

s.51 Stephenson, Shelagh *An Experiment with an Air Pump*. London: Methuen Drama, 1998.

■ Borrowing the time-shifting device of Tom Stoppard's play *Arcadia*, Stephenson gives us a present-day perspective on the interplay of science and art during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The issues remain constant: whether scientists' devotion to research is tainted by impure passion and whether the humanism instilled by the study of art and literature is freighted by excessive preoccupation with the past.

The play takes its title and dominant image from the masterpiece (1767–68) of painter Joseph Wright of Derby, which demonstrates a cruel experiment in which a bird suffocates as air is pumped out of a glass globe, only to have its life spared at the last moment. Stephenson suggests analogies among the use of air pump; the supply of "fresh" corpses to anatomists by William Burke and William Hare, Edinburgh body snatchers and murderers (see T.9), and their English counterpart, John Bishop; and twenty-first-century controversy regarding pre-fetal genetic research.

In the course of the drama, Tom, a present-day English professor, discovers beneath his venerable house in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, a skeleton with its upper spine missing. The audience knows what Tom does not: that the remains belong to an eighteenth-century hunchbacked Scottish servant named Isobel Bridie. Scientist Thomas Armstrong cynically wooed her so that he might examine her anatomical anomaly. Learning of his treachery, she unsuccessfully attempted to hang herself. When Armstrong found her still breathing, he suffocated her, like the bird in the air pump. It is implied that he later removed her hump for closer study.

s.52 Stevenson, Robert Louis *Kidnapped* and *David Balfour*. [In England *Catriona*.] In *The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson*. Vailima Edition. Vols. 9 and 10. New York: Scribner, 1921–23.

■ In 1752 red-haired Colin Roy Campbell of Glenure (the "Red Fox") was shot to death in a wooded ambush while walking home in the Appin area of the Scottish Highlands. Campbell, as King George II's agent, was in the process of evicting tenants from lands belonging to an exiled Jacobite landlord to whom they remained loyal. James Stewart was tried and hanged for complicity in this Appin murder; his kinsman Allan Breck, who was suspected of being one of the assassins, fled abroad. Scottish historian Andrew Lang claimed to have learned the identity of the true murderer (whom he believed to have acted alone) but refused to divulge the secret in his article on the case (see L.8).

In the novel *Kidnapped* (1886), young David Balfour witnesses the Appin slaying and comes upon his friend Allan Breck Stewart nearby. Although David suspects Allan Breck of the crime because of menacing statements he had previously made about the hated royal agent, Breck is firm in his denial, declaring that "if I were going to kill a gentleman, it would not be in my own country, to bring trouble on my clan."

David Balfour (1893; known as *Catriona* in Britain) follows the course of James Stewart's murder trial. Balfour, doubtless speaking for Stevenson, is scandalized by the address of the Duke of Argyll, presiding as Lord Justice-General, to the condemned man; seething with political partisanship Argyll told Stewart that had the rising of 1745 succeeded, the

prisoner “might have been satiated with the blood of any name or clan to which you had an aversion.” David Balfour comments: “James was as fairly murdered as though the Duke had got a fowling-piece and stalked him.” He also noted that a juryman had scandalously interrupted the speech for the defense with the words: “Pray, sir, cut it short, we are quite weary.”

S.53 ——— *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. In *The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson*. Vailima Edition. Vol. 7. New York: Scribner, 1921–23.

■ The image of Jekyll and Hyde (conceived in a feverish nightmare experienced by Stevenson) appears to have had its origin in a real personage of the author’s native city of Edinburgh, Deacon Brodie (1741–1788). William Brodie was a successful carpenter and cabinetmaker and so highly regarded in his craft that he became “deacon” or president of the Edinburgh carpenters’ trade. Far from having the solid churchgoing habits that his title might suggest to those unacquainted with its professional significance, Deacon Brodie spent many happy hours on Sunday mornings making wax impressions of the door locks of friends and neighbors who were at services. Brodie led a double life: by day he practiced his carpentry; at night he was a daring housebreaker.

The houses and office he raided (at first alone and later as leader of a gang of four) included many he had previously visited to make repairs or perform other work of his trade. Between blows of hammer and strokes of saw, he had taken the opportunity to make copies of keys and locks and to observe room arrangements and the arrival and departure schedules of inhabitants and workers. Some victims who witnessed his nighttime incursions thought they recognized him under his black gauze mask, but they kept their own counsel, out of either friendship or disbelief. The next morning Brodie would condole with them on their losses or would be in attendance at the town council, of which he was an ex officio member, helping formulate plans to catch the audacious criminal.

