A Sense of Dark Places: The Gothic Representation of the Scottish Natural Environment in Fiction by Robert Louis Stevenson

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The Gothic Representation of the Scottish Natural Environment in Fiction by Robert Louis Stevenson

by

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In the highlands, in the country places,
Where the old plain men have rosy faces,
And the young fair maidens
Quiet eyes;
Where essential silence cheers and blesses,
And for ever in the hill-recesses
Her more lovely music
Broods and dies.

O to mount again where erst I haunted;
Where the old red hills are bird-enchanted,
And the low green meadows
Bright with sward;
And when even dies, the million-tinted,
And the night has come, and planets glinted,
Lo, the valley hollow,
Lamp-bestarred!

O to dream, O to awake and wander
There, and with delight to take and render,
Through the trance of silence,
Quiet breath;
Lo! for there, among the flowers and grasses,
Only the mightier movement sounds and passes;
Only winds and rivers,
Life and death.

Robert Louis Stevenson

(1850-1894)

Introduction

This thesis examines the Gothic representation and symbolic function of the Scottish natural environment in two works by Robert Louis Stevenson: the short story "The Merry Men" (1882) and the adventure novel *Kidnapped* (1886). The Gothic aesthetics in Stevenson's writings – such as the notion of the sublime, the personification of nature, and the past versus the present – highlight the themes that the author expresses through his description of the Scottish landscape and seascape. By analysing the depiction of the Scottish natural environment in "The Merry Men" and *Kidnapped*, and by comparing these images with the aesthetics characteristic of the Gothic genre, I will demonstrate that the Scottish natural environment is not only Gothic in description (Yang and Healy, Shaw, Mishra), but also symbolises the themes and motifs of the narratives involved, such as heritage, memory and identity (Stewart and Strathern). Moreover, in the two narratives, the idea of Scotland as a nation as well as its specific physical environment becomes dark and mysterious, affecting both the characters' and the readers' sense of place (Wilkie and Roberson). Since one's sense of place is closely connected to one's state of mind, it is essential to critically explore the extent to which the Scottish landscape and seascape influence the state of mind of the protagonists.

This thesis argues that, in both "The Merry Men" and *Kidnapped*, the representation of the Scottish natural environment affects the characters' state of mind and holds a symbolic function in relation to heritage, memory, and identity. In "The Merry Men," the landscape and seascape evoke feelings of terror and anxiety, trigger troubled memories from the past, and give rise to superstitious believes. However, amidst these terrors and superstitions, the sublime depictions of nature also evoke a sense of reverence and awe. *Kidnapped* portrays a shift from the sublime terror at the beginning of the narrative to a more picturesque harmony in the second half of the story, which makes *Kidnapped* an adventure novel with Gothic elements, rather than an

archetypical Gothic text like “The Merry Men.” Nonetheless, in *Kidnapped*, the unruly seascape and west coast of Scotland overwhelm the characters with feelings of both fear and awe, which is comparable to the sublime aesthetics affecting the characters’ state of mind in “The Merry Men.” In addition, the adventure novel is filled with picturesque descriptions of the heather-strewn landscape that create a sense of harmony and offer contrast to the sublime terror. As the otherness of the Highlands slowly fades at the end of *Kidnapped*, the protagonist, a lowlander, experiences a change in his state of mind and, with that, in his identity. Furthermore, with the frequently recurring phrase “to take to the heather,” a metaphor that implies that someone has become an outlaw or bandit, Stevenson gives heather – an extremely common natural element in Scottish scenery – a symbolic function in the plot of the narrative. Additionally, the analysis will show that Stevenson drew from his own memory and experience in his portrayal of the Scottish landscape and seascape.

As both primary texts were written in the late nineteenth century – a literary period that posed a revival of the Gothic genre – the first chapter contains a literary review that provides a general introduction to the topic of *fin-de-siècle* Gothic and offers a brief overview of the historical context of the two primary sources. The two subsequent chapters will cover close readings of “The Merry Men” and *Kidnapped*, respectively. The findings of the first close reading will be juxtaposed to the findings of the second reading in the *Kidnapped* chapter. The results of this comparative analysis will be discussed and followed by a conclusion in the final chapter.

Chapter I: *Fin-de-siècle* Gothic, Identity and Historical Context

This chapter provides the context in which the two primary texts of this thesis are analysed. At the turn of the twentieth century, Gothic novels focussed even more on the human psyche, predominantly on the darker corners of the mind. Key examples are Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (1891), Machen's *The Great God Pan* (1894), Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), and, of course, Stevenson's own novella *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). These Gothic writings explore the uncanny facets of the human psyche and "embody *fin de siècle* anxiety over humanity's displacement, disorientation, and disillusionment in several specific ways" (Yang and Healy 241). Moreover, "[t]he *fin de siècle* marked a period of transition from old to new, without the assurance that the future would bring continued enlightenment and improvement," which enhanced the anxiety mentioned above (Smith and Hughes 217). By exploring the relationship between psyche and nature, this chapter will show how and in what ways the latter can affect and shape the former. Furthermore, the relationship between the Gothic as a genre and both landscape and identity as key themes will be discussed, followed by a brief overview of the historical events that preceded and influenced Stevenson's narratives.

1.1 Gothic & Landscape

While the texts analysed in this thesis are not as famously Gothic as Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde*, they do show numerous Gothic elements in their representation of the Scottish landscape. In *Gothic Landscapes: Changing Eras, Changing Cultures, Changing Anxieties*, Sharon Rose Yang and Kathleen Healey provide an extensive account of the symbolism and metaphors that oftentimes underlie the depiction of a Gothic landscape, arguing that "landscape in the Gothic

is more than just a mere backdrop to the main action" and that it is "a means by which political, psychological, social, and cultural ideals are laid bare, transmitted, and often critiqued" (1). This thesis focusses on the psychological aspects which are conveyed through Stevenson's landscapes, but also considers the political and cultural ideals that arise in the Scottish setting of the narratives. As such, the role of landscape exceeds the mere geographic function and highlights the relationship between humans and nature. In his essay "Imperial Landscape," W.J.T. Mitchell explains that "[l]andscape is a medium of exchange between the human and the natural, the self and the other" (5). The self versus the other is of course a stock image within the Gothic genre, as pictured, for instance, in Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, where the 'otherness' of Mr Hyde plays a central role in the narrative. In "The Merry Men" and *Kidnapped*, this otherness is found in nature; the self represents the protagonists and 'the other' portrays the landscapes and seascapes through which these characters manoeuvre.

Yang and Healy offer the following interpretation of the role of landscape: "Landscape, whether natural or human-made, is an aspect of the Gothic that powerfully embodies how the genre's fluidity enables it to challenge tradition and liberate anxieties. Gothic's ambience of uncertainty, delusion, fluidity, isolation, and instability is created mainly by landscape" (5). These anxieties arise from typically Gothic settings such as murky forests, towering cliffs, and ferocious seas. The fluidity of which Yang and Healy speak is not solely the *fin-de-siècle* shift towards the darker aspects of the human psyche, but also the flexibility of the aesthetic terminology, "for different authors had different ideas of what comprised the sublime, the beautiful, and the picturesque. But the basic concepts remained intact and the landscape aesthetics that had proved so useful for their eighteenth-century predecessors continued to be an important part of nineteenth-century Gothic craft" (Yang and Healy 84). Below, the concepts and terminology relevant to the thesis at hand will be further elucidated.

A psychological approach to how humans perceive nature is through the notion of the sublime, as the sublime enkindles a feeling in response to nature. Edmund Burke asserted in 1757 that the sublime is "the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" (58-9). Yang and Healy explain that "[t]he power of Nature to subsume the individual in its sublime ineffability is yet another way Gothic landscapes embody these anxieties" (8). In his extensive study *The Sublime*, Philip Shaw underlines this psychological aspect of the sublime: "Sublimity … refers to the moment when the ability to apprehend, to know, and to express a thought or sensation is defeated. Yet through this very defeat, the mind gets a feeling for that which lies beyond thought and language" (3). Even though the expression of this feeling lies beyond words, numerous authors – including Stevenson – have endeavoured to convey through their writings the complex emotion that arises from an encounter with the sublime. Vijay Mishra, who authored *The Gothic Sublime*, adds:

> The Gothic tropes the sublime as the unthinkable, the unnameable, and the unspeakable, always making it, the sublime, and its basic forms (the rhetorical and the natural) both incommensurable with each other and in excess of language … It is not what the Gothic sublime *is* that is crucial, it is what if *effects* that is its essence. (Mishra 23)

Both Shaw and Mishra demonstrate that language alone does not encompass the complexity of the sublime and that the essential element is the impact of the feeling it evokes.

As a much-explored Gothic trope, the sublime is an appropriate aesthetic to consider when analysing landscapes and seascapes, for sublimity is often expressed in a natural element that is both emotionally overwhelming in its beauty and potentially dangerous in its encounter. For instance, the vastness of the Scottish Highlands and the unpredictability of the sea surrounding the Scottish Hebrides prove to be simultaneously alluring and intimidating. According to Yang and Healy, "British novelists – especially those who worked within the

then-new Gothic form – often referenced these aesthetics as a way of adding layers of emotional interest and drawing readers into the story" (75). Indeed, readers who can identify with the emotional reaction to the natural environment in the narrative will be drawn into the story through a shared sense of place, a term that will be further clarified below. The sumptuous, elaborate descriptions of beautiful yet perilous landscapes and seascapes will evoke feelings of what Yang and Healy call "sublime awe" and "delicious terror" (75).

Crucially, beauty is merely a constituent of the notion of the sublime. To show contrast, Shaw juxtaposes the concept of the beautiful and the concept of the sublime: "The sublime is greater than the beautiful; the sublime is dark, profound, and overwhelming … whereas the beautiful is light, fleeting, and charming" (9). Moreover, the sublime can be described as a "divisive force" that encourages "difference and deference," while the beautiful inspires "unity and harmony" (Shaw 9). Within the chasm that exists between the "close-at-hand softness" of the beautiful and the "distanced powerful" sublime, lies the concept of the picturesque (Mohr 250). While the picturesque generally occurs in texts from the Romantic genre rather than the Gothic, the second narrative discussed in the present thesis, Stevenson's *Kidnapped,* features instances of the Gothic sublime as well as the Romantic picturesque that was part of the of British culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. William Gilpin, who introduced the term "picturesque," in 1782, defines it as follows: "a term expressive of that peculiar kind of beauty, which is agreeable in a picture" (*An Essay upon Prints* 2). Two centuries later, Hans-Unlich Mohr offers a richer definition and lists the following criteria for the picturesque: "Irregularity, contrast, roughness, kinship to the real world, variety, use of light and shade, novelty, pictorial organization" (245). In comparison with the sublime, the picturesque exerts less influence on one's state of mind and, albeit irregular and rough, shows more harmony with the natural surroundings.

Another significant Gothic trope that shapes and even unbalances the relationship between mankind and landscapes is the ungovernability of nature, or, more accurately, man's inability to govern nature. This unequal relationship is determined by the unruliness of nature, for "the natural resists human control and understanding" (Yang and Healy 3). When something is out of one's control or beyond one's comprehension, they simply have no other option than to adapt to the given situation. Therefore, having to adjust to nature can affect people's way of thinking and even shape their identities, a consequence that will be further explicated in the section below concerning identity and landscape. To exemplify, Yang and Healy state that "[i]n terms of natural landscapes, the power and sensory obfuscation of storms, fogs, dark forests, and night leave characters unable to orient themselves, unable to assert human power to perceive a shifting, even hostile, nature, let alone to control or define it" (5-6). Nature's refusal to be controlled or defined by humans, especially in the dark and in dangerous weather, corresponds to the eerie aesthetics of the Gothic genre. Moreover, the human inability to define nature is congruous with Shaw's above-mentioned definition of the sublime, which described sublimity as the human inability to apprehend and convey the thought or sensation their mind perceives at a certain moment.

