance or to understand the peril, before I had followed him, and he had caught and stopped me" (Stevenson, *Kidnapped* 137). Nevertheless, whereas Alan, after a drink of brandy, leaps to the shore, daringly defying death, and thus scoring "adventure marks", David cannot bring himself to complete the jump:

> When I saw where I was, there came on me a deadly sickness of fear, and I put my hand over my eyes. Alan took me and shook me; I saw he was speaking, but the roaring of the falls and the trouble of my

> mind prevented me from hearing; only I saw his face was red with anger, and that he stamped upon the rock. The same look showed me the water raging by, and the mist hanging in the air; and with that, I covered my eyes again and shuddered. [...] I was now alone upon the rock, which gave me the more room; the brandy was singing in my ears; I had this good example fresh before me, and just wit enough to see that if I did not leap at once, I should never leap at all. I bent low on my knees and flung myself forth, with that kind of anger of despair that has sometimes stood me instead of courage. Sure enough, it was but my hands that reached the full length; these slipped, caught again, slipped again; and I was sliddering back into the lynn, when Alan seized me, first by the hair, then by the collar, and with a great strain dragged me into safety (Stevenson, *Kidnapped* 137).

In a way that anticipates on Lord Jim's famous "non-jump" in Conrad's novel[1], David's jump is a kind of missed jump, that is inscribed in the text mainly on the negative mode – "if I did not leap at once, I should never leap at all" – and that is further undermined and dissolved by the self-disparaging synonym: "I flung myself forth", a kind of reluctant, careless, half-conscious jump, that is only a success owing to Alan's intervention.

If the jump is such a mark of Stevenson's modernity, how come then that David, the first-person narrator, should be such a reluctant jumper, should grudge the reader his adventurous due, and consistently spoil these purple patches of adventure? It seems that David's attitude to jumps can be interpreted as the symptom of Stevenson's desire to inscribe the mutation of the adventure novel, by situating adventure not so much in the contents as in the form of the novel, by emptying the novel of actual adventurous events, and inventing a form that

[1] For a further study of the treatment of the motif of the jump in *Lord Jim*, see Nathalie Jaëck, « Le saut manqué : aventure et imminence de Sherlock Holmes à Lord Jim », in Hervé Fourtina, Nathalie Jaëck, Joël Richard (Eds.), *Aventure(s)*. Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2008.

would internalise adventure. James had noted Stevenson's "love of brave words as well as brave deeds", and indeed, David's reluctance to jump is to be read against his narrative ability to introduce in his account the formal jumps and gaps that he fails to deliver physically. David's case perfectly illustrates Ricardou's crucial inversion, the very reason why Stevenson became a favourite among French literary critics: "The narration is no longer the writing of an adventure, but the adventure of writing".[1] David may not be very nimble at physical jumping, but he can be seen as Alan's literary version, as Alan's formal double – his problematisation of the space of the jump proving to be a literary asset, a way for Stevenson to formalise the jump, to import its specificities in the form of the narration itself.

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A mutation of the adventure novel: David as Alan's formal alter ego.

Indeed, the dissolution of the motif of the jump triggers a further degradation, and David's failed, passive jump from the wrecked *Covenant* seems to bring about a more serious literary wreckage, that of the "old" conventional adventure novel. Stevenson seems to engage in an active, "gleeful participation in subverting his own text"[2], as he gradually empties his novel of all the contractual ingredients of adventure. Despite David's insistent anchoring his text within the genre of the adventure novel – from the subtitle, "Memoirs of the Adventures of David Balfour in the year 1751" onwards: "I had left my adventure then and there" (13), "I began the most unhappy part of my adventures" (91), "tunes of my own south country that made me fain to be home from my adventures" (144), "as he thus moralized on my adventures" (200) – and despite the fact that before the wreckage, the story is crammed full of classical *topoi* – an orphan boy taking the road, a villain in a mysterious derelict old mansion, an attempted murder, a kidnapping, blows on the head and further murders, an eventful boat journey in the

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[1] « Le récit n'est plus l'écriture d'une aventure, mais l'aventure d'une écriture », in Jean Ricardou, *Pour une Théorie du nouveau roman*, Paris : Seuil, 1971.

