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Kidnapping the historical novel in Stevenson's *Kidnapped*: an act of literary and political resistance.

Nathalie Jaëck

In his dedication of *Kidnapped* to Charles Baxter, Stevenson made a point of defining the book, which was first published in *Young Folks* from May to July 1886, as a light unassuming boys' novel, the only pretention of which was 'to steal some young gentleman's attention away from his Ovid, carry him awhile into the Highlands and the last century, and pack him to bed with some engaging images to mingle with his dreams'.¹ He seemed to be following in the tracks defined by Ballantyne two years before in his own preface to *The Coral Island*: history, like adventure then, ought to be 'the regions of fun' and 'unbounded amusement'² said Ballantyne, 'no furniture for the scholar's library' (p. 3) echoed Stevenson. Yet, despite his cloaking himself in the harmless guise of the entertainer, this seems more like an ironic decoy, for Stevenson had another much more critical agenda, and meant serious literary and political business in *Kidnapped*.

What I would like to discuss in this essay is that Stevenson had a double intention, a literary one and a political one, and expressed them both in terms of territorial claims – which should after all come as no surprise since *Kidnapped* is explicitly the story of an illegal expropriation and the efforts of the young hero, David, to reclaim his property. As far as literature is concerned, Stevenson tried a daring formal experiment in *Kidnapped*, and endeavoured to colonise and appropriate the territory of the historical novel as he had inherited it from Scott, to question and redefine its formal positions and come up with a new dissenting literary form. Following the random course of Alan and David through the Highlands, Stevenson indeed kidnaps the historical novel and diverts it along unorthodox lines, crucially replacing



the causal time of the historical novel with the adventurous wanderings of these two literary rebels.

But as he operates the literary mutation of the historical novel, as he resists the authoritative injunctions of historiography and specifically discards the contractual necessity of factual accuracy, Stevenson chooses to tell another story, and to turn the novel into a site of clandestine political resistance. Indeed, Alan and David's active occupation of the Highlands, and their constant escaping the vigilance of the Red Coats, amount to an underlying commentary on English imperialist behaviour in Scotland: it is a way to reappropriate the colonised territory of the Highlands, to walk over it and physically occupy the land that had been lost to English Rule. *Kidnapped* can thus be read as a double site of resistance, as a literary coup enabling to map another version behind the authoritative account of official history – the literary deterritorialisation of the historical novel allowing the re-territorialisation of Scottish identity.

Interpreting the novel in terms of territory is not a random metaphor: Stevenson indeed, as he had already done in *Treasure Island*, chose to position a map, plus a 'note to the map', at the outset of the text, and these paratextual elements stall and complexify any smooth entrance in the novel. Indeed, the reader is forced to halt there, to examine this rather bewildering 'Sketch of the Cruise of the Brig Covenant And the probable course of David Balfour's Wanderings'. Two words from its title immediately indicate that this is certainly no exhaustive map of reference: it is just the *sketch* of a *probable* course, drawn in red through an otherwise blank map. I will try to prove here that the map serves two aims in the novel: as a symbolic transcription of the historical novel, it is the outline for the new type of literature Stevenson wants to create, a metaphor providing him with a method of writing, that should thus be, like the map, exploratory, incomplete, unfinished, open. But it is also a way to empty the territory of the Highlands, to return it to a *terra incognita*, to inscribe it



only with Alan's and David's course and thus to erase the marks of colonial history, to re-appropriate and re-identify with an occupied land. In his deconstructed and unauthoritative map, Stevenson disengages geography from centralised, dominant power³, the Highlands are back to an all open territory, for them to explore freely, a 'smooth space' disencumbered from received constructions of political geographies and identities.

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In his book *Mapping Men and Empire: a Geography of Adventure*, Richard Phillips demonstrated how cartography was linked with the colonial enterprise, how mapping amounted for Europeans to imaginatively charting the world and materially possessing it: 'The late nineteenth century scramble to map was also a scramble to colonise and consolidate imperial power. European imperialism and map-making reached a simultaneous climax at the end of the nineteenth century.'⁴ He developed the idea that maps had 'a measure of authority, a power to naturalise constructions of geography and identity'⁵ and shared this power with Realistic adventure stories and the typical Robinsonades that flourished at the time.