The idea of a landscape that is uncontrollable, indefinable, and, in a way, has a mind of its own, is emphasized by assigning anthropomorphic qualities to natural elements. Yang and Healy explicate that "fierce personifications of nature, such as storms, cataracts, mountains, or roaring oceans may mirror or reinforce the passion, ferocity, and obsession of a character, while the shadowed depths of caves, forests, or tarns may perform the same task in terms of a character's dark and hidden thoughts or past" (6).[1] The personification of nature and its

[1] Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* is a classic example of how the personalities of the characters are reflected in the landscape. For example, the wildness of Heathcliff's character mirrors the wildness of the moors. See, e.g., "Inhabiting Nature in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*" by Ivonne Defant (2017) and "Repression and Sublimation of Nature in *Wuthering Heights*" by Margaret Homans (1978).

symbolic function with respect to the psyche of the characters involved in the narrative add another layer to the deep-rooted connection between humans and the landscape or seascape surrounding them. Moreover, the character's personality and identity can be matched and accentuated by the atmosphere of the nature that is described. In both "The Merry Men" and *Kidnapped*, Stevenson elaborately explores these "fierce personifications of nature" of which Yang and Healy speak above – especially the "roaring oceans," which fill the characters' state of mind with fear and terror and are thus significant Gothic aesthetics in the two narratives.

Many *fin-de-siècle* Gothic texts explore the concept of the past invading and pervading the present (Yang and Healy 3). It is often the protagonist's (or antagonist's) past that heavily influences their acts and behaviour in the present and disturbs the status quo. While this traditional Gothic theme is sometimes restricted to the characters in the narrative, it can similarly be deployed for the natural environment through which these characters navigate. In times of political, social, or natural disasters, the landscape bears witness and creates a past for a new generation of people who have not themselves lived through these events. As such, landscapes can hold a past that can "invade and pervade" the present of the people who live in or pass through these lands. Yang and Healy add: "Disordered landscapes in the Gothic represent the chaos of a culture in transition, or the violence of passions seething beneath the veneer of civilized society. Gothic landscapes are a lens by which cultures reflect back their darkness hidden from the light of consciousness" (5). Furthermore, as many Gothic novels raise questions about the established power structures in society, and on occasion even defy them, the landscapes in these texts can project and give context to the "historical conflicts of power and thought" that would otherwise be pushed away (Yang and Healy 8). The historical context section below will describe the events to which the Scottish landscape has been witness and which influence the culture and the daily lives of the characters from the two primary texts.

Beside the "Gothic's emphasis on the irrepressible, the unspeakable, the inexplicable," many Gothic writings implement the conventions mentioned above "to create porous worlds where social, political, spiritual, physical, geographical, and personal boundaries are as permeable, and as constantly shifting, as the genre itself" (Yang and Healy 3-4). The tensions between these boundaries both overlap and reinforce one another. Scotland, for instance, bears actual porous borders externally between itself and England, and internally between the Scottish Highlands and Lowlands. While geographically in essence, these boundaries yield political, social, cultural, and personal disparities as well. However, as Yang and Healy argue above, these boundaries are constantly in flux. In his adventure novel *Kidnapped*, Stevenson plays with this idea of a fluctuating personal boundary as his protagonist – who comes from the Lowlands – shows a shift in his opinion of the Highlands after experiencing the culture and nature first-hand.

Connected to these various permeable borders is the idea of what Yang and Healy call the "cultural reciprocity of landscape" (5). This reciprocity is found in the way a landscape offers a foundation for a culture, and in which people create a culture within the potential and the limitations of said landscape. Rachael Ziady DeLue sums it up neatly by stating that "landscape … is both our subject and the thing within which we exist" (10). Based on the works of many landscape scholars such as DeLue, Elkins, Cosgrove, Daniels, and Corner, Yang and Healy argue that it is no surprise to see that landscape, which is in essence a "cultural artifact," plays a major role in the Gothic literary genre (5). They explain that "landscape is more than a physical entity, it is a canvas upon which cultures paint their world, their desires, and their cultural and political beliefs" (5). In that way, landscape is used as a means to an end. Two of these ends – the shaping of one's identity and the shaping of cultural and political beliefs based on historical events – are analysed in detail below.

1.2 Identity & Landscape

The collection of papers *Landscape, Memory and History: Anthropological Perspectives*, edited by Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern, investigates the conceptualisation of landscape within studies of identity. They argue that "notions of memory" and "notions of place" are two essential components to consider in these identity studies: "Memory and place, via landscape (including seascape), can be seen as crucial transducers whereby the local, national and global are brought into mutual alignment; or as providing sites where conflicts between these influences are played out" (Stewart and Strathern 2). As such, both landscapes and seascapes carry significant weight in the construction of one's identity.

While landscape is geographically bound to country borders, its complexity reaches beyond the mere topographical and helps define cultural, social, and political dimensions within a nation and generates "national senses of identity" (Stewart and Strathern 2). Moreover, Stewart and Strathern posit that "… cultural knowledge gained from living within a social landscape determines the pictures that people construct" (3). This means that, once more, the porous boundaries play an essential role; not only because the physical border lines are sometimes superseded by abstract borders, but also because landscape influences the cultural, social, and political climate on the basis of which people shape their identity. Stewart and Strathern emphasize that landscape is "a contextual horizon of perceptions, providing both a foreground and a background in which people feel themselves to be living in their world" (4). In other words, landscape – whether natural or man-made – fulfils both an active and a passive role in the construction of identity.

The horizon of perceptions mentioned above is often a projection of people's thoughts and personalities. Analogous to landscape, identity is subject to change and therefore never rigid, which indicates that the past, present and future can hold different identities for one and the same person. Stewart and Strathern assert, based on the findings by E.D. Hirsch, that

landscape is a "process because its shape at any given time reflects change and is a part of change. Nevertheless it often serves as a crucial marker of continuity with the past as well as a reassurance of identity in the present and a promise for the future" (4). This idea, that landscape simultaneously embodies transformation and stability in its interaction with human identity, improves our understanding of how people and their thoughts and personalities are shaped by the natural elements surrounding them, and why these perceptions shift over time.

How individuals perceive and respond to landscape is embedded in the concept "sense of place," which refers to "subjective human reactions to places" (Wilkie and Roberson 2532). The key element to take from this definition is subjectivity, for a single location can evoke a myriad unique senses of place and "the subjectivity of emplacement is an undeniable part of the human psyche" (Stewart and Strathern 9). A particular place can raise pleasant feelings or jog joyful memories for one, and at the same time hold dark or unpleasant connotations for another. These inter-human differences can then be traced back to individual memory and preference. However, senses of place do not only vary between people, but can also be revised internally as a person grows older. For example, creating new memories at an older age within the same environment may alter one's viewpoint and trigger a new sense of place. People also tend to appreciate the beauty of nature more intensely as they get older – when they are not or less rushed by everyday activities – which can enhance their sense of a place of a location that they have known all their life. Therefore, sense of place is extremely personal and constantly in flux.

Wilkie and Roberson underline that studying sense of place offers many approaches within multiple disciplines, due to the "uniqueness of individual responses, as well as the distinctiveness that different places possess" (Wilkie and Roberson 2532). To study sense of place is to study the character of a place and to ask why a certain location evokes "a sense of awe or attachment" (Wilkie and Roberson 2532-3). While sense of place is not limited to

natural grounds and can also imply man-made landscapes, it is often in nature that people find this sense of awe and attachment – which unmistakably relates to the Gothic trope of the sublime. Shaw declares that "the definition of the sublime is not restricted to value judgements; it also describes a state of mind" (1). Therefore, since one of the key aspects of the sublime is to show "the contrast between the limitations of human perception and the overwhelming majesty of nature" (Shaw 4), the concept of sublime and the concept of sense of place are both intrinsically linked to one's state of mind and the perception of one's surroundings.

Another Gothic trope mentioned above that neatly tunes in with the notions of identity and sense of place is the personification of landscape (or seascape). When anthropomorphic qualities are assigned to natural elements, the reader is able to identify themselves with the landscape described and with its mood. To achieve a clearer understanding of the relationship between identity and landscapes, Wilkie and Roberson explain the development and fluctuation of individual senses of place:

> Each person brings his or her own personality, background, and previous experiences into the process of forming a sense of place. People draw on their own use of the human senses, their own sense of aesthetics, and their own intellectual and emotional responses that they have developed with regard to places; these are based on their experiences and perceptions and the development of cognitive understandings of places. One's reactions and responses are not static, however, and the way one looks at places continues to evolve as one's life cycle develops and as the landscapes and places around one are transformed. (2532)

Beside the human reaction to the aesthetics of a landscape, the formation of sense of place is determined by who we are, where we come from, and what we remember. These three fundamental factors – identity, heritage, and memory – play a crucial role in establishing a

sense of place. In Stevenson's works of fiction, for instance, these three factors determine the role that landscape plays in the lives of the protagonists and in the plot. Moreover, these factors help build the character development when a protagonist's subjective reaction to a place evolves throughout the narrative.

Although sense of place is highly personal and unique, social or cultural subgroups usually share a common sense of place. These shared emotions arise historically from "an understanding of places at local and regional levels or through folklore and hand-me-down stories" (Wilkie and Roberson 2532). Authors regularly rely on shared knowledge and shared senses of place to evoke certain emotions – either positive or negative – or to express certain themes that are familiar to and comprehensible for their readers. What is interesting about writing about non-fictional places, is that the place described in the text can evoke different senses of place for the author, the narrator, the protagonist(s), and the readers. This should all be taken into consideration when discussing the sense of a specific place in a (fictional) text. Through fictional landscapes, however, authors will often succeed in conveying their intended sense of place, for they can play with stock landscapes and stereotypical imagery to create the desired emotion. Fields of bright flowers will evoke merry sentiments, whereas ominous cliffs or gloomy mountains will give a sense of dark places. With regard to the Scottish natural environment, national history connects the unruly Highlands and Hebrides with the wild and the savage, with the unlettered and the superstitious, creating a sense of place that stems from what is in the mind (identity, heritage and memory) and what is perceived by the eyes (the untamed nature).

Stewart and Strathern comment on the concept of sense of place from a more spiritual perspective by stating that "… the sense of place and embeddedness within local, mythical, and ritual landscapes is important. These senses of place serve as pegs on which people hang memories, construct meanings from events, and establish ritual and religious arenas of action"

(3). Of particular interest for this thesis is Stewart and Strathern's study into identity and the meaning of landscape in Scotland:

> … we have shown the ways in which people manifest their local, and in some instances their national, senses of self-recognition and social identity. Folktales, myths, oral histories, ballads, ritual incantations and ordinary stories of daily life all invoke in real or imagined detail the spatial positionings of a community of people. Our research in Ayrshire, Scotland, has shown, among other things, how places with historical significance can be appropriated through their perceived cultural heritage status so as to strengthen political identities. (3)

Stewart and Strathern's findings demonstrate once more that the history, culture, and politics of a place are intricately linked to and heavily affect the construction of identity. The historical and cultural influence express a sense of nostalgia, which will be examined below; the political impact will be further discussed in the following section.

In what Stewart and Strathern call "the inner landscape of the mind," people store their aesthetic knowledge of a place to which they feel connected or feel nostalgic about (7). Within the context of "recollection and commemoration," wistful feelings are often linked to this stored knowledge and contribute to forming an identity (7). The Scottish writer Violet Jacob explores this is a rather powerful motif in her poetry and addresses the Scottish diaspora in the early twentieth century. In one of her vernacular poems, "The Gangrel," Jacob describes the scenery that tourists will see upon visiting her home region in Scotland and draws a distinction between "inner and outer landscapes" (Stewart & Strathern 8). The inner landscape signifies the landscape that the speaker of the poem "sees" from experience, even though the speaker does not live in Scotland anymore, whereas the outer landscape refers to the familiar sights that the visitors encounter during their journey in Scotland. The contrast lies in seeing with the eyes

versus ‘seeing’ with the heart, the latter of which, of course, correlates with the concept of sense of place as considered above.

Juxtaposing the inner landscape with sense of place, Stewart and Strathern elucidate that the inner landscape “merges the perceived experience of the place with the imagined symbolic meaning of the place to the individual” (8). The speaker distinguishes between this symbolic seeing, which is “best,” according to the speaker of Jacob’s poem, and the actual act of seeing in the following stanzas:

> O’ nichts, ayont yer snibbet door,
> Ye’ll see in changeless band,
> Abune Craig Oule, to keep Strathmore,
> The stars of Scotland stand.
>
> But tho’ ye think ye sicht them fine
> Gang ben an’ tak’ yer rest,
> Frae lands that niver kent their shine
> It’s me that sees them best!
>
> For they shall brak’ their ancient trust,
> Shall rise nae mair nor set,
> The Sidlaw hills be laid in dust
> Afore that I forget.
>
> Lowse ye the windy-sneck a wheen,
> An’ glowre frae ilka airt
> Fegs ! Ye may see them wi’ yer een—
> I see them wi’ my he’rt!
>
> (Jacob 36-7)

While the tourists will see the same places, they will not see them in the same way as the speaker, from memory and, therefore, from the heart. This division between inner and outer landscapes and its relation to sense of place is an essential aspect in defining one’s identity through landscape.

