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international journal of scottish literature

Issue 9, Autumn/Winter 2013
www.ijsl.stir.ac.uk

Recommended Citation

Roslyn Jolly, 'Stevenson's Pacific Transnarratives', *International Journal of Scottish Literature* 9 (Autumn / Winter 2013), 5-25.

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Stevenson's Pacific Transnarratives

Roslyn Jolly

While travelling and resident in the Pacific region in the late 1880s and early 1890s, Robert Louis Stevenson conducted some remarkable experiments in transcultural narrative production. This essay will discuss two of his transnational narratives, which belong at once to Scottish literature and to the literature of the Pacific. For the long poem 'The Song of Rahéro' (1890), Stevenson took a traditional Tahitian story and retold it in verse for an English-speaking audience. For the short story 'The Bottle Imp' (1891), he borrowed a German folk-tale, transferred the action to a modern Hawaiian setting, and offered it in an original English version to Anglophone readers and in an authorised translation to Samoan readers. In both these texts, the element of translation goes beyond language and geographical positioning to encompass genre and medium as well. 'The Song of Rahéro' crosses from Pacific oral culture to European print culture, in the process taking its author, an established practitioner of the art of prose fiction, into the (for him) new practice of extended narrative poetry. 'The Bottle Imp' emerges from more complex crossings: between the genres of folk-tale, melodrama and short story, and between the media of oral narrative, embodied performance and print. In the attempt to indicate these multiple modes of translation, I have collapsed the term 'transnational narratives' to simply 'transnarratives'. I hope that the concept of the transnarrative, involving as it does a set of closely articulated crossings of multiple literary boundaries, will help to illuminate both what is distinctive about my specific object of study – a Scottish author's engagement with Pacific narrative modes and subjects – and some of the general characteristics of the field to which this study belongs, the theory of transnational literature.

'The Song of Rahéro' is a long narrative poem, which recounts a story Stevenson first heard while staying in the village of Tautira in Tahiti in November 1888. The poem has three sections. The first, 'The Slaying of Támatea', tells how the cynical trickster Rahéro hoodwinks a gullible young man, Támatea, into inadvertently giving the king an insulting gift, which results in Támatea being slain by the king's executioner. The second section, 'The Venging of Támatea', recounts how the young man's mother persuades the king of a neighbouring district to enact her revenge by luring all the people of Rahéro's tribe to a great feast, after which they are murdered in their sleep – only Rahéro himself escaping. In the third section, 'Rahéro', this sole survivor of the massacre takes *his* revenge by killing a man from the tribe of the murderous hosts and stealing his wife in order to start a new clan in his now deserted land.

Stevenson called the story 'a genuine Tahitian legend',¹ and in his notes to the poem was at pains to emphasise its authenticity:

This tale, of which I have not consciously changed a single feature, I received from tradition. It is highly popular though all the country of the eight Tevas, the clan to which Rahéro belonged; and particularly in Taiárapu, the windward peninsula of Tahiti, where he lived. I have heard from end to end two versions; and as many as five different persons have helped me with details.²

'I got wonderful materials for my book, collected songs and legends on the spot', Stevenson wrote to Sidney Colvin of his time in Tautira, and even made 'a day's journey to the other side of the island to Tati, the high chief of the Tevas [...] to collect more and correct what I had already' (*Letters* vi, 239). This critical awareness of the need to compare different versions of the story from multiple informants may be regarded as evidence of the scholarly rigour with which Stevenson approached the role of folklorist. His willingness to undertake an onerous daylong journey in order to 'correct' his findings in the light of new information suggests a strong commitment to accuracy. In this regard, 'The Song of Rahéro' differs from its companion piece in *Ballads*, the Marquesan-influenced 'Feast of Famine', which, Stevenson admitted, 'rest[ed] upon no authority' and was 'in no sense, like "Rahéro", a native story', but rather a patchwork of travellers' impressions (*Poems*, p. 193).

Robert Hillier notes that the American historian Henry Adams, who visited Tautira in 1891 and published his own collection of traditional Tevas narratives ten years later, 'prais[ed] Stevenson's accuracy' in recounting the Rahéro legend.³ Yet Hillier also observes that comparison with a version of the same story titled 'The Revenge of Maraa', collected by London Missionary Society representative J. M. Orsmond in the 1840s and translated by his grand-daughter Teuira Henry, 'shows where Stevenson possibly deviated from his sources'.⁴ The most significant difference between Stevenson's account of the legend and that published by Teuira Henry concerns the character of Rahéro, whom Stevenson presents as a trickster figure responsible for initiating the train of events that leads to the destruction of his clan. Henry's version includes no such characterisation and thus lacks the ambivalence surrounding Rahéro as both destroyer and rebuilders of the clan in Stevenson's narrative. Henry's version also involves a less complex movement between districts and clans than is found in Stevenson's account of the legend, although it too is a story of border contact.⁵

Comparing 'The Revenge of Maraa' with 'The Song of Rahéro' does not enable us to measure Stevenson's fidelity to his sources, because we do not know how closely those sources aligned with or diverged from those from which Henry's version derived. What the comparison does, though, is to fissure the seemingly unitary notion of 'tradition' invoked by Stevenson in his introductory note to the poem (*Poems*, p. 163). 'Tradition' is plural: not a monolithic authority, but an accumulation of voices and versions. Stevenson described the songs and legends he collected at

Tautira as ‘songs still sung in chorus by perhaps a hundred persons, not two of whom can agree on their translation; legends, in which I have seen half-a-dozen seniors sitting in conclave and debating what came next’ (*Letters*, VI, 239). Knit tight in ‘chorus’, tradition ravel in ‘translation’ and ‘debate’. Perhaps one should not speak of Stevenson deviating from his sources, but of tradition diverging and deviating within itself.

In her preface to the posthumously published *Poems*, Stevenson’s widow Fanny confirmed that the high chief Tati Salmon was one of Stevenson’s sources for the story of Rahéro, the other being the Tahitian Princess Moë, with whom Stevenson became friends at Tautira (*Letters*, VI, 239n.). Son of an English father and Tahitian mother, the English-educated Tati was a high-rank member of the indigenous Tahitian ruling class. He was, Stevenson thought, ‘quite an Englishman’ (*Letters*, VI, 277), although he retained his indigenous authority: Stevenson commented that ‘if there came troubles’ for the reigning king of Tahiti, Pomare V, Tati might ‘have a fly at the throne’ (*Letters*, VI, 276). Calling Tati ‘a man of real power and the most intelligent interests’, Stevenson noted that he was ‘the only man (French, native or English) who has the wit to pay attention’ to Tahiti’s traditional poetry (*Letters*, VI, 276). In a letter to Sidney Colvin, Fanny Stevenson elaborated on Tati’s aims:

He is trying to rescue the literature of his native land from the oblivion, into which but for him, it must fall. He has gathered together a great many of the poems and traditions of Tahiti, and proposes to translate them into English. ... Tati is the only person in the Island who has made the least attempt in this direction. (*Letters*, VI, 234)

Stevenson worked with the chief of the Tevas on the translation of a number of local traditional songs (*Letters*, VI, 235-36) and supported his aim to produce a volume of Tahitian verses (*Letters*, VI, 276). He understood Tati’s desire to ‘rescue the literature of his native land from [...] oblivion’, for in the note to Book II of his volume *Underwoods* (1887), which consists of poems written in a vernacular Scots dialect, he had expressed a similar desire:

The day draws near when this illustrious & malleable tongue shall be quite forgotten; & Burns’s Ayrshire, and Dr. MacDonald’s Aberdeen-awa’, & Scott’s brave, metropolitan utterance will be all equally the ghosts of speech. Till then I would love to have my hour as a native Maker, and be read by my own countryfolk in our own dying language: an ambition surely rather of the heart than of the head, so restricted as it is in prospect of endurance, so parochial in bounds of space. (*Poems*, p. 75)

Stevenson’s ambition to be ‘a native Maker’ exceeds Tati’s more modest aim to preserve his cultural heritage in translation, but they share a sense of parochial pride and a determination to resist the conforming effects of progress. While Stevenson had tried to rescue the language of his native land, Scotland, from oblivion – or at least, to prolong its currency until the inevitable

erosion of 'native' identity should occur – Tati intended to use his international education to translate and thereby save an indigenous literature from disappearing along with the speech that was its traditional medium.