[2] Alan Sandison, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism*, London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1996, p. 53.

claws of a mercenary crew – the wreckage and the pathetic jump mark the beginning of the end, the gradual dereliction of typical adventure: the deserted island that typically ranks high both in the hit list of adventure novels' favourites in general and of course in Stevenson's private system as well, proves to be a mock-island, that only highlights the ineligibility of David as a suitable hero. From then on, *Kidnapped* seems to conscientiously erase or downplay virtually all outstanding events: until the end, the novel will quite exclusively consist of a flight, only interrupted by a game of cards, a pipe contest, a pathetic quarrel and an aborted fight, that cannot exactly be retained as ideal adventurous events.

Action leaves way to the account of the broken, random course of the two friends across the country, and the chapter titles, symptomatically repeating one another, quite against the usual character of Adventure Novels' chapter titles, inscribe the suspension of the action and the dissolution of events: "Chapter XX. The flight in the heather: the rocks. Chapter XXI. The flight in the heather: the Heugh of Corrynakiegh. Chapter XXII. The flight in the heather: the moor. Chapter XXIV. The flight in the heather: the quarrel. Chapter XXVI. End of the flight: we pass the Forth." The title of Chapter XVIII, that reinterprets the action in exclusively literary terms, and evacuates contents in favour of form and language – "I talk with Alan in the wood of Lettermore" –, explicitly defines the exact nature of the second half of the novel. From the shipwreck onwards, *Kidnapped* is indeed the story of a wandering course as well as the story of a discourse, the metatextual story of Alan's and David's "driftings" (Stevenson, *Kidnapped* 219), or "rollings" (Stevenson, *Kidnapped* 200), or "wanderings" (Stevenson, *Kidnapped* 200), and Stevenson's writing approaches Gilles Deleuze's definition: "Ecrire n'est pas raconter ses souvenirs" (Deleuze, *Critique* 12), "Ecrire n'a rien à voir avec signifier, mais avec arpenter, carthographier, même des contrées à venir". (Deleuze, *Mille* 11). As the ambivalent, nearly antiphrastic subtitle, "Memoirs of the Adventures", suggests, *Kidnapped* could be seen as a kind of literary mutation in progress, from Memoirs to Adventure, that is to say from a retrospective, omniscient, distanced, continuous narration to prospective, broken, wandering, level writing, only able to follow the drifting

course of the action itself. David's failure to jump is favourably compensated for by his ability to achieve a great literary jump, by his exploration of the gap as a crucial tool for literary mutation. Stevenson had indeed warned the readers from chapter I: just like Pip in *Great Expectations*, who sees language as a set of forms to be interpreted, as a game of cubes to be manipulated, David embarks on his adventure with forms as his only luggage, offered by Mr Campbell: "The first, which is round, will likely please you best at the first off-go. [...] The second, which is flat and square and written upon, will stand by you through life. [...] And as for the last, which is cubical, that'll see you, it my prayerful wish, into a better land." (Stevenson, *Kidnapped* 10) This powerfully echoes Stevenson's claim, in "A Humble Remonstrance", that "A proposition of geometry does not compete with life; and a proposition of geometry is a fair and luminous parallel to a work of art"[1]. David's aim in *Kidnapped*, just like Jim's aim in *Treasure Island*, is thus *not* to jump, to push contents aside, and thus to embark the adventure novel on the journey to formal innovation.

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David's formal gaps: Stevenson's creation of narrative discontinuity.

There remains to specify the stylistic ways in which the gap is imported within the form of the narration itself by David. In the very words of the trustworthy Mr Rankeillor, the whole of the account itself can indeed be considered as a kind of superlative gap, as an altogether missing space, that David needs to fill: "'The brig was lost on June the 27th,' says he, looking in his book, 'and we are now at August the 24th. Here is a considerable hiatus, Mr Balfour, of near upon 2 months'" (Stevenson, *Kidnapped* 197). The word "hiatus" is bound to ring an intertextual bell: "the great hiatus" is how specialists in the

[1] Robert Louis Stevenson, "A Humble Remonstrance", Longman's Magazine, 5 (November 1884), 139– 47. Reprinted in *Memories and Portraits* (1887), 275–99. This response to Henry James's "The Art of Fiction" in *Longman's Magazine*, September 1884, led to a life-long friendship, and a particularly remarkable correspondence on the nature and aims of fiction. The complete letters can be found in

Sherlock Holmes stories named the gap between Holmes' suspended false jump down the Reichenbach Falls in "The Final Problem", and his spectacular return in "The Adventure of the Empty House", ten years later – another successful exploitation of the literary assets of the gap. In his own account for "the hiatus", David clearly embeds the process, and comes up with a distinctly discontinuous, dashingly adventurous form of writing.