Stewart and Strathern conclude that landscapes can thus become vehicles for many themes, such as "attachments to land, conflicts over land, the use of images of the past in the social construction of identities, and variant views of history, development and change" (10). As expected, Stevenson uses these vehicles and explores these topics in his portrayal of the Scottish natural environment. With identity, heritage and memory as key themes in Stevenson's works, the subsequent chapters will not only explore the ways in which these main subjects are expressed through Stevenson's depiction of the Scottish landscape and seascape, but also examine how the identities of the characters involved are sculpted by their past and externalised in the present. This Gothic trope of past versus present together with the Gothic trope of the sublime form a modus operandi for Stevenson to express these ulterior themes through his depiction of nature.

1.3 Historical Context

The historical relationship between Scotland and England predominantly encompassed division and warfare. Amid the more notorious conflicts such as the Battle of Brunanburh (937), the Wars of Scottish Independence (1296-1357), the Border Wars (1372-1448), the Battle of Flodden (1513), and the Rough Wooing (1543-51); many smaller rebellions and skirmishes occurred, resulting in geopolitical tensions that lasted for centuries (Woolf et al. "Anglo-Scottish Relations"). The numerous wars between the two nations on the largest British isle generated "clashes between Catholics and Protestants, Presbyterians and Episcopalians, Highlanders and Lowlanders, and Scots and Britons," some of which are still profoundly embedded in Scottish identity (Broun et al. "National Identity").

Despite multiple treaties and the Acts of Union of 1707, which unified the kingdoms of Scotland and England, the mutual hostility remained and displayed another outburst through

the Jacobite Risings in the first half of the eighteenth century. The Jacobites were "supporters of the exiled Stuarts [who] mounted military operations against the Whig and Hanoverian establishments," and although the Jacobite cause held sympathisers all throughout Great Britain and Ireland, the Scottish Highland clans provided the majority of the armed capacity for the uprisings (Mackillop "Jacobitism"). During the final revolt, the Jacobite Rising of 1745, an astounding 90 per cent of the army consisted of Highland clansman. This uprising ended after nine months in violent defeat for the Jacobite army at the Battle of Culloden; this battle ended the Jacobite rebellion, but did not terminate the Jacobite spirit, nor the Anglo-Scottish hostility, especially in the Highland region where the battle transpired, and where most losses were suffered during the revolts.

Notwithstanding the political hostility, the Scottish economy benefited from the British Empire and thrived even further after the Union, which created opportunities "in the fields of exploration, missionary work, colonial government, military service, and emigration" and offered "an important market for Scottish investment and exports" (Finlay, "British Empire"). However, though advantageous for the Scottish economy as a whole, these opportunities were mainly seized by the Lowland Scots who lived closer to the English border in the financial heart of Scotland, segregating the urban south even further from the rural Highlands and Hebrides in the north. While the Union did bring hope of a strengthened Great Britain, it was:

> … counterbalanced by the equally pervasive fear that an incorporating union would compromise Scottish independence still further, eroding the integrity of the church, the legal system, the economy, and the culture of north Britain, turning a once-independent country into what Sir Walter Scott memorably called 'an inferior species of Northumberland.' (Broun et al. "National Identity")

For instance, this fear of being deprived of their culture, traditions and way of living was actualized through the Dress Act of 1746, which followed as a retribution for the Highlanders in the wake of the Jacobite Rising and made it illegal for the Scottish clans to wear their traditional Highland dress until the Act was repealed in 1782 (Cheape "Dress, Highland").

Born in Edinburgh, in 1850, Robert Louis Stevenson grew up in a country that was socially, politically, and geographically divided and still dealt with the repercussions of the Jacobite revolts. Whereas "The Merry Men" is not explicit about its timeline, *Kidnapped* is set in the aftermath of the Jacobite rebellion and offers various references to the Jacobites. Written a century after the Rising, Stevenson's novels show how the split between the Whigs and the Tories, the Lowlands and the Highlands, and England and Scotland was still palpable in Scottish society and visible in the Scottish landscape. The violent confrontations of the past that had resulted in bloodstained battlefields left a permanent mark on the landscape, and it is this turbulent history combined with the unruly and hazardous Highlands and Hebrides that resonated with the rebellious spirit of the Scots. By exploring this historical and topographical wildness by use of the aforementioned Gothic trope of a troubled past persisting into the present, Stevenson had not only his characters but also his landscapes haunted by their past.

Chapter II: Sublime Personifications in "The Merry Men" (1882)

For his short story "The Merry Men," Stevenson chose a title that offers a stark contrast to the contents of the narrative. The protagonist and lowlander Charles Darnaway, whose first name we learn halfway through the tale, visits his grouchy, alcoholic uncle Gordon Darnaway and his cousin (and love interest) Mary Ellen Darnaway on the fictional Scottish island Aros, or, in Scottish Gaelic, *Eilean* Aros. Other men involved in the narrative are the Darnaways' old servant Rorie, Dr Robertson, an unnamed historian from Madrid and a nameless "black castaway" (62); all of whom are not the cheerful men to which the title of the short story refers. Remarkably, the term "Merry Men" is the anthropomorphic name given to the big waves that forcefully break upon the reef by the locals of Eilean Aros. This personification of the natural environment is crucial in Stevenson's work; through these anthropomorphic descriptions, the landscape and seascape figuratively come alive and gain agency over the characters. Stevenson explores this Gothic trope on multiple instances throughout "The Merry Men," occasionally turning natural features into uncanny monsters. This chapter explores Stevenson's inspiration for his Merry Men, analyses the significance of the Gothic landscape and seascape within the short story, and provides an overview of the Gothic elements both in characters and plot. This analysis will reveal the relationship between the natural environment and the characters' sense of place. The characters' state of mind is affected by the landscape and seascape in the following ways: the terrors of the sea and the storm evoke feelings of anxiety and awe, the sight of sea-runes and shipwrecks trigger memories from the past, and the remote rural environment induces superstitious believes.

In his *Memories and Portraits*, a collection of essays first published in 1887, Stevenson offers an elaborate account on the isle of Earraid, a tidal island west of the isle of Mull, which

is situated in the Inner Hebrides on the Scottish west coast. He reveals that the memory of this isle "besieges" him, and explains:

> I put a whole family there, in one of my tales; and later on, threw upon its shores, and condemned to several days of rain and shellfish on its tumbled boulders, the hero of another. The ink is not yet faded; the sound of the sentences is still in my mind's ear; and I am under a spell to write of that island again. (Chapter VIII: Memoires of an Islet, n.p.)

The hero of which Stevenson speaks in the above statement is David Balfour; Eilean Earraid also features in the novel *Kidnapped,* discussed in the next chapter of this thesis. For now, the focus lies on the Darnaway family, who Stevenson placed on the fictional isle of Aros that was inspired by Eilean Earraid, and on the Merry Men that find their origin in Stevenson's memory of the Scottish islet. About the sea surrounding Earraid, the Sea of the Hebrides, Stevenson reminisces: "No other life was there but that of sea-birds, and of the sea itself, that here ran like a mill-race, and growled about the outer reef for ever, and ever and again, in the calmest weather, roared and spouted on the rock itself" (*Memories and Portraits,* Ch. VIII, n.p.). In "The Merry Men," Charles Darnaway describes the sea surrounding Eilean Aros in a similar fashion:

> But it is nearer in shore that the danger is worst; for the tide, here running like a mill race, makes a long belt of broken water – a *Roost* we call it – at the tail of the land. I have often been out there in a dead calm at the slack of the tide; and a strange place it is, with the sea swirling and combing up and boiling like the cauldrons of a linn, and now and again a little dancing mutter of sound as though the *Roost* were talking to itself. … it's here that these big breakers dance together – the dance of death, it may be called – that have got the name, in these parts, of the Merry Men. (5)

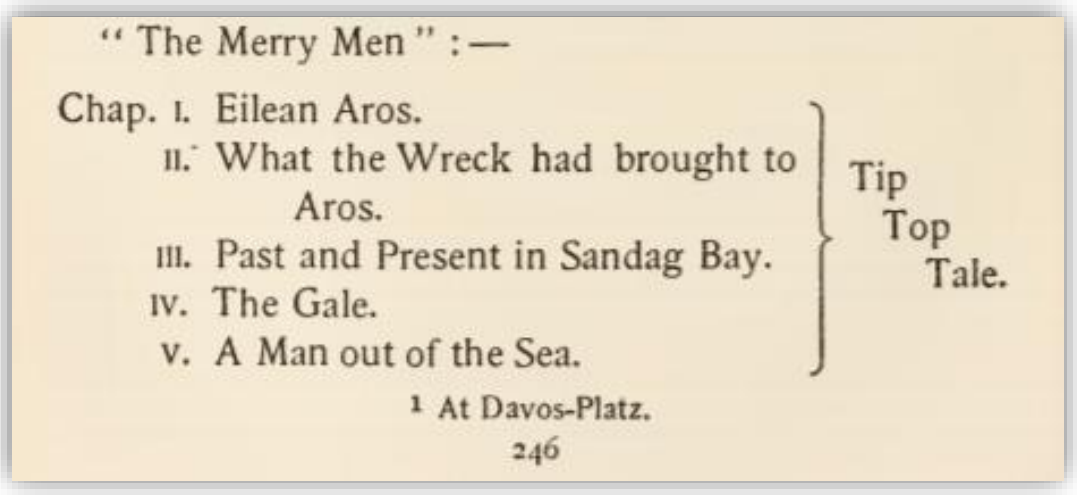
As these two quotations demonstrate, the phrase "running like a mill race" is a direct projection of Stevenson's own experience of the Sea of the Hebrides and his sense of place considering Eilean Earraid on his protagonist Charles. Moreover, both descriptions emphasize that the waves are not only boisterous on stormy days, but that even in the calmest of weathers, the Merry Men are dancing and singing away upon the shore.

Stevenson's descriptions of the sea, in his *Memories and Portraits,* and by Charles Darnaway, in "The Merry Men," present more parallels between the author's and the character's personal experiences and show similar choice of words. Stevenson recalls how "the men sat prisoned high up in their iron drum, that then resounded with the lashing of the sprays," whereas Charles mentions "I have heard it said that they run fifty feet high; but that must be the green water only, for the spray runs twice as high as that" (*Memories and Portraits,* Ch. VII, n.p.; "The Merry Men" 5). Furthermore, both men – the creator and the creation, if you will – speak of the effects of the waves crushing on the shore. Stevenson tells us that "fear sat with them [the men who sat prisoned high up in their iron drum, see above] in their sea-beleaguered dwelling; and the colour changed in anxious faces when some greater billow struck the barrack, and its pillars quivered and sprang under the blow" (*Memories and Portraits,* Ch. VII, n.p.). As Charles describes the Merry Men, he wonders whether they received their name "from their movements, which are swift and antic, or from the shouting they make about the turn of the tide, so that all Aros shakes with it" ("The Merry Men" 5). The language in these quotations is quintessential of Gothic fiction: the sea evokes a sense of fear and causes anxious expressions on the faces of men sitting on the barrels. The island quivers and shakes from the immense impact of the waves. The anthropomorphic shouting of the breakers as they blow against the shores of Aros create an ominous tone. The function of the natural environment in the narrative (and in the Gothic genre in general) is to arouse contradictory sentiments of anxiety and beauty, of fear and awe. Stevenson manages to evoke these feelings in both his

autobiographical essays and his short story "The Merry Men," constantly employing the Gothic trope of the sublime.

Stevenson and his protagonist do not only agree on their portrayal of the seascape; another resemblance between the two men is found in the third chapter of the short story, when Charles sets off early in the morning to explore the islet: "Aros is a very rough islet, its surface strewn with great rocks and shaggy with fern and heather; … the air was listless and thundery, although purely clear" (25). Likewise, Stevenson remembers seeing "the colourless clear light of the early morning making plain its heathery and rocky hummocks" (*Memories and Portraits*, Ch. VIII, n.p.). Beside these clear parallels in the perception of landscape and seascape, Stevenson's hints on the sublime are rather prominent in his *Memories and Portraits* as well, for instance when he speaks of "the music of the storm" and "an enchanted sea" (Ch. VIII, n.p.). Similar imagery is presented by Charles in his description of the natural environment, the weather, and of course the Merry Men, which will be addressed further below. It seems evident that Stevenson rooted his own findings and feelings regarding Eilean Earraid in the portrayal of Eilean Aros through his protagonist Charles and used it again in *Kidnapped* through the eyes of David Balfour, as will be examined in Chapter III.