Steeped in his own history of cultural dispossession, Stevenson was thus able to identify with the Tahitian chief's desire to preserve his literary heritage, while he also became increasingly fascinated by similarities between Scotland's past and the enduring traditions of the Pacific. Indeed, his visit to Tahiti provided an opportunity for him to associate himself with the type of clan-based society that barely existed any more in Scotland, but that had fuelled his imaginative sense of the romance of the Highlands. While staying at Tautira Stevenson engaged in a formal 'exchange of names' with a sub-chief of the Tevas, Ori a Ori. This ritual made him an honorary member of Ori's (and Tati's) tribe, the Tevas – the same tribe to which the legendary figure of Rahéro had belonged. Countless such name-exchanges are recorded in European voyage literature, the phenomenon representing a significant mode of contact and transaction between Pacific islanders and foreign visitors. The ritual provided the basis for 'an ongoing exchange of goods and services' between the individuals involved; enabled 'exogamous alliances' to be formed; and functioned as 'a dialectical exercise in status reinforcement' with the potential to benefit both parties to the transaction.⁶ But did it signify *friendship*, as Europeans understood the term? What relations between sentiment, obligation and advantage did it set in motion? Was it a flexible and strategic manoeuvre or a binding and permanent contract?⁷ And how far could the Pacific practice of name-exchange be assimilated to a European understanding of adoption as a legal fiction enabling the creation of artificial, but legally binding, kinship relations?⁸

A letter from Fanny Stevenson to Sidney Colvin, written from Tautira in December 1888, recounts Stevenson's exchange of names with Ori a Ori, and in doing so conveys her family's understanding of the significance of the act. Fanny states that her husband initiated the transaction, using Princess Moë to convey his request to Ori, who responded by offering 'brotherhood' to the foreign visitor. 'So now, if you please, Louis is no more Louis, having given that name away in the Tahitian form of *Rui*, but is known as *Terii-Tera* (pronounced *Tereeterah*) that being Ori's Christian name. "Ori of Ori" is his clan name' (*Letters*, vi, 229). The material significance of the exchange was revealed when delays to repairs on their yacht at Papeete left the Stevensons reliant on Ori's extended hospitality:

[T]hen Ori of Ori, the magnificent, who listened to the tale of the shipwrecked mariners with serious dignity, asking [sic] one or two questions, and then spoke to this effect. 'You are my brother: all that I have is yours. I know that your food is done, but I can give you plenty of fish and taro. We like you, and wish to have you here. Stay where you are till the *Casco* comes. Be happy – *et ne pleurez pas*.' Louis dropped his head into his hands and wept, and then we all went up to Rui and shook hands with him and accepted his offer. (*Letters*, vi, 231)⁹

In Fanny's humorously hyperbolic account, Ori's injunction not to cry has the opposite effect, with the offer and its acceptance being accompanied by outpourings of emotion from all present. The following day, 'amidst a raging sea and a storming wind' (*Letters*, VI, 232), Ori sailed to Papeete to collect European food supplies for the visitors, carrying letters of introduction which express Stevenson's sense of obligation to the man he described as his 'FRIEND and HOST' (*Letters*, VI, 225). These letters, together with Fanny's account, demonstrate that the Stevensons regarded their bond with Ori as one of genuine friendship as well as formal kinship, a relationship in which sentiment, obligation and advantage were all combined.

'The Song of Rahéro' begins with a verse dedication, six lines of unrhymed iambic pentameter addressed to Stevenson's 'brother':

Ori, my brother in the island mode,
 In every tongue and meaning much my friend,
 This story of your country and your clan,
 In your loved house, your too much honoured guest,
 I made in English. Take it, being done;
 And let me sign it with the name you gave.

Teriitera (p. 130)

Stevenson was a prolific writer of occasional poems and courtesy verses. In one sense these lines belong with the many poems, envoys and dedications he composed throughout his career, some of which were formally integrated into his professional oeuvre while others remained unpublished in his lifetime. But the unique terms of the relationship invoked in the dedication to Ori set it apart. While it bestows a gift, this piece of writing also claims something in return: for in publicly honouring his relationship with Ori, Stevenson publicly advertises a new 'Pacific' identity for himself. The same thing happens in one of the notes to the poem, where he refers to the formal clan membership conferred by his name-exchange with Ori. Conceding that he has taken the liberty of transferring the name of one historical figure ('Hiopa') to a different character in his story, he writes: 'perhaps there is only one person in the world capable at once of reading my verses and spying the inaccuracy. For him, for Mr. Tati Salmon, hereditary high chief of the Tevas, the note is solely written; a small attention from a clansman to his chief' (*Poems* p. 166).¹⁰ Here, 'a small attention' harbours a large claim – the claim to belong to the culture of which he writes. Stevenson was aware that '[t]he identities that both Europeans and islanders took on in the name of friendship were not exactly those traded to them':¹¹ Teriitera-Stevenson did not assume the identity of Teriitera-Ori, but modified his own in the light of a new relationship. Nevertheless, his use of that new persona as the authorial signature for 'The Song of Rahéro' gave him, for the occasion, an indigenous Pacific author-name, prefiguring his later assumption of the more casually bestowed but widely adopted Samoan nickname 'Tusitala' as a permanent authorial

identity.

By referring to the name-exchange ritual at the beginning of his poem, the 'too much honoured guest' (p. 130) indulges an impossible desire to 'have [his] hour as a native Maker' in the Pacific, as he had previously done in Scotland. The dedication expresses the tendency (constitutional with Stevenson) to associate himself with whatever is ancient and primitive, at the same time that it registers the continuing differences between his own and Ori's worlds. Offering the poem to his 'brother', Stevenson writes: 'This story of your country and your clan ... I made in English' (*Poems*, p. 130). By explicitly naming the language of his narrative, he draws attention to the changes the story has undergone in its passage from oral tradition to print. At the same time, the densely packed and recurrent pronouns – 'my', 'my', 'your', 'your', 'your', 'your', 'I', 'me', 'you' – suggest Stevenson's effort to effect a genuine exchange between himself and Ori. The concepts of 'brother', 'friend', 'country', 'clan', and 'guest' are all invoked as grounds for their relationship, verbal passports with the power to take Stevenson across the border between 'me' and 'you', 'my' poem and 'your' story. Yet while Stevenson uses these powerful social values to suture himself into Ori's clan and culture, the short dedication feels almost overburdened by the multiple terms of relationship it invokes. It is difficult to know how to interpret this: the close juxtaposition of so many relational terms may signify the complexity of the Polynesian custom of name-exchange, which cannot be reduced to a single correlative European concept; at the same time, the jammed pronomial traffic of the dedication may express an anxiety on Stevenson's part about his ability to make this relationship real to his readers at home.