For sure, the situation is very different with Stevenson: the map he proposes at the start of *Kidnapped* is a way to acknowledge the fact that the map is a powerful instrument of naturalisation, and to come up with a sort of counter-map or alter-map, the aim of which is precisely to accommodate politics of resistance to dominant literary and imperialist constructions. Before entering into the details of the literary and political interpretation and implications of the map, it is necessary to note its formal characteristics. The most immediately striking feature of the map to me is that it is a blank map, a mere outline map, that has been deprived of most its toponyms, with the exception of those immediately concerned by David's course.⁶ It reads as if David were indeed exploring a new virgin territory, and going through it without the constraints of previous constructions, as in a space



full of virtual ways only to be enacted by him. Such emptying of the official and fully documented map results in a map that has no history, a map that is mute.

Another characteristic of the map is that it is intentionally drawn partially wrong, as Stevenson makes it clear in his dedication to Charles Baxter: he explains in a tongue-in-cheek way that 'how the Torran Rocks have crept so near to Earraid' is '[a] nut beyond [his] ability to crack' (p. 3). Indeed, even if the map is otherwise particularly accurate as Barry Menikoff demonstrated in *Narrating Scotland*, Stevenson makes a point of inserting one obvious inadequacy, as if to exemplify the fact that a map is not a truthful representation, but always a choice, a selection and a decision, and a set of conventions as well – it was indeed current cartographic practise at the time to marginally change natural data to serve practical (or ideological) ends, as is virtually true in all mapping: in this case the practical necessity to represent the Torran rocks closer to Earraid for them to fit within the frame.⁷ This deliberate mistake in the left-hand corner of the map thus reads as a sort of metatextual wink, as a reminder that representation always takes liberties with facts and should be dissociated from absolute accuracy. This point is reinforced by the fact that the map contains no legend, no scientific referencing, and thus no instruction as to the way of interpreting it, no overhanging or authoritative pre-construction of meaning. The viewer of the map is left to wander over that unreferenced surface, with no selection or hierarchy in the information that is given, no specific direction but the tentative line of escape of David's flight: he is invited to the nomadic reading of a multiple space, endowed with nothing but a map-in-progress, a work map of physical features, mountains and valleys, that does not aim at exhaustiveness or full referencing. Indeed, interruption or lack of completion is made even clearer by another trick: in his instructions to the cartographer, Stevenson insists that the final stage of David's journey will be off the limits of the map, in its unregistered margins:



The line (full again) descends Balquhiddy from the top, turns down Strathire, strikes over Uam Var, hits Alan Water above Kippendaire, descends Alan Water to the Forth, along the N. bank of Forth to Stirling bridge, and *by road* by Alloa, Clackmannan and Culross, till it issues from the map; for I fear we don't reach Limekilns; which we really should have done, for from that point my hero crosses the Forth to Cawiden, and thence to Queensferry. Terminus Malorum. (p. xxi)

Indeed, Stevenson's emphasis on the line leaving the map foregrounds the necessary arbitrariness of the ending, stressing the fact that a map is necessarily a selection, that the frame is never all-encompassing and that representation always leaves elements aside. It plays the exact same function as the arbitrary ending of the novel: 'Just there, with his hand upon his fortune, the present editor inclines for the time to say farewell to David' (p. 219), and I must here disagree with Oliver Buckton, when he says that 'what the map cannot disclose however is the sudden abortion of David's narrative at the end of *Kidnapped*'.⁸ Through a technique of its own, through obviously subjective manipulation of its frame, the map reinforces the incompleteness of the text: it exposes strategies of containment as delusive, and treats as a myth the Realist ideal of completion. In *Kidnapped* as in all of Stevenson's texts, there is always a remainder, the closure of meaning can never be fully obtained.

Finally the line itself, the only inscription on the map, displays its own tentativeness despite the red authoritative colour, in two ways. First, as Stevenson explains to his cousin, the red line 'must be sometimes dotted to show uncertainty; sometimes full' (p. xxiv); this is a highly paradoxical and ironic demand, as if there could be some hierarchy of fiction, as if a totally fictive line could be at times less fictive than at others – and this is all the weirder since the reader can most of the time find no objective