Whereas Stevenson's *Memories and Portraits* generates further understanding of his source of inspiration, his *Letters* offer insight into his writing process. In 1881, Stevenson wrote to Sidney Colvin: "'The Merry Men,' I am more than half through, and think real well of. It is a fantastic sonata about the sea and wrecks; and I like it much above all my other attempts at story-telling; I think it is strange; if ever I shall make a hit, I have the line now, as I believe" (*Letters* I, 245). Stevenson even provided an outline for his short story in his letter to Colvin, calling it a "Tip Top Tale" (*Letters* I, 246, see Fig. 1 below). This letter not only shows Stevenson's enthusiasm about his own "sonata" so far, but also presents the main themes: the wrecks and the sea.



"The Merry Men":—

Chap. I. Eilean Aros.
II. What the Wreck had brought to Aros.
III. Past and Present in Sandag Bay.
IV. The Gale.
V. A Man out of the Sea.

} Tip Top Tale.

[1] At Davos-Platz.

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Fig. 1: Stevenson's outline for "The Merry Men."
The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson to His Family and Friends, volume I.

Besides providing the structural aspects of the text, this outline in and of itself signals some key Gothic features: the suspense of a shipwreck and a man supposedly out of the sea, and the focus on past and present. As the main plot and eventual climax of the narrative are concerned with the past of Gordon Darnaway creeping up into Charles's present, this outline aptly manages to highlight this crucial theme in "The Merry Men" and offers a structural aspect vital to the Gothic genre.

In a different letter, also written in 1881, shortly after the one to Colvin, Stevenson penned to W.E. Henley:

> And now, *mon bon*, I must babble about 'The Merry Men,' my favourite work. It is a fantastic sonata about the sea and wrecks. Chapter I. 'Eilean Aros' – the island, the roost, the 'merry men,' the three people there living – sea superstitions. Chapter II. 'What the Wreck has brought to Aros.' Eh, boy? what had it? Silver and clocks and brocades, and what a conscience, what a mad brain! Chapter III. 'Past and Present in Sandag Bay' – the new wreck and the old – so old – the Armada treasure-ship, Santissima Trinidad – the grave in the heather – strangers there. Chapter IV. 'The Gale' – the doomed ship – the storm –

> the drunken madman on the head – cries in the night. Chapter V. 'A Man out of the Sea.' But I must not breathe to you my plot. It is, I fancy, my first real shoot at a story; an odd thing, sir, but, I believe, my own, though there is a little of Scott's *Pirate* in it, as how should there not? He had the root of romance in such places. (*Letters* I, 247)

This letter demonstrates how excited and passionate Stevenson was about his short story, and how much emphasis he placed on the numerous Gothic elements. By calling his narrative a "sonata" in both letters, Stevenson adds, a wee bit brazenly perhaps, a musical and even poetic layer to his text, possibly to echo the anthropomorphic singing of the Merry Men and accentuate this theme of personification. The musical sound of the waves is a key feature of personifying the sea, for it calls to the readers' imagination to visualize not only the graphic crashing of the waves upon the shore, but also the melodious song of the Merry Men. By combining the visual with the audial, Stevenson creates a more profound eerie atmosphere than he would have established with just one of these aspects. This audio-visual way of describing the waves of course bears a resemblance to the frequently used Gothic trope of creaking floors and squeaking doors in gloomy haunted mansions.

Additionally, the way Stevenson lists his chapters is already a little Gothic short story on its own; he melodramatically builds suspense in his letter to the point where he does not want to reveal the plot to Henley, lest he spoils it. The key words used to summarize the chapters epitomise the many Gothic components of the text: the remote island, the superstitions, the mad brain of Uncle Gordon, the shipwrecks, the grave, and the storm – all of which will be critically analysed below in relation to the natural environment that constitutes both the physical and symbolical backdrop for these events. Furthermore, Stevenson admits that he drew inspiration from Sir Walter Scott's *The Pirate* (1822), a novel that would have been well-known in Scotland by the time "The Merry Men" was published, encompassing – unsurprisingly – themes such as piracy, shipwrecks, and the sea.

As seen above in the examination of *Memories and Portraits*, Stevenson was rather forthright about how his personal experiences inspired his fictional work. In his letter to Henley, Stevenson continues: "Aros is Earraid, where I lived lang syne; the Ross of Grisapol is the Ross of Mull; Ben Kyaw, Ben More" (*Letters* I, 247). This clear connection between fiction and reality makes it easier for (Scottish) readers to be fully drawn into the descriptions of Stevenson's landscape. Eilean Earraid, which Stevenson held dearly in his memory, is fictionalised in the isle of Aros, "Aros Jay" in full, which is Gaelic for "the House of God," according to the narrative ("The Merry Men" 3). Parallel to Earraid, Aros is a tidal island, which "formed the south-west corner of the land, fitted close to it, and was in one place only separated from the coast by a little gut of the sea" (4). By assigning this momentous name to the islet, Stevenson creates a sense of place open to interpretation and induces his readers to think highly of this little isle. With the plot of "The Merry Men" in mind, Eilean Aros could indeed be regarded the house of God, as the dangerous island eventually punishes Uncle Gordon for his sins when he is chased into the sea by the black castaway and both are devoured by the deadly current: "Rorie and I both stopped, for the thing was now beyond the hands of men, and these were the decrees of God that came to pass before our eyes. There was never a sharper ending" (67). While the closing lines of the narration suggest a probability of the two men surviving the incident, the omnipotent seascape has potentially executed its own denizen.

A similar strategy can be found in Stevenson's description of Ben Kyaw, which is, according to the Henley letter, based on Ben More: "*The Mountain of the Mist*, they say the words signify in the Gaelic tongue; and it is well named. For that hill-top, which is more than three thousand feet in height, catches all the clouds that come blowing from the seaward" ("The Merry Men" 2). Again, Stevenson proposes a compelling epithet to bolster his depiction of the landscape, thus speaking to the readers' imagination, whether they are familiar with the Scottish scenery or not. Similar to Ben Kyaw, the actual Ben More on the Isle of Mull reaches

an elevation of 3,169 feet.[2] By giving the mountain a mysterious sounding title and explaining why it is well named through the narrator, Stevenson bolsters the Gothic portrayal of Ben Kyaw and adds a sense of awe and wonder to the perception of his semi-fictional landscape.

A significant element to consider in the light of the historical, cultural, political, and geographical Highlands-Lowlands division, is the first-person narration by Charles Darnaway, of whom the reader learns not much more than that he is a former student of Edinburgh University, and that he has come to Eilean Aros in search of the treasure left in the deeps of Sandag Bay by a sunken ship of the Spanish armada. This means that the reader perceives the natural environment of the tidal island through an educated lowlander's point of view. Such a perspective perhaps resonated with the majority of Stevenson's intended audience. In contrast to the lush descriptions of the landscape and seascape surrounding Eilean Aros, of which Charles is evidently in admiration, the Lowlands are only mentioned briefly at the beginning of the narrative, when Charles notes that: "Meantime our family was dying out in the lowlands; there is little luck for any of that race" (2). While this supposed bad luck is not further clarified, it does stress the division between the lowlanders and the highlanders. The Lowlands, as emphasized by Charles's education and manner of narrating, were considered the genteel and commercial areas, whereas the Highlands and Hebrides were the mysterious rural regions, "so far from all society and comfort, between the codfish and the moorcocks" ("The Merry Men" 2). Paradoxically, the picturesque countryside is often looked down upon as well as revered by the enlightened lowlanders; although remote and uncomfortable, the sublime Highlands and

[2] Scotland counts multiple mountains of comparable height that go by the name of Ben More – or *Beinn Mhòr* in Scottish Gaelic, which translates to 'great mountain'. The best-known Ben More is situated in the Southern Highlands and is with her 3,852 feet the highest peak in the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park. It is extremely unlikely that Stevenson based his fictional Ben Kyaw on any other Ben More than the one on Mull, an island he knew by heart, especially since he confirms that his fictional Ross of Grisapol was inspired by the Ross of Mull that leads up to the tidal isle of Earraid. Nonetheless, it is perhaps noteworthy that he did not specify in his letter to Henley from which Ben More he drew his inspiration for his awe-inspiring "*Mountain of the Mist*," since Stevenson, as a Scotsman, was surely aware of multiple mountains carrying the name Ben More.

Hebrides are met with a sense of amazement, as underlined by Charles's lavish portrayal of Aros. The enigmatic and sublime character of these parts of Scotland, both factual and fictional, makes for a conventional Gothic landscape.

Roderick Watson confirms that Stevenson's fictionalised landscape is not merely a beautiful backdrop to a scary story: "'The Merry Men' is a tale of considerable symbolic complexity by which the whole landscape … speaks for ambivalence and the generation of theological or indeed metaphysical doubt" (147). The complexity lies in the scenes through which the characters manoeuvre – the rough grounds of the islet, the capricious sea, and the raging tempest – that oftentimes symbolise either the psyche of the characters, the atmosphere of the plot, or the general zeitgeist of the nineteenth century. This symbolism, in all its complexity, is subject to the ambiguities that we find in tales as old as time: how can the holy bring forth sin? How can the light bring about darkness? And how can there be magnificence in malevolence? Nevertheless, as Watson notes, the landscape is not solely dark and dangerous, but shows numerous ambivalent qualities. For instance, on his journey to Eilean Aros in the very beginning of the narrative, Charles recalls the contradictory elements of the island: "I have seen us sitting in broad sunshine on the Ross, and the rain falling black like crape upon the mountain," which is followed by a sublime-like description of the rain falling on Ben Kyaw: "But the wetness of it made it often appear more beautiful to my eyes; for when the sun struck upon the hill sides, there were many wet rocks and watercourses that shone like jewels even as far as Aros, fifteen miles away" (3). With these small remarks on the landscape and, in this case, on the weather as well, Charles reminds readers of the splendour of this heather-strewn isle and demonstrates an endless beauty in nature, even in something as undervalued as the rain. As a Scotsman himself, Stevenson understood the importance of weather in relation to landscapes in general and for Scotland in particular.

Stewart and Strathern observe that the weather is "surely a strong influence on the perception of landscape" (11). Landscapes are indeed shaped and transformed by their climate, making the weather a crucial component to consider when exploring landscape symbolism. For Scotland in particular, Stewart and Stratern comment on the prejudices against bad weather and how "for all the drear quality of the persistent rain in Scotland, this very aspect is itself an enduring part of senses of identity" (11). On that same note, John Grey asserts that "Scotland cannot be Scotland without its weather" (34). As such, the rain is part of the Scottish identity and – for the locals – "bad weather" is just weather. Grey analyses poetry composed by Tim Douglas, a twentieth-century Scottish poet, and explores the Scottish identity in both the cultural dimension and the political dimension. While his poetry focusses mainly on the Scottish Borders, Grey maintains that the themes and motifs of the poems are about Scotland as a whole, which makes the rainy weather an inextricable part of their national identity (17). The weather, both a curse for its persistence and a blessing for its provisions, proves to be crucial to the plot of not only "The Merry Men," where "the tempest might fall upon Aros in its might" (35), but also for the narrative that will be examined in the following chapter about *Kidnapped*.