'Everything that Mr. Stevenson does is interesting,' wrote the reviewer of *Ballads* for the London *Daily Chronicle*, but 'he cannot become one of a childish race'.¹² This reviewer saw Stevenson's wish to identify himself with traditional Polynesian society as an illusory goal that had been indulged to the detriment of the poem. He objected to what he saw as a jolting discrepancy between the 'savage' material on which 'The Song of Rahéro' was based and Stevenson's highly literary treatment of that material; he judged the poem to be inauthentic, because the author had 'surround[ed] his character with an atmosphere of his own. Instead of entering into their world he displays them at work in one of his own creation' (*Scrapbook*, p. 82). This reader argued that Stevenson could not use his exposure to traditional Pacific cultures as a means of escaping his own modernity, and that the effort to do so was harming his art. Taking a very different approach, the reviewer for the *Daily News* described the author of 'The Song of Rahéro' as 'a literary beachcomber' (*Scrapbook*, p. 81). The label suggests a collector and adaptor of found materials, which tallies well with Stevenson's self-presentation in his notes to the poem as an inquirer moving between cultures and an intermediary between the poem's Pacific origins and its English and American audience. It also anticipates Vanessa Smith's influential late twentieth-century positioning of Stevenson within a tradition of literary *bricolage*, which is connected to the historical figure of the beachcomber as an interpreter of the Pacific world to nineteenth-century European audiences.¹³ A reading of 'The Song of Rahéro' as the work of a 'literary beachcomber' suggests

that in the kind of text I am calling a transnarrative – a text that carries a story between spaces, languages and cultures – purity of source is less important than richness of mediation. Both these reviewers noticed something important about the process of cross-cultural literary adaptation in which Stevenson was engaged. The *Daily Chronicle* saw that neither the length of Stevenson's residence in the region, nor the many compelling similarities he found between Polynesian and Scots cultures, nor even his formal adoption into the Texas clan could change the fact that he wrote as a transnational, not an indigene. The *Daily News* eschewed such oppositions and interpreted 'The Song of Rahéro' as a product of 'the beach', of a liminal and often incoherent space between cultures. In a sense, both reviewers were right, for there is a tension in the poem, which Stevenson leaves unresolved, between the would-be clansman of the dedication and the scholarly traveller of the notes.¹⁴

As well as presenting challenges in terms of the author's relation to his subject, the writing of 'The Song of Rahéro' also posed considerable difficulties for Stevenson in relation to his readers at home. The English reception of 'The Song of Rahéro', and more generally of the *Ballads* volume in which it was published, prompted two comments that are often quoted in discussions of the difficult relation between author and audience during Stevenson's years in the Pacific. In a letter to an American friend in January 1891, Edmund Gosse wrote about *Ballads*:

I confess we are all disappointed here. The effort to become a Polynesian Walter Scott is a little too obvious, the inspiration a little too mechanical. And – between you and me and Lake Michigan – the versification is atrocious. [...] The fact seems to be that it is very nice to *live* in Samoa, but not healthy to *write* there. Within a three-mile radius of Charing Cross is the literary atmosphere, I suspect. (*Letters*, VII, 106-7n)

Unaware of Gosse's comments, but having read several reviews of the volume, Stevenson wrote this in a letter to H. B. Baildon later in 1891:

Glad the ballads amused you. They failed to entertain a coy public: at which I own I wondered. Not that I set much account by my verses, which are the verses of Pro-sator; but I do know how to tell a yarn, and two of the yarns were great. 'Rahéro' is for its length, I think, a perfect folk tale; savage and yet fine, full of a tail foremost morality, ancient as the granite rocks; if the historian not to say the politician could get that yarn into his head, he would have learned some of his A.B.C. But the average man at home cannot understand antiquity; he is sunk over the ears in Roman civilisation; and a tale like that of 'Rahéro' falls on his ears inarticulate. (*Letters*, VII, 187)

Gosse's image of the three-mile radius epitomises the metropolitan's disdain for the world beyond the city limits, a world he regards as provincial and therefore unable to generate literature of any value. Indeed, for Gosse, the modern concept of 'world literature' would have been

a nonsense, and the practise of comparing literatures, beyond a defined European and classical sphere, pointless. Stevenson, in contrast, had a cast of mind that was essentially comparative, and a literary imagination that fed eagerly upon the diverse cultures of the globe. Yet he also acknowledged the existence of culturally determined cognitive barriers to such an embrace of difference. The letter in which Stevenson described the resistant English reader of 'Rahéro' as 'sunk over the ears in Roman civilisation' is a fairly early expression of a thesis he was to develop more fully in writings over the next few years, the thesis that Europeans were locked into a worldview defined by the legacies of Roman civilization and as a result were largely incapable of understanding cultures that had not been shaped by Roman influence.¹⁵ In *The Wrecker* and *A Footnote to History* (both 1892) Stevenson used images of 'the verge of the Roman Empire' to signify a frontier between the bounded terrain of Western civilization and the radical alterity of traditional Pacific culture.¹⁶ For Stevenson, Pacific travel meant moving into 'zones unromanized',¹⁷ and the Roman Empire came to feature in his Pacific writings as a recurrent motif for the intellectual conditioning that he, and his readers, needed to overcome if they were to engage with these regions of social and psychological difference.

Reviews of *Ballads* in the British press display a wide variety of responses to the thematic and formal challenges that 'The Song of Rahéro' presented to English readers. Writing in *The Spectator*, R. H. Hutton found fault with Stevenson's subject selection, arguing that 'such acts of reckless butchery' as the revenge-massacre of Rahéro's tribe 'are not proper subjects for a poem until they are in some adequate way made intelligible by being connected with the recognised passions of men'.¹⁸ The reviewer for *The Scotsman*, by contrast, praised Stevenson's telling of 'the tale of the crafty savage Rahéro' precisely because of 'its many instances of the working of the elementary passions of man' (*Scrapbook*, p. 82). Hutton found the characters incoherent and their motivations implausible,¹⁹ prompting Stevenson to defend his representation of the 'savage psychology' behind the characters' actions (*Letters*, VII, 187). On the other hand, the reviewer for the *Daily Chronicle* criticised the poem for being *too* psychological and for importing modern notions of interiority and depth of character into a form that ought properly to have confined itself to the exterior presentation of action (*Scrapbook*, p. 82).

Divided over the artistic value of Stevenson's chosen subject, critics also disagreed about the poem's formal achievement. Edmund Gosse's private opinion that the versification was 'atrocious' matched Cosmo Monkhouse's damning public suggestion in *The Academy* that Stevenson could only have assembled so many 'infelicities of expression and defects of style' 'by way of a joke'.²⁰ In striking contrast, the reviewer for *The Scotsman* argued that 'the quality of the poem is so strong as to make the work a remarkable one' and singled out for praise the 'stately musical verse that has a strength peculiar to itself' (*Scrapbook*, p. 82). To make any sense of these contrasting evaluations we need to understand what *kind* of poem Stevenson wrote – a difficult task, as the 'The Song of Rahéro' resists clear generic and metrical classification. Included in the collection titled *Ballads*, the poem's narrative mode, strong rhythmic beat, mainly end-stopped lines,

and masculine rhymes all support this generic categorisation, although Stevenson has eschewed the typical quatrain ballad stanza of alternating trimeters and tetrameters in favour of hexameters. As Erik Gray points out, though, the distinction between ‘English hexameter’ and ‘ballad meter’ is ‘sometimes nonexistent’, for an accentual hexameter line with a strong medial caesura can easily be read as two trimeters joined together.²¹ The initial characterisation of Rahéro as a trickster fits with the folkloric world of balladry, but there are no supernatural agents in his story, which entirely lacks the eerie or uncanny quality that tends to pervade even the most politically grounded of the traditional English and Scots ballads.