Though David, trying to don the typical clothes of the realist omniscient narrator, climbs "on top of the hill" (Stevenson, *Kidnapped* 12) at the beginning of his adventures to get a panoptic view of the land and determine his course with precision, he can only manage "a rough direction" (12), and, not knowing where to go, to randomly explore his environment, and literally write as he walks, randomly, with no specific aim in mind. His primary piece of advice to the reader is to read the text against a map, thus comforting the link between writing and exploring: "The reader would do well to look at a map" (77), and indeed, the course of David's narration is just as discontinuous as their accidental, arbitrary itinerary, as unsure and unspecific as their direction : "But for the details of our itinerary, I am all to seek; our way lying now by short cuts, now by great detours; our pace being so hurried; our time of journeying usually by night; and the names of such places as I asked and heard, being in the Gaelic tongue and the more easily forgotten." (Stevenson, *Kidnapped* 136) The juxtaposed structure of Alan's sentence, the semi-colons that build a series of independent clauses, the –ING forms that replace the structural, unifying role of a principal conjugated verb, all contribute to make the sentence an exact verbal reproduction of the dotted line Stevenson asked his cousin to trace across the physical map of Scotland to indicate their itinerary: "On the large map, a red line is to show the wanderings of my hero after his shipwreck. It must be sometimes dotted to show uncertainty; sometimes full" (Stevenson, "Note to Map", *Kidnapped*, xxiv). Just like the dotted line, David's account rarely is rarely full, and the spaces between the full line grow wider and wider, owing to two crucial reasons.

On the one hand, David's partial knowledge, his surface view of things necessarily creates some gaps in his narration: in the same way as Jim falls asleep on the *Hispaniola* and thus

misses crucial parts of the conversation between the pirates, David's raving fits and faintings during his fever, as well as his long illness – "I had scarce lain down upon the bed before I fell into a kind of trance, in which I continued almost the whole time of our stay in the Cage" (163); "I lay bed-ridden for no more than a week" (177) –, prevent him from witnessing the whole of the action. Or it may also be that he arrives too late, or is pushed aside the central site of the action, as for the crucial murder of the Red Fox, that leaves David and the reader with an unsolved mystery, with a textual blank. David's account thus replaces continuous linearity with narrative hops and bounces, in between a few linear spells: "Sometimes I was broad awake and understood what passed; sometimes I only heard voices or men snoring, like the voice of a silly river" (163). Stevenson thus tears wide gaps in his text, opens up the possibilities, leaving it to the imagination of the reader to fill in the blanks, to try and reconstitute the broken, dotted line of the narration. David often vacates the crucial position of the narrator, or rather constitutes it as a discontinuous space, obeying Stevenson's sacred rule: "Jesus, there is but one art, to omit", as opposed to what he called the naturalists' "insane pursuit of completion"[1], or "heavy completeness": "He [Zola] would leave nothing undeveloped" (Stevenson, *Selected* 234). A virtual space is thus created between reader and text, as great portions of the adventure are left unexplained: the gap is maintained between the text and its ultimate meaning, and these sporadic interruptions and discontinuities leave the text in a state of suspension more than actual suspense, since these gaps are not designed as prolepses be filled at the end of the novel. They are built as irreducible, "undecidable" opaque zones, that define the text as an unstable construct. They thus irredeemably dilate the textual space, and its incompleteness opens what Jankelevitch calls "the formal cryptic element of adventure": "son fascinant vertige vers le non-être, l'objet sans nom et mystérieux de notre intense curiosité" (Jankelevitch 818). Suspense, a classical element of XIXth century fiction, an entirely linear process, built with the

[1] Robert Louis Stevenson, "A Note on Realism", quoted and developed in Oliver S. Buckton, "Reanimating Stevenson's Corpus", in *Nineteenth Century Literature*, 55, n°1, 2000, pp. 22-58.

aim of producing a specific later effect, transforms into its modern version of suspension: like David's abortive jumps, his literary gaps are meant to be left open.