reason for the choice of the dotted or the full line: virtually every move is made on open land, off regular roads or on the wide sea, and so there is no justifying why the line should be all dotted across Mull for example, and then full up to Gairloch. It seems to be a playful way for Stevenson to draw the attention of the reader on a crucial point: that there is no coincidence between reality and representation, that representation is by essence an active operation of transformation, hence Stevenson's provocative maxim to Charles Baxter who might reproach the text for its inconsistencies: 'It is more honest to confess at once how little I am touched by the desire of accuracy.' (p. 3) Accuracy indeed is obviously less valued by Stevenson than randomness, as he opts for what Buckton has called a 'cruising' method of writing, i.e. 'a deployment of travel as a basis for narrative structure'.⁹ He justifies what he calls 'the improbability' of David's itinerary by the fact that '[his] hero was trying to escape – like all heroes' (p. xxv). Quite clearly then, the red line on the map is very close to what Gilles Deleuze defined as 'a line of escape' on a 'smooth space', a random dynamic direction among a multiple space, and just like the literary hero, it is writing itself that should be a constant attempt at escaping static forms. Modelled on its perplexingly rich map, *Kidnapped* thus presents the reader with a redefinition of historical writing along those geographical lines and comes close to Deleuze's definition: '*Écrire n'a rien à voir avec signifier, mais avec arpenter, cartographier, même des territoires à venir.*'¹⁰

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In his efforts to do away with accuracy, it is notable that Stevenson should provocatively elect the least probable genre for the task – the historical novel, inherited from Scott and a treasured nearly sacred national genre, devoted to signifying the world. As early as the dedication to Baxter, Stevenson departs from the tradition defined by his great forbear, and treats the pivotal historical fact of *Kidnapped*, namely the Appin murder,

as he did central geographical data, braggingly making a point of distorting it: 'you will likely ask yourself more questions than I should care to answer: as for instance how the Appin murder has come to fall in the year 1751' (p. 3). Such an arbitrary decision to change the date of the Appin murder by only one year, 1751 instead of historically validated 1752, does indeed make all the difference – or the 'différance' as Derrida put it. First of all it serves to introduce as irreducible liminal gap between the text and its context; it establishes in the most brutal way (purposefully misdating a historical fact) that writing is always a reorganisation, that as Derrida put it in a brutal formulation as well: *'L'écriture interdit toute saturation du contexte'*, to mean that *'un texte écrit comporte une force de rupture avec son contexte, c'est-à-dire l'ensemble des présences qui organisent le moment de son inscription. Cette force de rupture n'est pas un prédicat accidentel, mais la structure même de l'écrit'*.¹¹

Such a gratuitous modification of the date of the Appin murder obviously rings throughout the novel, and even if, as Barry Menikoff put it, what Stevenson imagined 'is set within a frame of meticulously charted historical reality',¹² even if many real historical events are accurately recorded, the fictive worm is in the Realist fruit, and coincidence between representation and reality is efficiently prevented. It reads as if Stevenson were colonising the textual space of the historical novel, and emptying it of its contractual *topoi* as he emptied the map from its toponyms¹³. As Buckton puts it: 'he selected the historical novel for his design, and then gave it a deliberate twist. He chose to reproduce and conceal history, to invent a fiction that would paradoxically reveal and veil historical truth'.¹⁴

One of the major modifications that Stevenson superimposes upon the historical model is the fact that he manages to provide the reader with not one but several versions of history: just as on the map the line may sometimes be dotted, in the novel the way towards historical truth is rather errant as well, and the distance

from one event to another is covered through quite a number of different paths. As he first meets with Alan and can see first hand what a dashing Jacobite looks like, David volunteers a kind of historical abstract for the benefit of the reader, an abstract coming from hearsay, and rather neutral in its phrasing:

At that period (so soon after the forty-five) there were many exiled gentlemen coming back at the peril of their lives, either to see their friends or to collect a little money; and as for the Highland chiefs that had been forfeited, it was a common matter of talk how their tenants would stint themselves to send them money, and their clansmen outface the soldiery to get it in, and run the gauntlet of our great navy to carry it across. All this I had, of course, heard tell of. (pp. 59-60)

Then in chapter XII, Alan gives David his first lesson in history, in the first-person singular this time, with a rather biased kind of vocabulary ('English rogues' on p. 81 for example, has replaced 'the soldiery') and explicitly questioning the official version of the English: 'The Hielands are what they call pacified' (p. 84). A little later, during his rather pleasant encounter with Henderland, David is given yet another version, a 'rather moderate' one according to him. Henderland covers the same historical facts as Alan, but through a marginally different way, adding another perspective to the picture, another layer to history. Finally, towards the end of the novel, it is the turn of Mr Rankeillor to volunteer his own account, to voice the official Whig version, leaving it to David, adequately situated in the middle, 'betwixt and between' (p. 60) to work out his own synthesis, from that profusion of texts, to understand historic events.