In fact, the subject of ‘The Song of Rahéro’ – ‘a legend of clan foundation’²² – aligns better with the epic genre than the ballad, and the poem also exhibits many formal features that support this classification. Letitia Henville argues persuasively that Stevenson’s employment of ‘epic characteristics’ such as his abundant use of epithets, as well as a six-foot line which transposes the classical epic metre into English verse, ‘serves to appropriately translate’, by ‘connotation’, ‘the national importance of the Texas’ legend’.²³ Further support comes from a letter Stevenson wrote to W. E. Henley from Honolulu in March 1889, where he explicitly linked his experiment in rendering a Tahitian story in English verse with a longstanding desire to ‘try an epic’: ‘Do you remember suggesting I should try an epic? I have been trying narrative verse, I think with some measure of success. When I get a proof of “The Song of Rahéro”, I shall ask you to look at it, and condemn what is inadequate’ (*Letters*, vi, 267). Stevenson had a copy of Virgil’s *Aeneid* with him at Tautira (*Letters*, vi, 237) – presumably the same copy he had requested to be sent to him at Saranac Lake the previous year (*Letters*, vi, 20), and which he had been reading, with the aid of a dictionary, notes and the advice of his more classically educated friends throughout his travels in the western hemisphere (*Letters*, vi, 60, 86 and n.). His determined and sustained self-exposure to the *Aeneid* during this period, despite his poor command of Latin,²⁴ must have stimulated his general interest in the epic as a narrative genre, and perhaps also a specific desire to ‘try’ the metrical form Virgil executed with such mastery.

Judged by the metrical standards of the Virgilian hexameter, which is ‘quantitative’ as well as ‘accentual’, Stevenson’s poem fails, for it does not exhibit the complex and graceful patterning of long and short, as well as stressed and unstressed, syllables that characterises the classical metre. Given this, it is easy to see why critics steeped in classical languages and literatures might have regarded his performance in this poem as that of a barbarian mangling an imperial form. But was Stevenson really attempting to write English narrative verse in Virgilian hexameters? I doubt he would have tried anything so difficult or so foolhardy: his education did not prepare him for such a task, and in any case, the subtle rhythms of the classical hexameter were generally considered at the time to be almost impossible to reproduce in English verse.²⁵ Furthermore, unless his intention was ironic, it would seem strange that he would choose a metrical form closely identified with the golden age of Roman civilisation to give poetic expression to material he understood to be profoundly alien to ‘Roman’ ways of thought.

Stevenson himself had no illusions about his proficiency as a prosodist. 'Not that I set much account by my verses,' he wrote, 'which are the verses of Prosator; but I do know how to tell a yarn, and two of the yarns were great'. His interest in the Tahitian legends he heard was primarily narrative; he wanted above all to 'tell a yarn', so his choice of metre for 'The Song of Rahéro' would have been guided by a sense of the rhythms that would most effectively carry the Tahitian story in its passage through time and space to a modern English audience. Those rhythms were more English than Roman. The one constant feature of Stevenson's hexameters in 'The Song of Rahéro' is the presence of six metrical beats in each line. Employment of a fixed number of stressed syllables per line, with considerable freedom in regard to the total number of syllables, recalls the Germanic metres of the Anglo-Saxon epics and Norse sagas, although these have four beats per line, not six. Two other formal features of 'The Song of Rahéro' reminiscent of Anglo-Saxon poetry are the extensive alliteration and frequent strong medial caesuras, as in 'A youth went forth to the fishing, and fortune favoured him well' (p. 131); 'Honoura lived like a beast, lacking the lamp and the fire' (p. 133); 'Lazy and crafty he was, and loved to lie in the sun' (p. 134); 'He sat in his house and laughed, but he loathed the king of the land' (p. 135). While the alliteration in the poem is never more than decorative (rather than operating as a consistent structural principle), the frequency with which Stevenson employs alliteration across the caesura suggests a conscious effort to imitate this trademark feature of Anglo-Saxon verse, even though the use of hexameters distends the Anglo-Saxon line. Stevenson's story 'The Waif Woman' (written 1892), which was based on an Icelandic tale, carries the subtitle 'A Cue from a Saga'. It is possible that a 'cue' from a cognate source influenced the diction and rhythms of 'The Song of Rahéro'. We know that Stevenson used Anglo-Saxon material in his Samoan language exercises during 1892,²⁶ and this fact, together with his writing of 'The Waif Woman' in Samoa, supports the idea that the ancestral literatures of England may have influenced his thinking about European modes of ancient narrative just as much as Virgil did. He may have had an Anglo-Saxon rather than a Roman model in mind when he crafted the rhythms of his Tahitian tale, making the poem a latter-day barbarian epic, rather than the imitation of a classical one.²⁷

Of 'Rahéro' and its companion piece, 'The Feast of Famine', Stevenson wrote to his publisher Edward Burlingame in 1889, 'either they are very good or I have made a strange error' (*Letters*, vi, 257). Critics have generally affirmed the second option, although one contemporary dissenting voice stands out: *The Scotsman's* reviewer claimed that 'The Song of Rahéro' should be ranked 'among the best ballads that have been produced by the conscious efforts of writers practising poetry as an art' (*Scrapbook*, p. 82). Importantly, this reviewer recognised that Stevenson's poem should not be judged by the standards of the traditional, popular ballad (widely understood at the time as the utterance of a collective folk-voice), but as a literary ballad – that is, as the result of a modern individual's 'conscious effort' to find a poetic style capable of expressing a strange and primitive subject. Stevenson's solution to the problem was, I believe, to create a hybrid style, combining the singsong rhymes of the traditional ballad with the hexameter's capacity for continuous

narrative unfolding, and permeating it all with the heavy beat of Anglo-Saxon verse. The result is a poetic oddity – a ‘strange error’, perhaps, but an interesting response to the challenge of transporting narratives through vast distances in time and space.

The challenge of conveying ‘antiquity’ (*Letters*, VII, 187) to a modern audience was not an issue for Stevenson with regard to his Hawaiian tale, ‘The Bottle Imp’, which although global in reach, is unswerving in its contemporaneity. Written in 1890 and first published in 1891,²⁸ the story tells of a magic bottle which can fulfil its owner’s every wish, but will condemn to hell whoever dies with it in their possession. The only way the owner can be divested of the bottle is to sell it for a price less than he or she paid for it. Therefore, as the bottle is passed from owner to owner, its price will drop to a level where there are no longer any smaller divisions of money to pay for it; at that point its owner is doomed, without hope of rescue, to burn in hell forever. The story had come to Stevenson from German folklore by way of the British theatre. Stevenson took the main elements of the plot from a melodrama called ‘The Bottle Imp’, which was performed on the London stage in the late 1820s and subsequently printed, with illustrations, in book form. The melodrama borrowed heavily from a German folktale, set during the time of the Thirty Years’ War.²⁹ An awareness of the story’s German origins may have influenced Stevenson’s generic classification of his own prose version as one of a series of planned ‘*Märchen*’ or supernatural folktales (*Letters*, VII, 461).