Another example of the ambivalent landscape as proposed above by Roderick Watson is found in Charles making his way towards Aros, for he "went over rough boulders so that a man had to leap from one to another, and through soft bottoms where the moss came nearly to the knee" ("The Merry Men" 3). Once again, the landscape oozes ambivalence through a path that is both rough and soft, and both high and low. During his excursion on the island the next morning, Charles notices the effects of various shadows on the landscape:

> The bay seemed rather like a great transparent crystal, as one sees them in a lapidary's shop; there was naught to show that it was water but an internal trembling, a hovering within of sun-glints and netted shadows, and now and then a faint lap and a dying

> bubble round the edge. The shadows of the rocks lay out for some distance at their feet, so that my own shadow, moving, pausing, and stooping on the top of that, reached sometimes half across the bay. It was above all in this belt of shadows that I hunted for the *Espirito Santo*. (29)

Apart from the obvious Gothic image that this "belt of shadows" evokes, shadows in general also show that the aesthetics of the landscape are always in flux. A picturesque place during the daytime can effortlessly transform into a gloomy scenery at twilight. Playing with shadows allows Stevenson to play with a person's sense of place, or, in this case, a darker sense of place. Throughout the narrative, Charles's narration displays an abundance of these contrasts of nature, for example with the juxtaposition of lightness and darkness in the concluding chapter: "the sun already lighted in a rosy bloom upon the crest of Ben Kyaw; but all below me the rude knolls of Aros and the shield of sea lay steeped in the clear darkling twilight of the dawn" (66). Further down the penultimate page, another antithesis is found: "At a stride the sunshine fell on Aros, and the shadows and colours leaped into being" (66). This contrast between the rising sun and twilight, and between sunshine and shadows is not merely present for aesthetic purposes, but also signals and even foreshadows the dark and deadly ending of the narrative. While the sun is out and the promises of a new day are upon the characters, the "sharp ending," in Stevenson's words, provides a final sense of mystery and gloom to the short story.

Besides being ambivalent in the literal sense of the word, the Scottish landscape is also ambiguous through the sublime portrayal of dark and dangerous events. As Shaw argues, "the goal of the sublime is to sustain a sense of shock, to prevent the reader/viewer/interpreter from coming to terms with the meaning of that which exceeds the norm" (9). This sense of shock is visible in the quotation below:

> And yet the spectacle was rather maddening in its levity than impressive by its force. Thought was beaten down by the confounding uproar; a gleeful vacancy possessed the brains of men, a state akin to madness; and I found myself at times following the dance of the Merry Men as it were a tune upon a jigging instrument. ("The Merry Men" 47-48)

This citation, full of anthropomorphic elements that will be discussed further below, highlights the equivocal nature of madness. Charles combines madness and music in his depiction of the raging sea when he learns about a murder that had occurred on the islet, and his mind focusses on the sound of the Merry Men while he is coming to terms with this shocking news. It typifies a Gothic description of a sublime landscape and addresses a concept dubbed "the beauty of evil" by Leslie A. Fiedler, in his paper "R.L.S. Revisited" (15). Fiedler notes that this theme runs through Stevenson's works on multiple levels and explains: "the organizing mythic concept might be called the Beloved Scoundrel or the Devil as Angel, and the books make a series of variations of the theme of the beauty of evil – and conversely the unloveliness of good" (15). Uncle Gordon, whose madness is depicted as both frightening and alluring, is undoubtedly the beloved scoundrel in "The Merry Men," since he captivates both the protagonist Charles and the readers with his mysterious and murderous past. This displays again the Gothic trope of past events persisting into the present, and it shows that there can be magnificence in malevolence indeed. With landscapes, however, it is rather the beauty of darkness, of danger, and of awe-inspiring nature, as a landscape is not evil in and of itself. Like sense of place, the sublime and the beauty of evil are two notions of the mind that are highly personal, for some readers might overlook the beauty and solely see the evil in evil.

Watson also opts a theological and metaphysical uncertainty that comes to the fore through the many superstitions recorded by the old servant Rorie and by Uncle Gordon, which prove to have a profound impact on especially the latter man's conscience. As the majority of

the superstitions involve the sea – including "sea-kelpies," "sea deils," "sea bogles," "sea spensters," "mermaids," "mermen," and talking seals – Stevenson merges the Gothic tradition of superstition with the main theme (and arguably the main antagonist) of the narrative; the sea ("The Merry Men" 6, 19, 47). As Watson notes in suspenseful diction, "Nothing is certain on these shores" (147). Indeed, the shores encompass a sense of mystery that yields as many different interpretations as there are people. This phenomenon is illustrated by symbols in the sea: "when it is calm, as it often is, there appear certain strange, undecipherable marks – sea-runes, as we may name them – on the glassy surface of the bay" ("The Merry Men" 20). These sea-runes, while identical in shape, evoke individual readings to each who beholds them. When Uncle Gordon and Charles spot the letter C, the former recalls the shipwreck *Christ-Anna*, while the latter simply envisions his own name. The letter M is the other symbol the two men decipher, which leads Charles's thoughts immediately to his cousin Mary and his missed opportunity of declaring his love to her. Since Uncle Gordon refuses to respond with his own understanding of this rune, Charles follows his own train of thought: "as I mentally ran over the different words which might be represented by the letter M – misery, mercy, marriage, money and the like – I was arrested with a sort of start by the word murder" (22). With this last word and its "ugly sound and fatal meaning," the seascape both foreshadows upcoming events and provides a covert flashback to Uncle Gordon's past (22). Consequently, the sea holds a key function in the plot of the narrative: it builds suspense, it plays into the suspicions of the characters, and it conveys foretelling and crucial information to the protagonist, and, therefore, to the readers.

Regarding these sea-runes, Watson notes that "Charles recognises that we are prone to read into the world what we are inclined to find there" (147). This observation displays a parallel to the idea of sense of place and the individuality that is embedded in this concept. Although Charles never learns what associations Uncle Gordon had with the letter M, he

understands that people shape their own reading based on personal experience: “many a boy must have amused himself as I did, seeking to read in these runes some reference to himself or those he loved” (“The Merry Men” 21). Charles’s remark dovetails with Wilkie and Roberson’s definition of sense of place, which states that “[e]ach person brings his or her own personality, background, and previous experiences into the process of forming a sense of place” (2532). The sea-runes are an illustration, therefore, of people shaping their personal memory – specifically relating to themselves or their loved ones – into a sense of place for the shores of Eilean Earraid. Additionally, Charles’ realization of individual interpretation can trigger a metafictional response for readers, as they might also wonder what the letters C and M represent for them and their loved ones. While sense of place is usually formed unconsciously, this passage in Stevenson’s short story encourages readers to actively think about the possible senses that a single place – or indeed, a sea-rune – can evoke.

With its runes and shipwrecks and reference in the title of the narrative, the sea is arguably one of the protagonists in “The Merry Men.” On the one hand, the seascape fulfils a passive role as a backdrop and a home to the characters of the narrative. On the other hand, the sea is an active being, a force to be reckoned with, a murderer. Uncle Gordon provides a horrifying description of this “creature” in one of his outbursts:

> “If ye had but used the een God gave ye, ye would hae learned the wickedness o’ that fause, saut, cauld, bullering creature, and of a’ that’s in it by the Lord’s permission: labsters an’ partans, an’ sic like, howking in the deid; muckle, gutsy, blawing whales; an’fish – the hale clan o’ them – cauld-wamed, blind-eed uncanny ferlies. O, sirs,” he cried, “the horror – the horror of the sea!” (“The Merry Men” 18)

By calling the sea a “creature,” Gordon implies that this body of water is a living being. Moreover, it suggests that the sea has a mind of its own and, potentially, agency. Although

agency is not commonly assigned to inanimate or abstract objects in conventional realistic fiction, in Gothic fiction it is more common. The multiple instances of personification yield the question whether the sea in "The Merry Men" has the "ability or capacity to act or exert power" in a similar way that humans have (OED "Agency"). The claim that the sea is acting on its own free will is difficult to substantiate. Nevertheless, the repeated image of the sea as a creature with anthropomorphic traits does help to support this assertion. Charles, who is not overtly afraid of the sea but does respect its grandeur, thinks of the sea as a creature as well:

> … the sea also seemed to lie uneasily; a sound of it, like a long sigh, mounted to me where I stood; and, quiet as it was, the Roost itself appeared to be revolving mischief. For I ought to say that all we dwellers in these parts attributed, if not prescience, at least a quality of warning, to that strange and dangerous creature of the tides. (26)

A sighing sea, a tide contemplating mischief; Stevenson portrays a body of water which already evokes a sense of mystery and adds personifications to generate the feeling that the sea is a living being that all people should fear. "To be revolving mischief" implies that the Roost has the ability to ponder and potentially the capability to act on this mischief. While "mischief" is a euphemistic manner to delineate "murder," the mischievous character of the tide could foreshadow the deadly end of the narrative.

Continuing this idea of foreshadowing, Uncle Gordon links the sea to death on numerous occasions: "'I'll tell ye, man! The deid are down there – thick like rattons!'" (23). It remains unclear whether Gordon means actual dead bodies or the spirits of the dead, though both options seem plausible. The two shipwrecks mentioned in the narrative, the *Espirito Santo* from the Spanish armada and the more recent wreckage of the *Christ-Anna*,[3] evidently filled

[3] The evident Catholic references in the ships' names *Espirito Santo* (Holy Spirit) and *Christ-Anna*, and in the holy name of the islet Aros Jay (Gaelic for "the House of God," see p. 28) display a religious overtone that warrants a fuller treatment than is possible here given the scope of this thesis. See, e.g., Watson 147-8.

the sea with corpses. Still, Gordon's deeply rooted fear for the sea, in addition to his superstitious beliefs about ghosts and sea-devils, might implicate that he is haunted by something that is not merely physical. After all, this is a profoundly Gothic story, and while readers do not learn the truth behind Uncle Gordon's dread of the sea, his superstitions suggest that he does not rule out that there are ghosts at play, which is corroborated by Charles when he discovers the grave in Sandag Bay and fears that the spirit of the perished soul "was near me where I stood, guarding his sepulchre, and lingering on the scene of his unhappy fate" (27).

Watson weighs in that "'The Merry Men' can be seen to have invoked a kind of existential Gothic, or indeed a Gothic existentialism, in its vision of the natural world as a whirl of energy and matter, always at risk of shipwreck in 'the roaring blackness' at the edge of an abyss" (148). Gordon's mental state is plagued by this perpetual risk, which eventually drives him into the sea towards his (presumable) death. Despite his apprehensions, Gordon is still drawn to the sea, in a way which resembles the pulling sensation one experiences when standing on a cliff looking downward into the abyss. This combination of fear for and attraction to the sea, or to what Watson in general calls "the natural world," demonstrates a potentially fatal example of the sublime. Mishra adds that "the haunting presence/absence of the uncanny inscribed in the Gothic, and its seemingly paradoxical endorsement of death, is seen … as the real agenda of the Gothic. It is this agenda that underpins the Gothic sublime" (25). In other words, the Gothic genre plays with the idea that death itself is also sublime, in that it can be both beautiful and terrifying, and that it exceeds all that us humans can comprehend.

The fact that Gordon is driven mad by the terror of the sea highlights the power that nature can exert over people. His madness climaxes near the end of the narrative, where Gordon blames himself of the very thing of which he is afraid: "'I'm a deil, I ken't. But I think naething o' the puir sailor lads; I'm wi' the sea, I'm just like ane o' her ain Merry Men'" (54). By aligning Gordon with the Merry Men, Stevenson offers another dimension to the title of his

short story and proposes the possibility that not Charles, but his uncle Gordon is the protagonist of the narrative. Moreover, the Merry Men have been rather innocent until that point, but now Gordon mentions them in the same context of him being a devil, of him being with the sea and thus with the murderer of the poor sailors. Throughout the short story, Uncle Gordon is often juxtaposed with the characteristics of the sea. In his first encounter with Gordon Darnaway, Charles describes him as a "rough, cold, gloomy man" (12). In the passage quoted above, Gordon calls the sea a "fause [false, treacherous], saut [salt], cauld [cold], bullering [roaring] creature" (18). In that same outburst, Gordon addresses the wickedness of the sea, but he himself is also called "wicked" and "rather demoniacal than human" by Charles, mainly due to Gordon's alcoholism (48-9). However, the most striking resemblance is that Gordon, just as the sea is in innumerable ways, is a murderer.

As repeatedly indicated in this chapter thus far, the language-use concerning the sea demonstrates ample instances of personification, especially for the phenomena called the Roost and the Merry Men: "For the very midst of the land, on a day of wind and a high spring, I have heard the Roost roaring like a battle where it runs by Aros, and the great and fearful voices of the breakers that we call the Merry Men" ("The Merry Men" 3). The breakers are the epitome of Gothic sublimity; both terrific and terrifying to behold. While dubbed "merry," the crashing waves sound like a battlefield. These contradictions lure in the reader, as the depiction of the sea strays further and further away from what the title has promised: men who are merry. Additionally, by giving the breakers "great and fearful voices," Stevenson transforms this element of nature into an anthropomorphic and ultimate sublime Gothic being. Stevenson does, however, keep his readers in the dark about the downside of the Merry Men as long as possible, for Charles continues to portray the breakers as "the Merry Men singing and dancing in the Roost!" (9). With the waves singing and dancing away upon the shore, Stevenson maintains

the merry character of the breakers. At this point in the narrative, readers are still under the impression that they are joyfully called the Merry Men.