Instead of *testifying* to reality as the choice of the historical novel should incline him to, Stevenson thus engages in what we could call a process of *textification*, of narrative proliferation over



reality. The reason is given by mysterious Mr Riach: 'life is all a variorum, at the best' (p. 50), echoing Stevenson's own conception of the multiplicity of reality, and thus the impossibility for art to capture and reduce that multiplicity to one authoritative version, even if it is backed by so-called historical facts¹⁵. Such a process of textification is amplified by the fact that the historical novel is written over by many other different genres, and quite disappears behind the palimpsest of fictive layers. History is transposed from reality to literature, and Stevenson starts the process as early as his dedication, calling the novel 'a tale' (p. 3), then he superimposes the whole paraphernalia of the Gothic on the early chapters, with the 'dreary' House of Shaws and 'bats' flying from 'unglazed windows' (p. 15), 'a great rattling of chains and bolts' (p. 17), 'a stooping, clay-faced creature' (p. 17), 'a dark passage' and a gaoler, (p. 20). The narrative is further defined as 'a ballad' by Mr Riach, as an 'Odyssey' and an 'epic' (p. 200) by Mr Rankeillor; it is repeatedly likened to a tale of 'adventure' (pp. 7, 13, 200), and even smacks of the picaresque novel in its early chapters when the course of the young hero's journey is determined by his encounters on the road. All this gives David's wanderings a generic nature, as Buckton notes: 'cruising entails a narrative method that produces unstable texts of travel – texts that display narrative hybridity and formal flux'.¹⁶ History is thus reduced to a backdrop, to an outline as in the map: it is then occupied by a story, whose own formal necessities and chosen structures replace those of history. In particular, as far as time is concerned, what is remarkable is that the typical time of the historical novel, ordering reality along a linear and causal line of events, is here totally replaced by another form of time, the wandering, rhizomatic, arbitrary, and above all unclosed, time of adventure.

A comparison with *Waverley*, the prototype of the Scottish historical novel, published by Scott in 1814, is quite telling in this respect. Scott stabilises from chapter one the method of the



historical novel – an omniscient narrator able to tell the story from above, endowed with the authority granted by distance (the subtitle of the book being *'Tis sixty years since*), and a retrospective narration established from the first sentence: 'It is, then, sixty years since Edward Waverley, the hero of the following pages, took leave of his family, to join the regiment of dragoons in which he had lately obtained a commission.'¹⁷ In *Kidnapped*, Stevenson seems to unwrite *Waverley*, by inverting its temporal positions. David is the narrator of his own adventures, and the past tense is replaced by a daring future, inverting retrospection and replacing it with advent and imminence: 'I will begin the story of my adventures with a certain morning early in the month of July' (p. 7). Stevenson makes the intention clearer as the titles of the first five chapters are all in the present tense,¹⁸ which inscribes movement through verbs of action and dynamic postpositions as chapters one to five demonstrate: 'I set off upon my journey to the House of Shaws'; 'I come to my journey's end'; 'I make acquaintance of my uncle'; 'I run a great danger in the House of Shaws'; 'I go to the Queen's ferry'.

Kidnapped is indeed remarkable for its efforts to find a temporal alternative to closed and ordered retrospection, to settle narration in what is happening, in suspension or immanent, in what Jankelevitch defined as the time of adventure: *L'aventure infinitésimale est liée à l'avènement de l'événement. [...] L'aventure est l'instant en instance, l'actualité sur le point de se faire.*¹⁹ Not only is the novel full of prolepses, anticipating on the future and accelerating the movement forward, replacing suspense by a perpetual sense of suspension and expectation ('as the event proved' (p. 48), 'as you are to hear' (p. 55), but Stevenson also experiments with a sort of narrative present, placing David constantly *on the brink* of adventures to come, as is obvious for example in the siege of the round-house, on the *Covenant*:

By this, my pistols were *ready*, and there was nothing to



do but listen and wait. While the brush lasted, I had not the time to think if I was frightened; but *now*, when all was still again, my mind ran upon nothing else. The thought of the sharp swords and the cold steel was strong in me; and *presently*, when *I began to hear* stealthy steps and a brushing of men's clothes against the round-house wall, and knew they *were taking* their places in the dark, I could have found it in my mind to cry out aloud. (My italics p. 57)