The British stage version of ‘The Bottle Imp’ had retained its source’s European setting; Stevenson’s innovation was to relocate the action to the Pacific region – in the city of San Francisco, on the Kona coast of Hawaii’s Big Island, and finally in Tahiti. This use of modern locations was integral to his increasing commitment to stylistic realism, even within supernatural stories. When the plan for a volume of ‘*Märchen*’ fell through, and ‘The Bottle Imp’ was published alongside ‘The Beach of Falesá’ and ‘The Isle of Voices’ in *Island Nights’ Entertainments* (1893), Stevenson consoled himself that although the collection was generically diverse, it was unified by the ‘queer realism’ of all three stories (*Letters*, VII, 436). One reason the realism of ‘The Bottle Imp’ is ‘queer’ is because it merges the high romance of the source tale with exact representation of modern Pacific manners and *mise-en-scène*. The Pacific setting also allowed Stevenson to put new twists on the plot element of the bottle’s ever-diminishing price, as the different currencies of American Hawaii and French Tahiti allowed him to play with different units of coinage (the French centime being worth less than the American cent).

The protagonists of Stevenson’s ‘The Bottle Imp’ are Hawaiian islanders, enabling him to introduce the theme of leprosy, which was not part of the earlier (European) versions of the story. The spread of leprosy was a pressing and controversial public health issue in Hawaii in the 1880s and 90s.³⁰ In Stevenson’s story, the hero, Keawe, discovers he has leprosy just after he has become engaged to marry the beautiful Kokua. Rather than give her up, or risk infecting her with the disease, he chooses to buy the magic bottle and cure himself, although its price of one cent means

certain damnation.³¹ Learning of his sacrifice, the resourceful Kokua determines to save him, her saving knowledge being her awareness that 'all the world is not American' (p. 92). The French and the English have coins worth less than one cent, so Kokua suggests that she and Keawe travel to French Tahiti, where they may find a purchaser willing to buy the bottle for a few centimes. When this plan fails, Kokua secretly arranges to buy the bottle herself, thereby sacrificing her own soul to save her husband's. After discovering what she has done, Keawe in turn secretly arranges to buy the bottle back again. The seemingly inevitable tragic outcome of their unselfish actions is averted when Keawe's intermediary, a vicious old boatswain, refuses to sell the bottle back, declaring that he is 'going [to hell] anyway' (p. 102) and wishes to spend his remaining time on earth in an alcoholic stupor funded by the magic bottle.

Stevenson's aims in writing this story, and the effects he achieved, were very different from the aims and effects of 'The Song of Rahéro'. 'The Bottle Imp' expresses no yearning for primitive authenticity. Rather, the tale exemplifies the trades, contaminations and negotiations of the contact zone that was the modern, multi-cultural Pacific, as Stevenson experienced it on his travels of the late 1880s. He called the region 'a no man's land of the ages, a stir-about of epochs and races, barbarisms and civilisations, virtues and crimes' (*Letters*, VI, 312), and in other fictions such as 'The Beach of Falesá', 'The Isle of Voices', *The Wrecker*, and *The Ebb-Tide* he continued to use trade, colonisation and the spread of disease as material and metaphoric signifiers of the global system of exchange in which the Pacific region had become enmeshed. In the case of 'The Bottle Imp' the process of transculturation was taken one step further with the translation of the story into the Samoan language and its publication in a local missionary magazine in 1891. Stevenson would later claim that the story had from its inception been 'designed and written for a Polyneesian audience' (*SST*, p. 72). He collaborated with the missionary Arthur Claxton on the Samoan translation (*Letters*, VII, 95) and was proud to be the author of the first work of fiction published in the Samoan language.³²

Unfortunately, we have no direct evidence of how Samoans who read or listened to readings of the translation of 'The Bottle Imp' responded to the story. It is therefore not possible, in terms of reception, to carry out a symmetrical investigation of both sides of the two-way transcultural narrative traffic in which Stevenson engaged when he presented 'The Song of Rahéro' to English readers in 1890 and 'The Bottle Imp' to a Samoan audience in 1891. All we have are mediated accounts of the Samoan response to the story, accounts that originated with Stevenson and which were then taken up and circulated by English friends and critics. In a letter to Arthur Conan Doyle in 1893, Stevenson told how Samoan visitors to his home, Vailima, after admiring the splendours of the house, would 'be seen to shrug a brown shoulder, to roll up a speaking eye, and at last the secret bursts from them: "Where is the bottle?"' (*Letters*, VIII, 155). Only possession of a magic bottle such as the one that featured in his story could account for such opulence, Stevenson claimed these visitors believed. His cousin and later biographer, Graham Balfour, who lived at Vailima in the early 1890s, confirmed the story: 'In one corner was built a large safe, which

[...] was supposed by the natives to be the prison of the Bottle Imp, the source of all Stevenson's fortune.³³ This anecdote became very popular and was often included in journalistic accounts of Stevenson's life in Samoa. It also formed part of the legend of Tusitala, which became the main interpretative framework through which Stevenson's English and American readers processed the otherwise baffling fact of his residence in Samoa. As Sidney Colvin wrote in the first published edition of Stevenson's letters: 'The name the natives knew him by was Tusitala, teller of tales, and he was supposed by them to be the master of an inexhaustible store of wealth, perhaps even to be the holder of the magic bottle of his own story, the *Bottle Imp*'.³⁴

Stevenson's English and American fans loved this story, because it confirmed their preconceptions about childish 'natives', while at the same time adding to the romantic glamour of the celebrity author. Stevenson may not have objected to either of those effects, but he first told the story for a more serious purpose, to explain to Doyle how he had observed the Samoans' understanding of narrative to differ from that of English readers. 'They do not know what it is to make up a story', he told Doyle, which was why they assumed that the bottle was real (*Letters*, VIII, 155). Stevenson had discovered that the modern, European concept of narrative fiction was not universal, but culturally bounded, and that its sudden importation into a traditional Pacific society, without any gradual process of acculturation, could lead to misunderstandings – possibly on both sides of the encounter.³⁵ Stevenson's story of the mis-reception of 'The Bottle Imp' in Samoa as fact rather than fiction became part of a larger meta-narrative he wove around his experiments in authorship during his Pacific years. Like his assessment, following the reviews of 'Rahéro', that the English literary establishment 'cannot so much as observe the existence of savage psychology when it is placed before it' (*Letters*, VII, 187), Stevenson's claim that the Samoans 'do not know what it is to make up a story' showed an acute (and possibly exaggerated) awareness of the epistemological and cognitive gaps over which his transcultural narratives might stumble.