The distinct sound of the sea is again emphasized in Charles' description of the effects of rough waters: "when the sea is up, Heaven help the man that hears that cauldron boiling" (4). The calling onto Heaven here suggests that only God can defy and handle the might of the sea, and that people possibly pray to God when they hear the crashing sound of the breakers. However, the boiling cauldron offers a contradicting image, for it carries a heathen connotation and perhaps implicates that the sea is a witch or that at least witchcraft is involved, which opposes the religious subtext. While this way of describing the Merry Men is an exception to the overall portrayal of singing and dancing, the narrative does provide another illustration including a religious overtone: "Now the storm in its might would seize and shake the four corners of the roof, roaring like Leviathan in anger" (45). By juxtaposing the sound of the storm with the roaring of the Leviathan, Stevenson puts forward a well-known and powerful image of the demonic sea monster and thus aligns the weather and the sea as two evil God-defying elements, in a true Gothic fashion.

Near the end of the narrative, when it is clear that the Merry Men are not altogether merry, Charles contemplates the malevolent character of the breakers. Still awestruck by the greatness of the sea and the Merry Men's song, Charles realises that it is a lament for evilness and tragedy:

> Never, not even in the height of the tempest, had I heard their song with greater awe. Now, when the winds were gathered home, when the deep was dandling itself back into its summer slumber, and when the stars rained their gentle light over land and sea, the voice of these tide-breakers was still raised for havoc. They seemed, indeed, to be a part of the world's evil and the tragic side of life. (64-5)

In this sublime passage *pur sang*, where awe and havoc go hand in hand, Charles offers an existential realization. Watson explains that this is typical for Stevenson's works:

> Under Stevenson's pen, familiar Gothic tropes and social certainties have been subverted and overthrown. … In 'The Merry Men' and 'Olalla', the conventions of original sin and mystery romance have revealed material existence and human desire to be utterly abject in a physical world that is chaotic and absurd. From old Scottish roots, pursuing what is ultimately a metaphysical or indeed a proto-existential vision, Stevenson has given a disturbingly new dimension to the conventions of Gothic fiction. (153-4)

Indeed, both Charles and Uncle Gordon feel and, to a certain extent, desire to feel insignificant and miserable in relation to their natural environment. For Charles, this predominantly results in moments of total astonishment of the awe-inspiring natural environment surrounding him. For Uncle Gordon, this abjectness in the physical world has developed into a downward spiral of madness, ensuing that he drowns, both figuratively and in the end literally, in his own misery. Yet is it not Uncle Gordon's unfortunate ending that should be considered the main event of the narrative, according to Watson: "it is Stevenson's invocation of the power and terror of the final storm that will become the central and controlling vision of the whole tale" (147). Although Watson is not wrong and his statement is underlined by foreboding phrases such as "the coming gale was not unlikely to bring death upon its wings" ("The Merry Men" 38), one might argue that the central vision of the tale encompasses not only the final storm but also Stevenson's invocation of the power and terror of the sea. The emphasis should be on the lethal yet wonderful combination of the tempest and the breakers that lies at the heart of this Gothic short story.

With a constant play between past and present, between beauty and evil, and between the actual natural environment and the anthropomorphic natural environment, Stevenson has incorporated archetypical Gothic tropes into “The Merry Men” to show how the sublimity of the Scottish landscape and seascape can influence his characters’ state of mind – for better or worse – and how it can shape his readers’ sense of place. Charles’ state of mind during the narrative was affected by the sublimity of the sea and the storm, and by the sea-runes that not only reminded him of his past, but also foreshadowed the two murders. The rural and remote environment influenced the state of mind of Uncle Gordon in the sense that it deepened his superstitions and contributed to his misery and ultimate madness, not being able to change or escape from his dark situation.

Chapter III: From Sublime Terror to Picturesque Harmony in *Kidnapped* (1886)

The historically inspired adventure novel *Kidnapped* portrays the tumultuous journey of the 17-year-old orphaned David Balfour in quest of his inheritance. In terms of themes and motifs, *Kidnapped* shows many similarities with "The Merry Men." Moreover, readers perceive both stories through the point of view of a lowlander travelling to and through the Highlands and Hebrides. This chapter juxtaposes the themes and Gothic imagery in *Kidnapped* with those examined in "The Merry Men" and analyses the effect of the natural environment on the characters' state of mind. Since this narrative includes actual historical events and personages alongside the fictional plotline and characters, this chapter will also explore the social, cultural, and political identity that emerges from the story and to what extent this affects the characters' sense of place. The characters' state of mind is influenced by the landscape and seascape in the following ways: the sublimity in the seascape causes the characters to be overwhelmed by fear and awe, the picturesque in the landscape creates a sense of peace and harmony, the heather connotes a sense of exile and lawlessness, and, as the otherness of Lowlands versus Highlands slowly fades, the protagonist experiences a shift in his identity.

After the fashion of most nineteenth-century novels, *Kidnapped* carries a shorter and a longer title. The full title of the book reads:

> *Kidnapped: Being Memoirs of the Adventures of David Balfour in the Year 1751: How He was Kidnapped and Cast Away; His Sufferings in a Desert Isle; His Journey in the Wild Highlands; His Acquaintance with Alan Breck Stewart and other Notorious Highland Jacobites; With all that he suffered at the hands of his Uncle, Ebenezer Balfour of Shaws, falsely so-called: Written by himself and now set forth by Robert Louis Stevenson.*

This rather elaborate title discloses many of the topics contained in the narrative, such as shipwreck, adventure, history (Alan Breck Stewart), geography (Wild Highlands), and politics (Notorious Highland Jacobites). The title also reveals a glimpse of the evil uncle motif, which was of course also one of the central motifs in "The Merry Men."

Uncle Ebenezer, "a mean, stooping, narrow-shouldered, clay-faced creature," is believed to have murdered his brother (David's father) Alexander Balfour and has absolutely no intention of granting David his inheritance (18). David learns of this alleged murder only after he has been kidnapped. Therefore, at the outset of the narrative, he unknowingly sets off to visit his uncle to claim what is rightfully his. David comes from a small village near Edinburgh. When he arrives in the capital, he recounts:

> I saw all the country fall away before me down to the sea; and in the midst of this descent, on a long ridge, the city of Edinburgh smoking like a kiln. There was a flag upon the castle, and ships moving or lying anchored in the firth; both of which, for as far away as they were, I could distinguish clearly; and both brought my country heart into my mouth. (12)

David draws a clear distinction between his own country heart and the clearly industrialized Edinburgh, with its smoking buildings and buzzing harbour; this distinction also emphasizes the wildness of the Highlands and Hebrides later in the narrative. The passage also provides a foreshadowing to the shipwreck theme, as David is triggered by the sight of the ships in the Firth of Forth.

As Uncle Ebenezer lives in Cramond, a small village in the north-west of Edinburgh, David's path turns away from the city centre when he finally spots his uncle's house:

> The country was pleasant round about, running in low hills, pleasantly watered and wooded, and the crops, to my eyes, wonderfully good; but the house itself appeared to

> 8e a kind of ruin; no road led up to it; no smoke arose from any of the chimneys; nor was there any semblance of a garden. My heart sank. (14)

The country is depicted as highly picturesque, with the clear exception of the ruinous and seemingly abandoned building.[4] While the appearance of the house is in and of itself not extremely Gothic, the "stout, dark, sour-looking woman" who showed David the way to the building, reacts to David's disappointment with the uncanny statement in a "kind of eldritch sing-song" voice: "'Blood built it; blood stopped the building of it; blood shall bring it down'" (14). As such, it is not David's perception of the house itself but rather the eerie woman who transforms this house into an exceptionally Gothic building, which fills David with horror and superstition. Still, the Gothic elements of the house do not alter David's sense of place of the countryside. On the contrary, he seems to develop an even more profound appreciation of the natural surroundings:

> The more I looked, the pleasanter that country-side appeared; being all set with hawthorn bushed full of flowers; the fields dotted with sheep; a fine flight of rooks in the sky; and every sign of a kind soil and climate; and yet the barrack in the midst of it went sore against my fancy. (14)

Thus far in the narrative, Stevenson has presented clear imagery of an industrialized Edinburgh and a picturesque countryside, which offers a stark contrast to the sublimity of the landscape and seascape of the Highlands and Hebrides that will be discussed further below. This contrast emphasizes the social, political, cultural, and historical disparity between the Lowlands and Highlands.

Once entered, the house of his Uncle Ebenezer, David notices that his uncle is as uncanny as is his home. In the following metafictional passage, David, albeit humbly and

[4] The concept of the Picturesque is introduced in the opening chapter. See p. 9.

unwillingly, parallels his own experiences with his uncle with that of a ballad, much like Stevenson calling "The Merry Men" a sonata in one of his letters:

> One the one hand, I began to think my uncle was perhaps insane and might be dangerous; on the other, there came up into my mind (quite unbidden by me and even discouraged) a story like some ballad I had heard folk singing, of a poor lad that was a rightful heir and a wicked kinsman that tried to keep him from his own. (26)

When David later tells his story to the sailor Mr Riach, the latter also "declared it was like a ballad" (51). However, Stevenson does not stop at this comparison. At the end of the novel, he compares David's tale with one of the most well-known classical epics : "'Well, well,' said the lawyer, when I had quite done, 'this is a great epic, a great Odyssey of yours. You must tell it, sir, in a sound Latinity when your scholarship is riper; or in English if you please, though for my part I prefer the stronger tongue'" (203). Stevenson places David's journey and the epic journey of Odysseus side by side in an attempt to portray David as a young classical hero. Moreover, with his depiction of the pompous lawyer, Stevenson highlights the contrast between the civilized, educated Lowlanders and the wild Highlanders that David encountered earlier in the narrative.

Under false pretences, the "wicked auld man" Uncle Ebenezer brings David to Queensferry, where Ebenezer makes a deal with the captain of the brig *Covenant* to kidnap David and sell him into slavery in the Carolinas (*Kidnapped* 42).[5] Fortunately for David, the *Covenant* never reaches the Carolinas. After various turns of events, the brig clashes upon the reefs of the Torran Rocks, which are part of the Inner Hebrides on the west coast of Scotland (see the smaller map on Fig. 2 for the complete journey of the brig). In the days leading up to the shipwreck, in which the brig is already forcefully "tossed and tacked to and fro" due to the

[5] The brig *Covenant*: another ship in Stevenson's fiction with a religious name. Further research into the matter is beyond the scope of this thesis, since it is not tied to the theme of the natural environment. See footnote 3.

dangerous tides, David experiences the breakers for the first time, with a sense of fear as well as excitement:

> [T]here was a falling swell and a thick, wet, white fog that hid one end of the brig from the other. All afternoon, when I went on deck, I saw men and officers listening hard over the bulwarks – 'for breakers', they said; and though I did not so much as understand the word, I felt danger in the air, and was excited. (57)