The insertion of anachronic adverbs in this narrative in the past tense, 'now' or 'presently', the progressive forms in -ing working as anticipations ('were taking'), the grammatical decomposition of movement ('I began to hear'), and the sense of 'readiness' it creates, all this places David and the reader just the other side of the door of adventure, in the near future they can anticipate. Such a process of inversion finds its climax at the very end of the novel, when David is left to stand there in the very intense space of the middle, where he actually belongs. The end of his 'drifting' course brings him 'to the very doors of the British Linen Company's bank' (p. 219), and the novel paradoxically stabilises in that state of unresolved tension, 'just there' as the editor puts it. Here again, the difference with *Waverley* is striking, since Scott's novel ends with full closure, utter 'fulfilment': 'It only remains for me to say that, as no wish was ever uttered with more affectionate sincerity, there are few which, allowing for the necessary mutability of human events, have been upon the whole more happily fulfilled.'²⁰ 'Fulfilled' is the final word, and the text settles in the motionlessness of *present perfect*, establishing the continuity between past and present, leaving no remainder. In *Kidnapped* on the contrary, Stevenson ends with a final twist, with yet another line of escape, as he grafts a bracket on the main text, and opens up the textual future: 'Just there, with his hand upon his fortune, the present editor inclines for the time to say



farewell to David. How Alan escaped, and what was done about the murder, with a variety of other delectable particulars, may some day be set forth' (p. 219) To Scott's stabilised present perfect, Stevenson substitutes suspended immediacy, prospection and probability, and *Kidnapped* is allowed to remain to the end 'a free and wandering tale'.²¹

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The final point I would like to make is that the outline map is also a clue to Stevenson's political intention in *Kidnapped*, a further attempt at deterritorialisation. Indeed, I would like to consider the idea that the mute map is a way for Stevenson to wipe English rule off the Highlands, to leave the Scottish space open to David and Alan's indigenous course, and to use fiction to soothe history, as a counter discourse of re-appropriation.

In *Robert Louis Stevenson's Anti-Imperialism*, Jamie Rothstein highlighted the anti-imperialist nature of Stevenson's novels, and argued that 'the Scottish novels, set in the years immediately following the final Jacobite defeat at Culloden, suggest the adverse ramifications of England's influence over Scotland, the injustices perpetrated against the Highlanders, the deepening divisions and growing inequities among Scots, the misalignment of power, and political corruption.'²² To be sure, though open resentment of English rule is always expressed through the veiled and biased screen of Alan's strong enmity, there is material in *Kidnapped* to prove that Stevenson also used the novel as a militant symbolic space, to enact quite flamboyant, though fictive, Scottish re-appropriation.

The signs of English authoritative presence are indeed detailed quite extensively in the novel, hinting at the fact that though Scotland was never actually 'colonised', it still occupied a subordinate position within the Union and was in danger of both complete assimilation and expropriation. The historical fact of the English presence is constantly made felt in the novel: the King's ships besiege the Scottish coast – 'the King's cruisers [...]

were kept along that coast, both summer and winter, to prevent communication with the French' (p. 108) – and the heathery hills are all dotted with invasive of red-coats: 'About half a mile up the water was a camp of red-coats; [...] All the way down along the river were posted other sentries. [...] Higher up the glen, [...] the chain of posts was continued by horse-soldiers. [...] Lower down, the infantry continued' (p. 140). Physical occupation is but the sign of legal domination and the several characters echo one another to describe the several acts that were taken to ensure surrendering: the Disarming act (pp. 111, 105), 'the Highland dress being forbidden by law since the rebellion' (p. 101), with a more graphic version from Alan: 'It's now a sin to wear a Tartan plaid, and a man can be cast into a goal if he has but a kilt about his legs' (p. 81); the fact that that 'the law was harshly applied, in hopes to break up the clan spirit' (p. 102), a process of evangelisation typical of imperialist routine, with catechists 'sent out by the Edinburgh Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge, to evangelise the more savage places of the Highlands' (p. 111), and eventually financial oppression through deceit and corruption to drive rebellious highlanders off their own land: 'The kindly folk of that country must all pack and tramp, every father's son out of his father's house, and out of the place were he was bred and fed' (p. 83); English rule has contributed to the impoverishment of the country, and the Pound Scots, (a fact that David's uncle tries to take advantage of) is no more than one English shilling (p. 26).