In fact, intentionally or not, Stevenson had fostered local misrecognition of 'The Bottle Imp' as factual narrative through narratorial statements such as this, in the story's opening sentence: 'There was a man of the Island of Hawaii, whom I shall call Keawe; for the truth is, he still lives, and his name must be kept secret' (p. 73). Most English readers in the nineteenth century would have understood that such a reference to 'the truth' in a work of fiction, particularly one that dealt with the supernatural, was merely a literary convention, a technique of realism with no actual truth-force. But for Samoan readers or listeners, it may not have been so easy to disentangle the strands of the tale's 'queer realism' from its magical content – partly because belief in the reality of ghosts and devils was widespread in late nineteenth-century Polynesia,³⁶ and partly because islanders received confusing cues from Europeans about how to interpret their stories. For example, 'Talofa, Togarewa!', a narrative of recent events on the island of Penrhyn designed to warn Samoans about the spread of leprosy, which Stevenson wrote for translation into Samoan and publication in the same missionary magazine as that in which 'The Bottle Imp' appeared, has been conventionally classified by European scholars as an 'essay'.³⁷ Yet it begins: 'I am going

to tell people here in Samoa the true story of an island'.³⁸ This statement of a storyteller's act in relation to the 'truth' of the narrative he presents is very similar to the first sentence of 'The Bottle Imp' quoted above. Yet, one narrative was intended as fictional entertainment (whatever moral 'truths' it might be supposed to contain), while the other was a non-fictional account of events reported to Stevenson by a source he considered reliable,³⁹ the truth of which he believed it was important for Samoans to recognise if they were to avert certain real-world consequences. How were his readers supposed to tell the difference between the two kinds of 'story'? Visiting the Gilbert Islands in 1889 Stevenson had been 'long of comprehending', but had eventually grasped, how difficult it might be for Pacific islanders to sort the diverse speech-acts of their European visitors into truth, lies and fictions. The experience taught him how 'hard it is, even for a man of great natural parts like Tembinok' [king of Apemama], to grasp the ideas of a new society and culture'.⁴⁰ The alien European practice of fiction-writing only made this general difficulty more acute for the Samoan readership of 'The Bottle Imp'.

The transmission and reception history of this tale extends the narrative of cross-cultural traffic that is its subject matter. 'The Bottle Imp' is a story of consumption, contamination, travel and exchange, which takes place in, and refers to, many countries. In the story, Hawaiians like Keawe are afflicted with a disease (leprosy) they call 'the Chinese Evil' (p. 85). Keawe cures his leprosy with the help of a magic bottle he buys from a Haole (white man) living in Beritania Street (p. 88). One could interpret this choice of setting allegorically, as a reference to the damaging effects of Europeans' presence in the Pacific; given Stevenson's disparaging remarks during his visit to Hawaii about 'beastly *haoles*' (*Letters*, VII, 295), where else would the imp be likely to reside than in 'Britain Street'? Yet the naming of the street is also a reality effect, as Beritania Street is an actual location, one of Honolulu's main thoroughfares, and its name bears the trace of the historical presence of British visitors to and inhabitants of the city. Stevenson's realism here is 'queer' (*Letters*, VII, 436) because the impress of culture upon culture makes the familiar strange and the strange familiar: British readers of the tale would see the name of their homeland exoticised by the island pronunciation, while for the Hawaiian characters a reference to faraway England operates as the sign of a well-known local address.

As the narrative of 'The Bottle Imp' unfolds, more international references and locations accumulate. Seeking to rid themselves of the bottle, Keawe and his wife Kokua give out the false story that 'they were gone pleasuring to the States' (p. 92), while in fact they travel to Papeete, 'the chief place of the French in the south islands' (p. 93). There, they attempt to interest Tahitians in buying the bottle. When this fails, they each employ a foreigner – in Kokua's case an old man who is 'a stranger in the island' (p. 95), in Keawe's 'an old brutal Haole [...] that had been a boatswain of a whaler, a runaway, a digger in gold mines, a convict in prisons' (p. 98) – to buy the bottle secretly from the other. The boatswain's history and his language (his generic address to males, even if strangers, is 'mate' [p. 101]) suggest that he may be Australian. Australia is one of two Pacific Rim locations mentioned in the story in connection with Keawe's career as a mariner

(p. 80), San Francisco being the other (p. 73). As well as invoking a wide range of ethnic identities and geographical locations, the story contains many references to different national currencies and their differential values. When Keawe is first tricked into buying the bottle, he pays fifty dollars for it, 'or, to say truth, a little less, because one of [the] dollars was from Chili' (p. 77). As the bottle falls in price through dollars, cents and centimes, systems of coinage and rates of exchange are integral to the plot, increasing narrative suspense as the smallest existing coin is inevitably approached, while at the same time constantly reminding the reader of the global network of trade within which the story unfolds.⁴¹

'The Song of Rahéro' by contrast, emerges from a pre-modern and therefore – with regard to Europe – pre-contact world. Yet it too invests deeply in the idea of transnational exchange. This is a story of nation-building, expressed as a legend of exogamy.⁴² Rahéro's actions in the first part of the narrative are part of an attempt to overthrow a moribund dynasty. The unintended and catastrophic consequences of those actions, revealed in Part Two, lead to the destruction of his entire clan. His response in Part Three is to secure the rebuilding of the clan through an act of bride-capture. One of the most interesting aspects of the poem is the function of the two female characters in the narrative. Tamatea's mother leaves her home clan of the Tevas and home land of Taiárapu to join the Námuna-úra people; she takes the story of Part One with her, thereby instigating the action of Part Two. The unnamed fisherman's wife in Part Three makes the opposite journey, leaving the Námuna-úra and accompanying Rahéro to Taiárapu, in order to help him re-establish the clan of the Tevas. That criss-cross movement of the two women across the field of the narrative's action is vital to the story of national renewal it embodies. By means of the women's journeys, 'The Song of Rahéro' suggests that social groups renew themselves through contact with what lies outside them, and that the idea of boundary-crossing exchange is built into the literature of even the seemingly most pristine of cultures.

Both 'The Bottle Imp' and 'The Song of Rahéro' contain thematic motifs that offer suggestive metaphors for transnationalism itself. In 'The Bottle Imp', there is the motif of exchange, already discussed; the motif of infection, associated with the transmission of leprosy; and the relation of the bottle to its owner, which may be thought of as that of parasite to host. Any of these could function as a metaphor for the process whereby Stevenson took a 'very unliterary product, the English drama of the early part of the century' and 'made it a new thing' (*SST*, p. 72) that belongs by virtue of its authorship to the literature of Scotland and by virtue of its setting to the literature of the Pacific. One could figure this as a process of exchange: Stevenson taking from his Pacific travels details of place, character and manners, and in exchange giving Samoa its first published story in the local language. Or it could be seen as a process of controlled infection, by which a moribund European romance was inoculated, and thereby renewed, with a dose of modern Pacific reality. Or, perhaps most suggestively, it could be seen as a process by which Pacific literature 'hosts' Stevenson, the foreign writer, who could be regarded as a kind of parasite upon the culture from which he drew imaginative sustenance.

It is a short linguistic step from host/parasite to host/guest, which is the central relational motif of 'The Song of Rahéro' and which also provides a rich metaphoric field on which to chart the interconnections of literary transnationalism. 'The Song of Rahéro' is a story of kin, clan, gift, hospitality, treachery and revenge. In the poem and its source story, the Namuna-ura host a feast for the Tevas, after which they kill their guests. In the poem's dedication, Stevenson foregrounds his role as a guest of Tahitian society, specifically the 'too much honoured guest' of the sub-chief Ori a Ori. In a wider sense, in seeking from his Tahitian friends the means and permission to retell a local traditional story, Stevenson became a kind of guest writer within Tahitian culture – not just a writer in residence, in the physical sense, but a literary force given space and sustenance to write by the indigenous narrative tradition on which he drew. On the other hand, one could also argue that the established British author was not a literary guest but a host, giving the Tahitian legend a place within his own oeuvre, hospitably extending the shelter and protection of his name and global celebrity to this obscure piece of the world's literature.