Brodie’s career ended when a member of his gang gave him away to the authorities after a disappointing raid on the Scottish Excise Office. Brodie fled and was caught in Holland, where he was making profitable use of his fugitive hours learning the art of forgery from an itinerant expert. The Deacon was hanged in 1788 at the Edinburgh Tolbooth prison. Legend has it that he was hanged on a gallows that he had built in the course of his carpentry for the city. Unfortunately, this supreme irony is not borne out by chronology.

In the night nursery where Robert Louis Stevenson slept as a child were a bookcase and a chest of drawers made by Deacon Brodie. There is little doubt that his devoted nurse, Alison Cunningham (“Cummie”), who had the odd notion that the way to put an impressionable child to sleep is to tell him terrifying stories, regaled him with the exploits of Edinburgh’s famous Deacon. When Stevenson was thirteen or fourteen years old, he made his first attempt at a play based on Deacon Brodie, and at nineteen, in 1869, he wrote a later draft. In 1879 his friend W. E. Henley (the hot-tempered, red-bearded, one-legged poet and critic who was to serve as the model for Stevenson’s immortal character Long John Silver) “fished” the 1869 draft out of a trunk and persuaded Stevenson to collaborate with him on a new version. In their play, Deacon Brodie pursues his burglar’s trade partly

for the economic purpose of restoring his sister's dowry, which he had dissipated by gambling. At the same time, Stevenson and Henley introduce a philosophical interpretation that is underscored by the play's subtitle, "The Double Life." Deacon Brodie feels that his "naked self" is stifled by the social restrictions and hypocrisy of daytime Edinburgh and leaps into his nights of crime as into a "new life." He invokes the night as "the grimy, cynical night that makes all cats grey, and all honesties of one complexion." When at the end of the play the Deacon, in a departure from his historical fate, dies in a duel with the police, he cries that he has found the "new life" at last. Unfortunately, *Deacon Brodie*, like Stevenson's other dramatic collaborations with Henley, was unsuccessful, and its American performances were not helped by the fact that Henley's brother, an untalented actor, was cast in the title role.

The disappointing fate of the play by no means ended Stevenson's fascination with the figure of Deacon Brodie or his speculations about the existence of the unknown dark sides of men whose public characters were beyond reproach. Eve Blantyre Simpson, the sister of Stevenson's close friend Walter Simpson, reports that Stevenson would pace up and down before the Simpsons' library fire and "expatiate on the double life, speaking again of the Deacon. He would wonder what burglary some esteemed citizen of his own day was guilty of in the . . . [night]." The respected Dr. Henry Jekyll and his alter ego, the unspeakable Mr. Hyde, are the permanent embodiment of Stevenson's obsession with the double soul of man.

To a modern generation, which has learned, through such studies as Steven Marcus's *The Other Victorians* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), of the unpleasant aspects of the private conduct of the Victorians, Stevenson's tale seems to be as well suited to nineteenth-century England as to Deacon Brodie's Edinburgh of a century earlier. In fact, in a striking exception to the rule that history never repeats itself, a notorious criminal case was tried at Sheffield in 1879 that presented a close parallel to the exploits of Brodie. Charlie Peace—known to his suburban community in London as "Mr. Thompson," a proper, violin-playing citizen busy with his great assortment of pets, a regular attendant at parish church services, and an outspoken critic of the pro-Turkish policies of the government—was a professional housebreaker by night. When he was arrested in the course of a burglary and his identity was discovered, it was found that he had committed two murders, one of them years before. Peace was hanged for his crimes. His violin is now one of the prime exhibits in Scotland Yard's Black Museum.

s.54 Stoker, Bram *Dracula*. London: Constable, 1897.

■ Vlad Tepes, a fifteenth-century prince of Walachia (now part of Romania), impaled masses of captives on spikes. According to legend, he took dinner amid rows of his suffering victims. From researches in the British Library, Bram Stoker, author of *Dracula*, appears to have obtained information about fifteenth-century Hungarian military campaigns against the Turks; as a result of Stoker's reading, there emerged "a composite picture—admittedly sketchy—of an authentic character who bore at least some of the characteristics of the historical Dracula" (see Barbara Belford, *Bram Stoker* [New York: Knopf, 1996], 259–60;