Yet, such recorded *history* is then confronted by and clashes with Stevenson's *story*, as it fully occupies the map; two elements in David and Alan's private course enable Stevenson to counter the public official version, a re-appropriation of space, and a return to native language. Indeed, no matter how many soldiers the English might post on the roads, no matter how close the meshes of their nets, David and Alan always manage to cut through, through native better knowledge of the ground, and in particular through their ability to avoid the mapped network,



while English soldiers are stuck to referenced topography. As Alan explains to David, the Highlands are all transparent territory to their native folk: they do flourish and develop within the blank space in between official lines of the map. What is wild inhospitable *terra incognita* to foreign occupants is their own favoured environment, an intense middle-ground, a ramified active multiplicity:

A bare hillside (ye see) is like all one road; if there's a sentry at one place, ye just go by another. And then the heather's a great help. And everywhere there are friends' houses and friends' byres and haystacks. And besides, when folk talk of a country covered with troops, it's but a kind of a byword at the best. A soldier covers nae mair of it than his boot-soles. I have fished a water with a sentry on the other side of the brae, and killed a fine trout; and I have sat in a heather bush within six feet of another, and learned a real bonny tune from his whistling. (p. 82)

While the soldiers are forced within pre-established organised ways, within territorialising lines, the population of the Highlands is highly rhizomatic, they imagine their own ever-changing lines of escape in a territory with multiple entrances and moving direction, like an ever-adaptable burrow. 'No soldiers would find the way that we came' (p. 129) confirms Alan, since indeed, the Highlands are 'trackless' (p. 100) to those who do not practise them. David himself confesses to his own disorientation in this open surface. To him it is indeed a desert, a blank space: 'the country appeared to be a desert' (p. 136); 'a piece of low, desert land' (p. 152), 'a country that lay as waste as the sea' (p. 153). To the native Highlanders, it is dynamic and occupied, 'with huts and houses of the people hidden in quiet places of the hills' (p. 136), it seems to be infinitely mouldable when trusted to them, an inalienable private space, a labyrinth to exogenous elements:





'but for the details of our itinerary, I am all to seek; our way lying now by short cuts, now by great detours' (p. 136). As they walk through the occupied territory together in *Kidnapped*, Alan and David rewrite an alternative story of Scotland; this improbable couple – the Jacobite Highlander and the Whig Lowlander – celebrates Scottish solidarity against English rule, and as David concludes: 'It is all Scotland' (p. 124).

Finally, political resistance is achieved in *Kidnapped* through linguistic insubordination: the names on the map inscribe Scottish spelling, and indeed the whole novel is remarkable for its refusal to internalise and legitimise domineering official English language. The first interesting point to notice is that everyone Scottish has got an accent in *Kidnapped*, even the King's ally, Mr Campbell: 'Be soople David [...] Dinnae shame us [...]. As for the laird, remember he is the laird' (p. 9). Stevenson systematically distorts both official grammar and spelling to inscribe the vernacular discrepancy that signals an appropriation of language – and indeed, it is Scots and not English that is spoken in *Kidnapped*: when Alan wants David to understand, he asks his Highland friends to speak 'Scottish': 'Speak in Scotch' (p. 129). The picturesque effect clearly disappears behind the political claim that language is an essential means to resist assimilation. But Scottish is only the first step towards the gradual erasure of English, and it is Gaelic that serves the most dissident function in *Kidnapped*, even as it remains impenetrably alien to Davie.

Just as their familiarity with the ground enables Highlanders to dodge English vigilance, so their use of Gaelic is an efficient means to resist assimilation. It works as a code, excluding those who do not belong, as David finds: 'Few had any English, and these few [...] were not very anxious to place it at my service. I knew Torosay to be my destination, and repeated the name to them and pointed; but instead of simply pointing in reply, they would give me a screed of the Gaelic that set me foolish' (p. 102). Such a technique of 'pretending to have no English' (p.



102) is basic enough, and a trick quite well-shared among local populations.