Eventually, at the end of the sentence in which he describes their broken itinerary, David comes to the essential reason why literature should make the choice of discontinuity over linearity and closure: he is not able to define his course with accuracy, because language itself fails him: "and the names of such places as I asked and heard, being in the Gaelic tongue and the more easily forgotten". Indeed, in *Kidnapped*, language is marked as unable to provide the reader with a coherent, continuous, transparent version of reality: it is language itself that is recognized as fundamentally opaque, resisting immediate and trustworthy interpretation. In linguistic as well as historical terms, lowland David, speaking "Scotch", finds himself "betwixt and between", between the Gaelic tongue that he cannot understand, and that opens wide communication gaps between himself and the people he encounters, and the English accent, that disguises his own language into a strange, unfamiliar tongue. Repeatedly in the novel, Alan begs of his interlocutors that they should refrain from using Gaelic for David to understand – "I will ask you to speak in Scotch" (129), but the highland people have such a minimal mastery of English so that conversation is constantly broken, difficult: "With what little English he had" (100); "for she had no English" (101).

On the other hand, David's overhearing the soldiers triggers a process of linguistic defamiliarisation, a sense of estrangement from his own "correct", normative, "right" mother tongue: "It was in this way that I first heard the right English speech. [...] I was amazed at the clipping tones and the odd sing-song in which he spoke, and no less at that strange trick of dropping out the letter h" (141). David never quite gets used to his own tongue, neither to its phonetic nor to its grammatical systems, and will maintain a sense of distance to its rules, a lack of immediacy, an empirical and approximate usage: "indeed I have never grown used to it; nor yet altogether with the English grammar, as perhaps a very critical eye might here and there spy out in the memoirs" (141). Indeed, in *Kidnapped*, language is never allowed to stabilize as a coherent, agreed-upon,

transparent system, as the ideal "glasshouse"[1] Zola deemed it to be: it is constantly incomplete, often amorphous, a perpetually evading material.

In Earraid, when mutual comprehension proves crucial, David can only get fragments, a dotted line indeed from the fishermen's elaborate and continuous line of speech, "whattefer" here, "tide" there:

> Then he stood up in the boat and addressed me a long while speaking fast and with many wavings of his hand. I told him I had no Gaelic; and at this he became very angry, and I began to suspect that he thought he was talking English. Listening very close, I caught the word 'whateffer' several times; but all the rest was Gaelic, and might have been Greek and Hebrew for me.
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> 'Whatever,' said I, to show him I had caught a word.
>
> 'Yes, yes – yes, yes,' says he, and then he looked at the other men, as much as to say, 'I told you I spoke English,' and began again as hard as ever in the Gaelic.
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> This time I picked out another word, tide. Then I had a flash of hope. (Stevenson, *Kidnapped* 98)

"I began to suspect that he thought he was talking English": in this elaborate paradoxical statement, David highlights that in *Kidnapped*, everyone, not least the narrator, is a foreigner in his own tongue. Meaning is not an objective result of language, it is a performance, and the text becomes an active site for the production of meaning, through individual leaps among the stable dots – not even so stable after all, if all David can get is a faulty and extremely open "whattefer". There can be no objective text, Stevenson forcefully illustrates here, the gaps, or the blanks in the text making it clear that the meaning derived from a text is always virtual, arbitrary, transitory, that "the meaning of a literary text is no longer a definable entity but, if anything, a dynamic happening" (Iser 22), an effect to be

[1] Emile Zola, « Les romanciers naturalistes » in *Œuvres complètes*. Paris : Tchou, t. XI, p. 92.

experienced and temporarily achieved. David's hazardous jump from "whattefer" to "tide", along with the context of the fishermen waving hands, perfectly illustrate Iser's theory that "the iconic signs of literature constitute an organization of signifiers which do not serve to designate a signified object, but instead designate instructions for the production of the signified" (Iser 64).