So, as we try to understand the double placement of 'The Song of Rahéro' and 'The Bottle Imp' within Scottish and Pacific literature, we must ask which literature is really the host and which the guest of the other – or, to revert to the imagery suggested by 'The Bottle Imp', which is the parasite and which is the host? In his classic demonstration of deconstructive reading, 'The Critic as Host' (1977), J. Hillis Miller showed the porousness of the boundaries between these concepts and the inbuilt capacities of language to break down apparent binary oppositions into shifting, multiple, reversible relations. His etymological investigation of the word 'parasite' leads him to claim that:

'Para' is an 'uncanny' double antithetical prefix signifying at once proximity and distance, similarity and difference, interiority and exteriority, something at once inside a domestic economy and outside it, something simultaneously this side of the boundary line, threshold, or margin, and at the same time beyond it, equivalent in status and at the same time secondary or subsidiary, submissive, as of guest to host, slave to master.⁴³

The parasite therefore is at once alien to and part of its host – a guest, perhaps a destructive one, but incorporated with the host off which it feeds. Miller finds a similarly 'uncanny' linguistic relation between the terms 'host' and 'guest', deriving as both words do from the same etymological root:

The relation of household master offering hospitality to a guest and the guest receiving it, of host and parasite in the original sense of 'fellow guest,' is inclosed within the word 'host' itself. A host in the sense of a guest, moreover, is both a friendly visitor in the house and at the same time an alien presence who turns the home into a hotel, a neutral territory. [...] The uncanny antithetical relation exists not only between pairs of words in this system, host and parasite, host and guest,

but within each word in itself. [...] Each word in itself becomes separated by the strange logic of the 'para,' membrane which divides inside from outside and yet joins them in a hymeneal bond, or allows an osmotic mixing, making the strangers friends, the distant near, the dissimilar similar, the *Unheimlich heimlich*, the homely homey, without, for all its closeness and similarity, ceasing to be strange, distant, dissimilar. (pp. 442-43)

So it is, I have come to think, with Stevenson as a host, guest or parasite of Pacific literature, and with Pacific culture becoming, through him, a host, guest or parasite of Scottish writing. To take the play on words further, as Miller at one point does (p. 446), guests may also be ghosts. The figure of Stevenson continues to haunt Pacific literature, as – to use Harold Bloom's language – a 'strong precursor' with whom modern Pacific writers may feel bound to struggle,⁴⁴ and it is matter for debate whether this lingering ghost has had an enabling or a disabling effect upon the development of indigenous Pacific literature. On the other hand, Stevenson's attempt to authenticate himself as a presence in the literature of the region by retelling 'a genuine Tahitian legend' as 'The Song of Rahéro' is itself haunted by 'the ghosts of speech' (*Poems*, p.75), echoes of the Tahitian voices that were threatened with the same extinction as his 'own dying language' (*Poems*, p.75) in Scotland.

In terms of literary quality, 'The Bottle Imp' is a much greater achievement than 'The Song of Rahéro'. The combination of its 'queer realism', narrative economy and exquisite diction has earned it almost universal critical praise since its first publication. 'The Song of Rahéro', by contrast, failed to please the audience for which it was designed, and never recovered from the critical panning it received upon its initial publication. True, the poem has neither the formal economy nor the verbal finesse that make 'The Bottle Imp' such a successful tale. Yet, as transnarratives the two works are equally interesting. Although the short story clearly expresses a globalised consciousness, whereas the poem seems to speak from a single traditional culture, on closer inspection it can be seen that both texts are pervasively transnational in form and theme. Both place pressure on national fictions of 'bordered containment'.⁴⁵ 'The Bottle Imp' uses the motif of currency to explore the modern Pacific as a 'borderlands' or 'contact zone' of global exchange. 'The Song of Rahéro' traces the emotional and psychological force of the border on a very small scale – that of relations between the Texas and the Namuna-ura – to show how nations renew themselves through boundary-crossing contact with the other. The composition and transmission histories of both texts show that crossings between genres and media, as well as between languages – processes of adaptation as well as translation – are integral to the process of generating transnational literature. More specifically, with regard to Stevenson's distinctive position as a Scottish author who contributed to the literature of the Pacific, these transnarratives provoke questions about the ways in which one national or regional literature may 'host' another, with all the complexities and ambiguities of meaning that the metaphor of the host entails.

NOTES

- 1 *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew, 8 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994-95), vi, 246. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.
- 2 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Poems* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1913), p. 163. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.
- 3 Robert Irwin Hillier, *The South Seas Fiction of Robert Louis Stevenson* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), p. 64.
- 4 Hillier, p. 65; Teuira Henry, *Ancient Tahiti: Based on Material Recorded by J. M. Orsmond* (1928; New York: Klaus Reprint, 1971), pp. 241-46.
- 5 'The Revenge of Maraa' begins at a moment of contact between two districts, Maraa and Matahihae: 'A man named E-te-turi (Deaf-one) and his son Ma-nai (Small-mark) went from Maraa to cast their net along the shores of Matahihae' (p. 241). As comparison of their titles suggests, Henry's version is the story of a group, whereas Stevenson's focuses on a particular individual.
- 6 Vanessa Smith, *Intimate Strangers: Friendship, Exchange and Pacific Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 69, 71, 71-72.
- 7 Smith, *Intimate Strangers*, pp. 100-103; Alfred Gell, *Wrapping in Images: Tattooing in Polynesia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 175-76.
- 8 Victorian jurist Henry Sumner Maine called adoption '[t]he earliest and most extensively employed of legal fictions'. *Ancient Law* (repr. New York: Dorset Press, 1986), p. 107; see also p.22.
- 9 As Ori's speech was translated by the priest, Ariie, it is not clear which of them used the French phrase. See *Letters*, vii, 231n.
- 10 Cf. a letter written to Tati in December 1888: 'as my name is Teriitera ... am I not one of your clansmen? Let me consider myself so'. *Letters*, vi, 236.
- 11 Smith, *Intimate Strangers*, p. 103.
- 12 Monterey Scrapbook 4 (1889-1893), Margaret Stevenson Scrapbook Collection, Stevenson House Collection, Monterey State Historic Park, California State Parks, p. 83. Further references to this scrapbook are given after quotations in the text.
- 13 See Smith, *Literary Culture and the Pacific: Nineteenth-Century Textual Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 18-52 on the beachcomber tradition in general, and pp. 146-66 on Stevenson's engagement with that tradition in *The Wrecker* and *The Ebb-Tide*.
- 14 Letitia Henville argues that in its assertions of authorial control over its subject the poem's 'paratextual frame' complicates, and to some extent undermines, the 'radical politics' of Stevenson's 'core text', which refuses to treat the islanders of the story as exotic others. "'The Walter Scott of Tahiti": Robert Louis Stevenson's Ballad Translation', *Literature Compass*, 9.7 (2012), 489-501 (p. 489). In addition, I would argue that even within the 'paratextual frame' Stevenson pursues irreconcilable aims, wishing at the same time to speak from within the world of the poem, as a participant in the culture it depicts, and from outside that world, as an observer equipped with an alien intellectual apparatus for analysing and understanding it. The twentieth-century ethnographic ideal of 'participant observation' fused these positions, in theory, but here Stevenson alternates between them.
- 15 'You must remember that we are only the decayed fragments of the Roman Empire, from which we derive all that we value ourselves upon,' he told an interviewer in Auckland in 1893. 'Mr. R. L. Stevenson on Reading and

Literature: An Interview', *Argus*, 6 May 1893, p. 4. Stevenson's fascination with the legacies of Rome originated in his study of Roman Law as part of his legal training in Edinburgh; see Roslyn Jolly, *Robert Louis Stevenson in the Pacific: Travel, Empire, and the Author's Profession* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 37-38. For a detailed analysis of the influence of Stevenson's Roman Law studies on his practice as an anthropologist in *In the South Seas* and *A Footnote to History*, see Jolly, *Robert Louis Stevenson*, pp. 39-58.