But Stevenson gives Gaelic another more original function: he embeds it in the novel as the language of fiction, able to reconfigure reality, and it is Alan who is in charge of such reconfiguration, 'a well-considered poet in his own tongue' (p. 84). Quite immediately after meeting David, still on the boat, Alan improvises a song in Gaelic, a song of his own creation, and as he translates it for the reader, David ironically comments on poetic licence – regretting that Alan's should pay no tribute to his role in their common victory against the crew, and should pocket all the credit: 'I might have claimed a place in Alan's verses. But poets (as a wise man once told me) have to think of their rhymes; and in good prose talk, Alan always did me more than justice' (p. 70). What David makes clear is that fiction is always a transformation of reality, that it owes nothing to facts but to internal coherence, aesthetic beauty, and idealisation, as Stevenson maintained: '[The writer must be disengaged] from the ardent struggle of immediate representation, of realist and ex-facto art. [Art lies in] the crystallisation of day-dreams, in changing not in copying fact; in the pursuit of the ideal, not in the study of nature.'²³ In reality, Alan may not have been as dashing or as heroic as in his own Gaelic poem, and so he does rewrite history. But fiction is always already a foreign tongue, and it never speaks the same language as facts: so one can say about Alan's song exactly what one can say about *Kidnapped* as a whole: 'It's in a manner history' (p. 183)

Notes

- 1 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Kidnapped* (London: Penguin Classics, 1994), p. 3. Henceforth cited in text.
- 2 Robert Michael Ballantyne, *The Coral Island* (London: Penguin Popular Classics, 1995), p. 9.
- 3 Edward Said showed how much in mapping 'territory and



- possessions are at stake, geography and power', in Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London, Vintage, 1994), p. 5.
- 4 Richard Philips, *Mapping Men and Empire: Geography of Adventure* (London, Routledge, 1996), p. 9.
 - 5 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
 - 6 In 1886 the Highlands were obviously quite accurately mapped already, and Stevenson could have opted for a much fuller map: this decision to use only the background map is thus the symptom of a further intention.
 - 7 In other instances, manipulating natural data has clear ideological motivations: for example, in the projection of Mercator, Africa is represented much smaller than it actually is, and this seems to naturalise the domination and superiority of Europe over Africa.
 - 8 Oliver Buckton, *Cruising with Robert Louis Stevenson. Travel, Narrative, and the Colonial Body* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), p. 135.
 - 9 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
 - 10 'Writing has not anything to do with signifying: it is about walking, mapping, even territories yet to be' – my translation. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2: Mille plateaux* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980), p. 11.
 - 11 'Writing makes saturation of context impossible [...] a written text contains a force of rupture with its context, i.e. all the presences that organize the moment of its inscription. Such force of rupture is not a accidental predicate, but the very structure of writing' (My translation). – Jacques Derrida, 'Signature, événement, contexte', in *La Communication. Actes du XV^e Congrès de l'Association des sociétés de philosophie de langue française* (Montreal: Éditions Montmorency, 1971-1973), t. II, p. 53.
 - 12 Barry Menikoff, *Narrating Scotland: the Imagination of Robert Louis Stevenson* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), p. 48.
 - 13 The map is empty of names, except for those relevant to the story, and the settlement names are small in contrast to the names of natural features in capital letters, suggesting the superiority of territory over human settlement.
 - 14 Buckton, p. 129.





- 15 The point is very clearly made in 'A Humble Remonstrance' published in *Longman's Magazine* as an answer to James's 'The Art of fiction': 'Life is monstrous, infinite, illogical, abrupt. [...] No art is true in this sense: none can "compete with life": not even history, built indeed of indisputable facts. [...] Literature, above all in its most typical mood, the mood of narrative, similarly flees the direct challenge and pursues instead an independent and creative aim.' See 'A Humble Remonstrance' in Robert Louis Stevenson, *Memories and Portraits* (London: William Heinemann, 1924), Tusitala 29, p. 136; p. 135.
- 16 Buckton, p. 7.
- 17 Walter Scott, *Waverley* (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1998), Chapter 2, p. 5.
- 18 Indeed, this is a convention of chapter titles, and as such it also highlights and reinforces the metatextual nature of the discourse.
- 19 'Infinitesimal adventure is linked to the advent of an event. [...] Adventure is the impending instant or immediacy about to happen' (my translation), see Vladimir Jankélévitch, *L'Aventure, l'ennui, le sérieux*, in *Philosophie morale* (Paris: Flammarion, 1998), p. 828.
- 20 *Waverley*, p. 339.
- 21 Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim* (London & New-York: Norton, 1996), p. 5.
- 22 Jamie Rothstein, *Robert Louis Stevenson's Anti-Imperialism* (Dekalb IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995), p. 16.
- 23 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Selected Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Ernest Mehew (London & New-Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 235.