As "whattefer" brilliantly summarises, no reader is allowed to stabilize the text, meaning is always a decision made, and not a logical, compulsory consequence of an adequate, objective set of words. Indeed, and in order to eventually rehabilitate the one that may have come to pass for "merely" a bold physical jumper, a heroic remains of the "older" adventure novel, Alan himself teaches the same lesson to David: as he wants to pass a call for help to John Breck, he reckons that he will simply need to have his silver button deposited on his window-sill, and that from Breck will be able, through an elaborate reasoning, to guess where they are hiding, and shortly turn up. Whereas David, awed by the seemingly ridiculous complexity of the process, proposes that they should quite simply write him an explicit request : "'Eh, man,' said I, drolling with him a little, 'you're very ingenious! But would it not be simpler for you to write him a few words in black and white?'" (148), Alan makes it clear that there is no such thing as a few simple transitive words in black and white, or at least that these simple words collide against a necessary opacity – an opacity that is of course major in John Breck's case: "It would be a sore job for John Breck to read it. He would have to go to school for two-three years; and it's possible we might be wearied waiting on him" (148). His method forcefully asserts that meaning is always an elaborate, hazardous construction, that no one can rely on the supposed limpidity of language.

David's linguistic "inbetweenness", his careful dislocation of the naturalist belief in the solidity of the langage as a system of communication, his insistence on its opacity illustrate Deleuze's definition of a writer as "a foreigner in his own tongue" : "Nous devons être bilingue même en une seule langue, nous devons avoir une langue mineure à l'intérieur de notre langue, nous devons faire de notre propre langue un usage mineur. Le multilinguisme n'est pas seulement la possession de

plusieurs systèmes dont chacun serait homogène en lui-même; c'est d'abord la ligne de fuite ou de variation qui affecte chaque système en l'empêchant d'être homogène" (Deleuze, *Dialogues* 11). Nearly a century later, Gilles Deleuze indeed followed the *NRF* in their admiration of British end of the XIXth century writers, in a famous article titled "De la supériorité de la littérature anglaise-américaine": according to him, these writers are remarkable for their defamiliarisation of language, for their ability to "jump intervals, jump from one interval to another".[1] David's use of language elects him as one of these most successful formal jumpers, who managed to deconstruct, to open up the compacity of langage and explore the dynamism of the gaps.

In the same way as David does not quite manage a single complete jump in *Kidnapped*, and falters in between, he does not achieve narrative closure either. *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* ends with a very dissident indefinite form and highlights the arbitrariness of the ending: "I bring the story of that unhappy Henry Jekyll to *an* end". In *Kidnapped*, Stevenson comes up even more with "an end of sorts", with a fundamentally suspended ending. David's last sentence brings him to the brink of the final step of his adventure, to the crucial moment when all the drifting could finally get channeled into resolution: "The hand of Providence brought me in my drifting to the very doors of the British Linen Company's bank" (219). In a totally unexpected and disorienting way, David halts just there, and leaves the reader stranded just before "the advent of the (final) event", right in the middle – the jump will remain suspended for six years, until the publication of *Catriona* in *Atalanta*, in 1892, the opening sentence of which takes up where David's narration had ended in *Kidnapped* and eventually bridges the gap – with the notable exception of what happened within doors: "The 25th day of August, 1751, about two in the afternoon, I, David Balfour, came forth of the British Linen Company, a porter attending me with a bag of money, and some of the chief of these merchants bowing me from their doors".

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[1] "Sauter des intervalles, sauter d'un intervalle à l'autre", in Gilles Deleuze et Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, Paris : Flammarion 1996, p. 51.

Moreover, David does not have the final word, and the literary necessity of suspension is theorized by a totally heterogeneous, intrusive third-person narrator. In brackets, both inside and outside the novel, both a remainder and a literary agenda, his intervention reads like an unstable, unidentified textual object, like a textual window that opens onto a text to come. The anonymous editor makes it clear that the ending is not the compulsory objective outcome of a narrative chain, but a matter of artistic decision, a matter of arbitrary and temporary "inclination", thus highlighting the importance of form and artistic reconstruction over realist mimesis : "The present editor *inclines* for the time to say farewell to David" (217). He settles the end of the text in a paradoxical state of permanent suspension – "How Alan escaped *may* some day set forth" (218) – lack of determination and antiphrasis: "whatever befell them, it was not dishonour, and whatever failed them, they were not found wanting to themselves" (219), in the perfect liminal state of adventure[1], in the intense present when the jump, or the text, is yet a dynamic impulse, a possibility, a temptation.

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[1] « L'aventure porte la désinence du futur. L'aventure est liée à ce temps du temps qu'on appelle le temps futur et dont le caractère essentiel est d'être indéterminé, parce qu'il est l'empire énigmatique des possibles », in « L'Aventure, l'Ennui, le Sérieux », *Philosophie morale*, Paris : Flammarion, 1998, p. 828.

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