

Review

Richard Ambrosini and Richard Dury, eds., *European Stevenson*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009. Pp. 287. ISBN 1-4438-1436-9. £39.99.

Anglophone critics have been reluctant to grant Robert Louis Stevenson a permanent place in the literary canon, judging him to be, at best, an author whose style is out-of-sync with his subject matter, and, at worst, a writer of mere genre fiction. In approaching Stevenson from a continental perspective, Richard Ambrosini's and Richard Dury's admirable collection, *European Stevenson*, redresses this critical injustice and presents Stevenson as an author who was "uniquely open among his peers in the English-speaking world" to an "international exchange of ideas on art" (p. 2). The portrait of Stevenson that emerges is of an author whose awareness of the European literary tradition not only directly affected the evolution of his own writing, but the evolution of European fiction more broadly. As such, the volume makes a valuable contribution to Scottish and European literary history.

European Stevenson is divided into four parts, each of which focuses on a different aspect of Stevenson's relationship to the Continent. The first two parts deal with European Experiences and French Travel Narratives, and explore familiar territory in new ways. Where previous accounts of Stevenson's time in Europe have been mostly of interest from a biographical perspective, the essays in Part I clearly link Stevenson's travels to his development as an author. This is particularly true of Robert-Louis Abrahamson's, "'Of Some Use to Me Afterwards':

Stevenson's Pivotal Experience in Mentone," which presents a before-and-after picture of Stevenson-the-writer, and Anne C. Colley's engaging "Stevenson and the Davos Winter Landscape." Essays that deal with Stevenson's travel writings also approach them from new angles: Laurence Davies looks at *Travels With a Donkey* and *An Inland Voyage* in relation to time, space, and issues of national identity; Lesley Graham analyzes the various reconfigurations and re-workings of *Travels With a Donkey* by the many authors who have retraced Stevenson's footsteps in the Cévennes; and Morgan Holmes approaches the same text as a "travelogue [that] denaturalizes culturally-forceful distinctions between human and non-human animals" (p. 110).

The second half of the volume focuses on "European Influences and Reception," and "European Translation," and contains some of the most noteworthy essays in the collection. Foremost among these are Richard Ambrosini's sweeping and erudite inquiry into Stevenson's place in European literary history; Vincent Giroud's study of Stevenson and Jean Cocteau, which contains a comprehensive publishing history of his works in France; and Guy Barefoot's thought-provoking overview of film adaptations of *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, which focuses on director Walerian Borowczyk's 1981 film *Docteur Jekyll et les femmes*—a film that "highlights ... sexual violence" through the introduction of female characters and thereby "accentuate[s] the disturbing and transgressive nature of Hyde's crimes" (pp. 244, 249). Also included in this section of the volume are essays on lesser-studied literary relationships and languages, including: similarities between Stevenson and Michel de Montaigne; Stevenson's influence on Italo Calvino; and the difficulties of translating *Treasure Island*—with its specialized seafaring vocabulary—into Yiddish. Other chapters include an analysis of onomastics, a study of aesthetic similarities between Stevenson and Proust

(the role of the past and art in creating a sense of self), and a long-overdue comparative analysis of comic-strip adaptations of *Jekyll and Hyde*, which contrasts American and Italian versions of the story.

Collectively, the essays in *European Stevenson* demonstrate that Stevenson was an author with one foot on the Continent and one in Scotland, and that it was these divided loyalties, as it were, that caused English-speaking critics to misinterpret his writings. By changing the critical perspective and looking at his work through a more comparative European lens, it becomes clear that Stevenson was an author whose writings challenged cultural, literary, and generic stereotypes of his day. By providing new points of entry into Stevenson's work, *European Stevenson* should do the same for present-day interpretations of his oeuvre and function as a springboard for further enquiries into this aspect of his legacy.

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