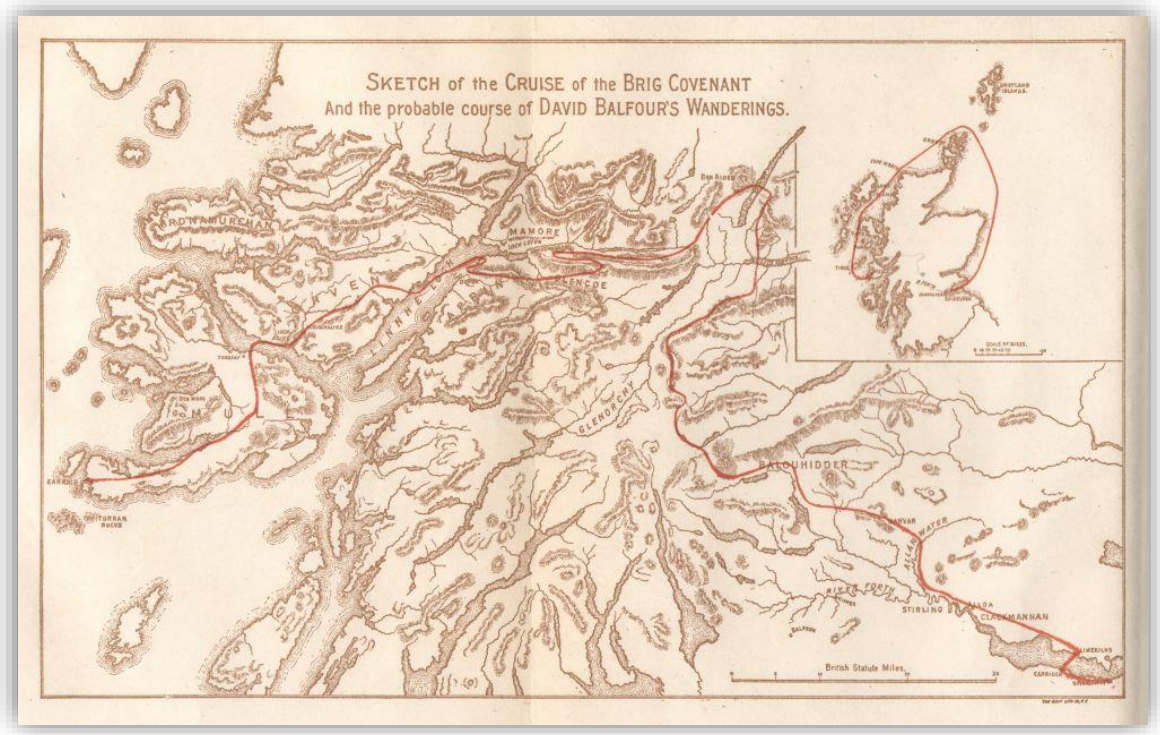

Fig. 2 "Sketch of the Cruise of the Brig *Covenant*, and the probable course of David Balfour's Wanderings"

These breakers illustrate yet another link to "The Merry Men," although the breakers in *Kidnapped* are assigned anthropomorphic qualities less frequently than the breakers in the short story. Nonetheless, the roaring sound of the breakers instil fear in the crew of the *Covenant*, even in the captain, which does result in a sublime description of the waves: "Away on the lee

bow, a thing like a fountain rose out of the moonlit sea, and immediately after we heard a low sound of roaring. 'What do ye call that?' asked the captain, gloomily. 'The sea breaking on a reef,' said Alan" (86-7). The captain realises that the louder the sound of the breakers, the closer the brig is to crashing upon the Torran Rocks. Even though the crew cannot see the imminent danger, the sound of nature is enough to grasp the great peril of the situation. This observation can be linked to Burke's concept of obscurity: "To make anything very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary. When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of apprehension vanishes" (Burke 99). In other words, not seeing the full potential of the peril contributes to the level of fear we experience. While the crew of the *Covenant* understands a great deal of the danger by merely listening to the roaring of the sea, their apprehension is amplified by the obscurity of the dark, as they cannot see or know where exactly the reefs of the Torran Rocks are in the middle of the night.

In both "The Merry Men" and *Kidnapped*, the sea is considered a sublime entity, and is often depicted as such. Whereas Charles Darnaway primarily regards the sea as both beautiful and terrifying, David Balfour leans more towards terrifying and inconceivable; David cannot grasp the magnitude of what he experiences:

> The reef on which we had struck was close in under the south-west end of Mull, off a little isle they call Earraid, which lay low and black upon the larboard. Sometimes the swell broke clean over us; sometimes it only ground the poor brig upon the reef, so that we could hear her beat herself to pieces; and what with the great noise of the sails, and the singing of the wind, and the flying of the spray in the moonlight, and the sense of danger, I think my head must have been partly turned, for I could scarcely understand the things I saw. (89)

This unfathomable power of the sea often becomes too much for David to comprehend, and after the ship has been wrecked, even affects his wits: "I was being hurled along, and beaten upon and choked, and then swallowed whole; and the thing was so distracting to my wits, that I was neither sorry nor afraid," to the point where he speaks of the sea in an anthropomorphic manner: "it must have been the roost or tide race, which had carried me away so fast and tumbled me about so cruelly, and at last, as if tired of that play, had flung out me and the spare yard upon its landward margin" (90). These passages suggest that the sea is playing a cruel game with David, which not only provides an image of the sea as an uncanny Gothic monster, but also underlines the notion of the sublime and man's inability to control or define nature.

The shipwrecked hero then washes ashore on Eilean Earraid (the actual island is portrayed in this narrative, not Stevenson's fictionalized Eilean Aros), where David is "threw upon its shores, and condemned to several days of rain and shellfish on its tumbled boulders" (*Memories and Portraits,* Ch. VIII, n.p.). As discussed in the previous chapter, Stevenson was immensely fond of this tidal islet and perhaps even fonder of writing about it: "I am under a spell to write of that island," as he puts it himself (Ch. VIII, n.p.). See Fig. 2 for the exact location of Eilean Earraid and David's full journey through the Scottish Highlands.

Numerous similitudes between "The Merry Men" and *Kidnapped* can be found in Stevenson's portrayal of Eilean Aros and Eilean Earraid, respectively. For instance, in the following description, Ben More is linked to mist: "the Island of Mull; the hills of which (and Ben More above them all, with a wisp of mist upon the top of it) lay full upon the larboard bow" (*Kidnapped* 86). As stated in Chapter II, Stevenson's fictitious equivalent of Ben More is Ben Kyaw, which is, according to the short story, Gaelic for "*The Mountain of the Mist*" ("The Merry Men" 2). These subtle details in representation show that Stevenson had indeed a clear image of Eilean Earraid in his mind while writing the narratives; he creates a sense of place that he drew from his memories. David oftentimes shares his own sense of place with the

readers: “I thought in my heart I had never seen a place so desert and desolate,” “[t]o walk by the sea at that hour of the morning, and in a place so desert-like and lonesome, struck me with a kind of fear,” and “the sense of horror I had whenever I was quite alone with dead rocks, and fowls, and the rain, and the cold sea” (91-2, 95). While David’s sense of place of Eilean Earraid does not echo the warm memories that Stevenson himself holds of the islet, Stevenson does manage to create a Gothic setting of nature that will spark a feeling of unease for his readers as well as for David.

The historical event of the “Appin Murder” of 14 May 1752, which occurred in the aftermath of the Jacobite Rising of 1745, forms a realistic backdrop to the following chapters of *Kidnapped,* although the narrative itself is “unaccountably moved by Stevenson to 1751” (Grenby 276). Nonetheless, the fictional protagonist interacts with real historical figures on multiple occasions, the most prominent of which is Alan Breck Stewart, who allegedly committed the Appin Murder on Colin Roy Campbell, but was never tried for it (*Kidnapped,* ‘Historical Note’ xliii-xliv). David meets Alan the “wild Hielandman” first on the *Covenant,* and is later reunited with him on Eilean Earraid, where he learns about the murder and flees with Alan through the Highlands. By engaging realistically with the historical events and setting the narrative in a convincing eighteenth-century Scotland, Stevenson aims to reconstruct the events around the Appin Murder.

Upon their first encounter, David notices that Alan’s eyes “were unusually light and had a kind of dancing madness in them” (58). The recalcitrant Jacobite Alan is the epitome of what Leslie Fiedler called the “Beloved Scoundrel,” or the “Devil as Angel,” as David (a Whig by upbringing) ultimately grows fond of Alan, even though he is “a rebel, a deserter, perhaps a murderer ... without a shred of Christian morality” (Fiedler 15-7). The way in which Alan is portrayed by Stevenson, makes it easy for both David and the readers to appreciate, as Fiedler puts it, the beauty of evil. Fiedler’s concepts – of the beloved scoundrel and the beauty of evil

– are part of the allure of the sublime, as it reveals the fine line between the terrific and the wonderful. Unlike the evil Uncle Gordon in "The Merry Men," who did display a beauty in his wickedness; David's evil Uncle Ebenezer does not possess this quality, possibly because there already is a beloved rebel in *Kidnapped;* Alan.

During his journey with Alan through the Highlands, David often contemplates his own social, cultural, and national identity. On the one hand, David distances himself from the wilderness of the landscape through which he travels; he acknowledges that he does not know what to do in this rough natural environment: "being inland bred, I was as much short of knowledge as of means" (94); he underlines the difference in social classes: "for a lad, the rightful heir of an estate, and now starving on an isle at the extreme end of the wild Highlands" (96); and he realises the cultural boundary of language: "all the rest was Gaelic, and might have been Greek and Hebrew for me" (99). On the other hand, David regards the entirety of Scotland as his country, which shows a strong sense of national identity and highlights the idea of Scotland as an independent nation: "indeed it seemed impossible that I should be left to die on the shores of my own country" (95).

When David and Alan are taken in by an old gentleman and his friendly wife to have supper and sleep in their hut, David is taken aback by their kindness: "Thought I to myself: 'If these are the wild Highlanders, I could wish my own folk wilder'" (102). While David constantly juxtaposes "his own" folk versus the wild Highland folk, it seldom occurs that he recognizes that the Highlanders are not all wild, and that the Lowlanders can even learn something from them in terms of hospitality and generosity. Furthermore, when David and Alan have a quarrel later in the narrative, Alan says: "As if this was your country!" to which David answers: "It's all Scotland" (126), which again displays a sense of nationalism. Alan, however, does not share this view and even ironically questions David's sense of moral: "you Low-country bodies have no clear idea of what's right and wrong" (126). Alan then realises

the irony of the statement and both men laugh merrily and settle their argument, after which David decides to flee with Alan towards the Lowlands.

David and Alan's flight from Highlands to Lowlands is spread across seven chapters, four of which carry the title "The flight in the heather," with subtitles such as "the rocks" or "the moor" (*Kidnapped* 138-196). The heather is a recurrent image throughout the narrative, with 48 occurrences of the word "heather" overall – including instances of heathery, heather-bush and once a heather-cat – of which 25 occurrences can be found in the seven chapters of the flight (the novel consists of 30 chapters in full). While "The Merry Men" does contain descriptions of the natural environment involving heather, the short story does not place as much emphasis on heathery landscape and, most importantly, does not use the heather in a proverbial sense. Before the flight, Alan warns David of his fate: "Either take the heather with me, or else hang" (127). "To take to the heather" connotes *to become an outlaw or bandit,* a metaphor that Stevenson explores – exploits even – to the point where readers find up to three heather-related phrases per page (*OED* "heather"). By giving the heather symbolic meaning, Stevenson emphasizes the image of two outlaws or bandits who run away from the King's justice. Moreover, heather is not only extremely common in the Scottish natural environment, but it is also etymologically linked to Scotland, as the word originates in the Scottish language as *hæddre* (*OED*), which unites the idea of Scotland as a culture and nation with the landscape.

The heather phrases in *Kidnapped* can be divided into four categories: figurative, literal, functional and spatial. The first category comprises all variations on "taking to the heather" and all instances of heather being employed to signify the outlaw-status of the person whom it considers. Examples are: "in those days, so close on the back of the great rebellion, it was needful a man should know what he was doing when he went upon the heather" (79), and "I think the best place for him will be the heather" (125), and "we'll cry 'Forth, Fortune!' and

take a cast among the heather" (128), and "we were ready for the heather" (134), and "a man that has been so much among the heather as myself" (141).

The second category involves the depictions of the landscape in which heather plays a significant role: "The shores of Earraid were close in; I could see in the moonlight the dots of heather and the sparkling of the mica in the rocks," (90) "much of [the country] was red with heather," (155) "a body of horse-soldiers … were … riding their horses to and fro in the deep parts of the heather," (156) "a grouse rose out of the heather," (157) "going down a heathery brae," (159) and "we were set face to face, sitting in the heather" (159). These literal portrayals illustrate that Stevenson often used heather in his description, where he could have easily used a different element of the natural environment: other plants, other flowers, or other scenic details.

The third category mainly consists of the moments in which David and Alan sleep on the heather, a considerably practical use of the plants: "We slept in the cave, making our bed of heather bushes," (147) "we wore away the morning; and about noon lay down in a thick bush of heather to sleep," (155) "a bed of heather in a corner of the Cage," (166) and "here [David] must tramp in the dubs and sleep in the heather like a beggarman" (193). No matter where David and Alan are on their flight, there is always more than enough heather bushes nearby to fashion a bed for themselves. The fourth and final category shows how Alan uses heather to define space: "there is a good deal of heather between here and the Forth" (149) and "[t]here's hills and heather enough between here and the two seas, David" (171).