16 Robert Louis Stevenson and Lloyd Osbourne, *The Wrecker* (repr. New York: Dover, 1982), p.125; cf. the image of 'the Roman wall' in *A Footnote to History: Eight Years of Trouble in Samoa* (London: Cassell, 1892), pp. 1-2. See also Robert Louis Stevenson, *In the South Seas*, ed. by Neil Rennie (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 9.

17 Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Wrecker*, p. 125.

18 *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Paul Maixner (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 370.

19 Maixner, *Robert Louis Stevenson*, pp. 369-70.

20 Maixner, *Robert Louis Stevenson*, p. 372.

21 Erik Gray, 'Clough and his Discontents: *Amours de Voyage* and the English Hexameter', *Literary Imagination*, 6.2 (2004), 195-210 (p. 205). Henville argues against such a reading of 'Rahéro', quoting lines that resist 'this kind of neat division', in 'Walter Scott in Tahiti', p. 491. However, one could quote different lines (for example, the first two of the poem), which readily illustrate Gray's point.

22 Smith, *Literary Culture and the Pacific*, p. 143.

23 Henville, 'Walter Scott in Tahiti', p. 492.

24 'If only I knew any Latin!' Stevenson exclaimed in a letter recording the profound impact he received from reading Virgil at Bournemouth in 1886 (*Letters*, v, 235-6). According to his cousin and biographer, Graham Balfour, he 'never mastered the grammar of the language, and to the end made the most elementary mistakes'. *The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson*, 2 vols (New York: Scribner's, 1901), II, 102. Acutely aware of his shortcomings as a Latin scholar, Stevenson would often ask his friend Sidney Colvin for help with translations, or when quoting Virgil would follow with a tentative 'is that right?' (*Letters*, VIII, 322).

25 George Saintsbury, *A History of English Prosody from the Twelfth Century to the Present Day*, 3 vols (London: Macmillan, 1910), III, 397-406.

26 'He began to read and write in Samoan and, under the tutelage of the missionary Samuel Whitmee, translated part of the chronicle of Edwin in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*'. Robert Hoskins, 'Introduction', in *Sophia Scarlet and other Pacific Writings* (Auckland: AUT Media, 2008), pp. 11-15 (p. 11).

27 Cf. John Charlot's argument about 'The Song of Rahéro' as a ballad: 'Stevenson is looking for a non-classical European genre with which to express a non-classical subject'. 'The Influence of Polynesian Literature and Thought on Robert Louis Stevenson', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 14 (1987), 82-104 (p. 93).

28 The story was published serially in the New York *Herald* from 8 February to 1 March 1891 and in the English journal *Black and White* on 28 March and 4 April 1891.

29 The tale's literary genealogy is traced by Joseph Warren Beach, 'The Sources of Stevenson's *Bottle Imp*', *Modern Language Notes*, 25 (1910), pp. 12-18.

30 For an excellent account of this crisis and Stevenson's relation to it, see Rod Edmond, *Leprosy and Empire: A Medical and Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 90-93, pp. 145-56 and pp. 224-30. Edmond interprets the imp of the title as 'a figure for the disease itself and the destruction it causes' (p. 227).

31 Robert Louis Stevenson, *South Sea Tales*, ed. by Roslyn Jolly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 89. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

32 Roger Swearingen provides a detailed timeline of the story's composition and translation, so far as it can be reconstructed from surviving evidence. 'Introduction', in *The Bottle Imp/O le Fagu Aitu in English and Samoan*, ed. by Robert Hoskins (Wellington: Steele Roberts, 2010), pp. 24-31. The edition includes a corrected text of the story as it was published in the missionary magazine *O le Sulu Samoa*, indicating the breaks between the seven monthly installments.

33 Balfour, *Life of Robert Louis Stevenson*, II, 130.

34 *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson to his Family and Friends*, ed. by Sidney Colvin, 2 vols (London: Methuen, 1899), II, 205.

35 The place of narrative fiction within oral (as opposed to literate) cultures is a subject of considerable, ongoing anthropological and sociological debate. For an intervention in that debate, which focuses the key areas of recent academic controversy, see Jack Goody, *Myth, Ritual and the Oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Goody's own position, based on his research in Africa, is that in oral cultures 'fiction generally is for the young; adults demand more serious matter' (p. 131), such as narratives conveying useful (because true) information about the world, or myths embodying historical and religious truth. If Goody's claims are applicable to traditional Samoan society, this could explain local confusion about the truth-status of Stevenson's story; Stevenson's wealth, power and social status may have seemed incompatible with the 'childish' activity of telling fictional tales.

36 See Stevenson's chapter, 'Graveyard Stories', in Stevenson, *In the South Seas*, pp. 136-51. The supernatural 'stories' Stevenson heard when travelling among the Pacific islands seem to have been offered as news, or anecdotes of real life, not fictional entertainment.

37 See Ernest Mehew's editorial note in *Letter*, VII, 143.

38 Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Talofa, Togarewa!', in *Sophia Scarlet and Other Pacific Writings*, pp. 81-85 (p. 81).

39 Henry Moors, an Apia trader with whom Stevenson had close personal, political and business relations and who supplied many facts for his Samoan history, *A Footnote to History* (1892).

40 Stevenson, *In the South Seas*, p. 234.

41 I disagree with Kevin McLaughlin's claim that 'in this story the possibilities of traveling to islands in the South Seas with ever smaller units of currency is, we are led to believe, limitless. [...]The bottle thus betokens an economy that includes a concept, or fiction, of infinitely large and small amounts. A source of potentially infinite credit, it brings with it a debt which is always approaching a fictive absolute zero, as such never to be reached'. 'The Financial Imp: Ethics and Finance in Nineteenth-Century Fiction', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 29.2 (1996), 165-83 (p. 175). This asymptotic view of the death-sentence carried by possession of the bottle is not borne out by the story, in which the damnation signified by looming exhaustion of currency units is an unavoidable reality that must fall to someone – just not, as it turns out, the story's attractive main characters.

42 I use the term 'nation' in this context not in the now dominant nineteenth-century European sense of a political state, but in its earlier meaning of a 'group of people having a single ethnic, tribal, or religious affiliation', as was once used to refer to Irish clans, and is still used to designate North America's indigenous tribes or 'first nations'. See *OED* entry 'nation, n.1', definitions 1c, 4 and 5'.

43 J. Hillis Miller, 'The Critic as Host', *Critical Inquiry*, 3 (1977), 439-447 (p. 441). Further references to this essay are given after quotations in the text.

44 See, for example, Albert Wendt's 'Foreword', 'Tusitala: The Legend, the Writer & the Literature of the Pacific', in *Robert Louis Stevenson: His Best Pacific Writings*, ed. by Roger Robinson (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2004), pp. 9-11. Wendt's novels *Leaves of the Banyan Tree* (1979) and *The Mango's Kiss* (2003) engage explicitly with Stevenson's legacy to indigenous Pacific writers. See also Michelle Keown's essay in this issue of *IJSL*.

45 Stephen Clingman, *The Grammar of Identity: Transnational Fiction and the Nature of the Boundary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 3.