Several occurrences of heather do not fit in the categories listed above but do require some consideration and clarification. When explaining his story and his feud with Colin Roy Campbell – also known as The Red Fox – to David, Alan gets flustered when David wrongfully assumes that Campbell was beaten: "'Him beaten?' echoed Alan. 'It's little ye ken of

Campbells, and less of the Red Fox. Him beaten? No: nor will be, till his blood's on the hillside! But if the day comes, David man, that I can find time and leisure for a bit of hunting, there grows not enough heather in all Scotland to hide him from my vengeance!'" (83). Here the heather imagery is used to make a point about the magnitude of Alan's antagonism. In the following example, Alan reminds David that the Highlands are a dangerous place and explains that there are fates far worse than being an outlaw: "we're in the Hielands, David; and when I tell ye to run, take my word and run. Nae doubt it's a hard thing to skulk and starve in the heather, but it's harder yet to lie shackled in a red-coat prison" (127). Stevenson constantly draws this link between the heather and the danger of the flight.

This relationship between heather and danger is also portrayed in Stevenson's poem "The Saying of the Name," which describes the events of the Appin murder in the following stanza:

> Nothing but danger about me,
>
> Danger behind and before,
>
> Death at wait in the heather
>
> In Appin and Mamore. (*Selected Poems* 184)

The idea that danger is everywhere, enclosing the narrator of the poem from all sides, signifies an outlaw or bandit who is the object of a manhunt and is fleeing for their life. Since heather is a ubiquitous element of the Scottish landscape and occurs throughout the entire nation, "death at wait in the heather" could imply that death waits everywhere in Scotland where heather grows, although that contradicts the statement in the final line. The image of the heather could also merely refer to the metaphorical sense of taking to the heather, as discussed above. The reference to "Appin and Mamore" ties the poem indisputably to the Appin Murder (see quote below from *Kidnapped* 147).

Finally, at the end of the flight, when David and Alan have arrived in the Stirling council area in the Lowlands, David describes another bed of heather: "we lay in a heather bush on the hillside in Uam Var, within view of a herd of deer, the happiest ten hours of sleep in a fine, breathing sunshine and on bone-dry ground, that I have ever tasted" (187). In this passage, while David gives a positive spin on sleeping in yet another heather bush, the emphasis still lies on the two men being outlaws among the heather.

During the flight through the Highlands, David offers lavish descriptions of his natural surroundings, as is the case when they arrive at the cleft that is called Heugh of Corrynakiegh:

> [I]t was still dark when we reached our destination, a cleft in the head of a great mountain, with a water running through the midst, and upon the one hand a shallow cave in a rock. Birches grew there in a thin, pretty wood, which a little farther on was changed into a wood of pines. The burn was full of trout; the wood of cushat-doves; on the open side of the mountain beyond, whaups would be always whistling, and cuckoos were plentiful. From the mouth of the cleft we looked down upon a part of Mamore, and on the sea-loch that divides that country from Appin; and this from so great a height as made it my continual wonder and pleasure to sit and behold them. (*Kidnapped* 147)

This picturesque description of the landscape stands out from the more sublime portrayal of the seascape demonstrated earlier in this chapter. David's sense of place shows a clear distinction between the two types of natural environment; with the sublime he loses control of his wits, whereas with the picturesque, David's mind is filled with wonder and pleasure. When David and Alan reach another body of water during their flight, it is remarkable to note that David's depiction immediately shows more sublimity and Gothic features:

> The sound of an infinite number of rivers came up from all round. In this steady rain the springs of the mountain were broken up; every glen gushed water like a cistern;

> every stream was in high spate, and had filled and overflowed its channel. During our night tramps, it was solemn to hear the voice of them below in the valleys, now booming like thunder, now with an angry cry. I could well understand the story of the Water Kelpie, that demon of the streams, who is fabled to keep wailing and roaring at the ford until the coming of the doomed traveller. Alan I saw believed it, or half believed it; and when the cry of the river rose more than usually sharp, I was little surprised (though, of course, I would still be shocked) to see him cross himself in the manner of the Catholics. (174)

This passage exemplifies one of the few instances of personification of nature in *Kidnapped*. The voice of the rivers arose a solemn feeling in David, which reminds him of the Water Kelpie myth. David, the lowlander, though he understands how the tale came to be, does not believe in this myth. Alan's response displays that he believes in the demon of the streams more than he cares to admit, which poses the idea that Highlanders are more prone to superstition than Lowlanders.

The water kelpie is a well-known mythic creature in Scottish and Celtic folklore, so much so that it has received national acclaim in the shape of two 30-meter-high steel sculptures, revealed to the public in 2013 (see Fig. 3 below). According to the mythology, kelpies are shape-shifting spirits, usually assuming the "fearsome shape of a water horse," that cause mischief and destruction on bodies of water (Monaghan 269-70). By combining this superstition with the sublime, Stevenson creates a Gothic atmosphere that is profoundly linked to the Scottish identity.

Fig. 3: “The Kelpies” in Falkirk, Scotland, 23 March 2019

David notices a change in his own sense of Scottish identity and sense of place in the concluding part of the narrative. In the final passage, David is back in Edinburgh after he has at last successfully claimed his inheritance. Just as in the beginning of the novel, the capital city is depicted as industrial and vibrant, but David now senses a shift in his appreciation of this environment:

> It was coming near noon when I passed in by the West Kirk and the Grassmarket into the streets of the capital. The huge height of the buildings, running up to ten and fifteen storeys, the narrow arched entries that continually vomited passengers, the wares of the merchants in their windows, the hubbub and endless stir, the foul smells and the fine clothes, and a hundred other particulars too small to mention, struck me into a kind of stupor of surprise, so that I let the crowd carry me to and fro; and yet all the time what

> I was thinking of was Alan at Rest-and-be-Thankful; and all the time (although you would think I would not choose but be delighted with these braws and novelties) there was a cold gnawing in my inside like a remorse for something wrong. (222)

David experiences an unnerving sensation regarding the bustling city of Edinburgh and laments his time with Alan. Since David does not elaborate on what is intended with the concluding sentence, many interpretations can be proposed; he regrets parting with Alan, but he could also be remorseful for aiding an alleged murderer in his escape from justice. However, if this final phrase is considered through a sense of place perspective, it could also signify that David's gnawing sensation stems from a longing back to his adventures in the Highlands and Hebrides. The "something wrong" then implies the city or countryside in general, as David evidently cannot enjoy the "braws and novelties" that fall upon him now. Whichever remorse it is, David's shows a considerable leap in character development with this closing statement.

Stevenson's adventure novel *Kidnapped* displays similar literary themes (identity, memory, and heritage), Gothic tropes (the sublime and personification), and senses of place to his short story "The Merry Men." The historical events that form a backdrop to the narrative underline and highlight the characters' (both historical and fictional) social, cultural, and political identity, which affects their sense of place: Alan feels at home in the Highlands, whereas David feels like an outsider. here is room for David to show a slight change of heart on the final page of the novel. However, as the otherness of Lowlands versus Highlands slowly fades, David experiences a change in his state of mind and, with that, in his identity. Albeit *Kidnapped* portrays a shift from the sublime terror to non-Gothic picturesque harmony, the natural environment, especially the bodies of water and the heather, functions here, too, as a vessel for emotions like fear, wonderment, and desire, and plays a significant role in the narrative. The characters' state of mind is affected by the uncontrollable seascape and west coast of Scotland which overwhelm David with feelings of fear and awe, and by picturesque

descriptions of the heather-strewn countryside that create a sense of peace and harmony and offer contrast to the sublime terror. Finally, the heather, which connotes a sense of exile and lawlessness and therefore influenced Alan and David's sense of place, is given a symbolic function both in the plot of the narrative.

Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated that Robert Louis Stevenson's representations of the Scottish natural environment in the short story "The Merry Men" and the adventure novel *Kidnapped* not only displays archetypical tropes of the Gothic genre – most prominently the personification of nature and the sublime qualities of nature – but oftentimes also influences the characters' state of mind or hold a symbolic function in relation to heritage, memory, and identity. Whereas *Kidnapped* is a proper Bildungsroman in which David's identity shifts as he experiences the wild Highlands at first hand, "The Merry Men" presents a protagonist whose identity does not develop within the short period of the narration but does significantly contrast the Highland setting. The educated lowlander Charles is astounded by the roughness of the natural environment in the Inner Hebrides; a quality that is reflected in his uncle's crude character.

The three main concepts that form the theoretical framework of this thesis are the theories of the sublime, the picturesque and sense of place. The sublime evokes the contradictory feelings of awe and fear when one beholds a natural element that is both emotionally overwhelming in its beauty and potentially dangerous in its encounter. The aesthetics of the sublime highly affects a person's state of mind and complement the Gothic motifs of terror and wonder. The picturesque landscape or seascape, albeit irregular and rough, shows a sense of peace and harmony with the natural surroundings, and therefore exerts less influence on a person's state of mind. Both the Gothic sublime and the Romantic picturesque are connected to the concept sense of place. Sense of place refers to how individuals subjectively perceive and respond to landscape. Since a single location can evoke multiple unique senses of place, this concept is extremely personal and constantly in flux, and is thus closely linked to a person's state of mind.

The analysis in the two close reading chapters shows that “The Merry Men” is in multiple ways closely connected to *Kidnapped*. Beside the featuring of Eilean Earraid, the manner of depicting various natural elements, and the cultural and social disunity between the Highlands and Lowlands, the two tales also share numerous similarities in plot. An orphaned young man from the Lowlands in search of his inheritance in the wild Highlands, hindered in his endeavours by an evil uncle. In this sense – and in correspondence with the publication dates of the two narratives – “The Merry Men” can be regarded as a forerunner of *Kidnapped*.

Stevenson has aptly translated his fondness of Eilean Earraid, elaborately described in his *Memories and Portraits*, into his portrayal of the islet in “The Merry Men” and *Kidnapped*. While the short story offers almost exclusively sublime depictions of the isle and the adventure novel shows a shift from the sublime terror to more picturesque imagery, in both tales Stevenson’s own experience makes for a detailed account of the typical Scottish landscape. The mountains, the heather, and – most importantly – the sea, are all elements he had encountered in his own lifetime and had written about in *Memories and Portraits*. In both narratives, the most sublime aspect of nature concerns the seascape; simultaneously terrifying and awe-inspiring, an incomprehensible force to be reckoned with. It is also the sea that receives the most anthropomorphic characteristics in Stevenson’s fiction: the dancing and singing of the waves, the shouting of the breakers, the Roost revolving mischief, and the sea as a living and breathing “creature.”

In *Kidnapped*, other bodies of water, such as the gushing rivers in the Highlands, are also personified, albeit it in a more picturesque manner. The rivers are described to have voices, but they do not roar like a battlefield like the breakers in “The Merry Man.” The picturesque portrayals of David in the landscape create a sense of harmony. In these peaceful landscapes, there is no room for the sublime, as there is no presence of terror. Charles finds only little

harmony with the natural environment in "The Merry Men," and therefore presents almost solely sublime depictions of his surroundings.

The connection between the characters and the landscape and seascape is expressed through their sense of place, which in turn affects their state of mind. In "The Merry Men," Charles' apprehension is conveyed through his sublime descriptions of the natural environment (including the weather), whereas Uncle Gordon's state of mind – perceived through Charles' point of view – is closely linked to and perhaps amplified by the state of the nature surrounding him. In *Kidnapped*, David's identity is shaped and reshaped by his adventure through the Highlands, as he develops an admiration for the landscape throughout his journey. David's initial aversion towards the coarseness of the people and the wildness of the landscape shifts to wonderment for the kindness and loyalty of the Highlanders and a desire to go back to that part of the country once he has arrived in the bustling city of Edinburgh. For Alan Breck, however, the roughness of the landscape is a confirmation of his state of mind and particularly the abundance of heather is a metaphor for his life as an outlaw.

By exploring the Gothic aesthetics in Stevenson's writings and examining the themes that the author expresses through his depiction of the Scottish landscape, this thesis has shown that through the sense of place of the protagonists, their state of mind becomes discernible. Further research could consider the sense of place of the characters in other works by Stevenson, for example the novel *The Master of Ballantrae: A Winter's Tale*, published in 1889, which not only takes place in Scotland, but also features Paris, New York, and India. By juxtaposing the depictions of the countries in this novel with the depiction of Scotland in the two narratives analysed in this thesis, one could examine the differences (and similarities) between the various portrayals. Another scope for further research could review Stevenson's biography and investigate the reasons behind his fascination for islands and seascape. For it is

Stevenson's fascination for the Scottish natural environment that laid the groundwork for this thesis and for the exploration of the sense of dark places.

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