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The Text of “Apparition”:
A Purview of the Henley-Stevenson Friendship

“Apparition,” W. E. Henley’s sonnet-portrait of Robert Louis Stevenson, was first drafted in 1875, was reshaped and refined over a period of thirteen years, and was eventually published among his “In Hospital” sequence in A Book of Verses, 1888. What is true of the others of the “hospital” poems is also true of “Apparition”: in each case, along with the final product of the creative process, there also exists an exceptionally vivid account of the process itself. The letters of Henley and his correspondence with those close to him yield specific insights into the conception and development of his works. The preserved drafts provide the details of the laborious procedure by which the raw literary material evolved. But what is unique of the textual history of “Apparition” is that it closely parallels the history of the Henley-Stevenson friendship — from its chance origin in an Edinburgh hospital to its dissolution in their infamous quarrel.¹

The creative history of “Apparition” began in the winter of 1875. Leslie Stephen, then editor of the Cornhill Magazine, was in Edinburgh to lecture at the Philosophical Institute; and on 12 February he wrote to his wife:

I had an interesting visit to my poor contributor. He is a miserable cripple in the infirmary, who has lost one foot and is likely to lose another—or rather hopes just to save it, and has a crippled hand besides. He has been eighteen months laid up here, and in that time has taught himself Spanish, Italian and German. He writes poems of the Swinburne kind, and reads such books as he can get hold of. I have taken one of his poems for the Cornhill. I went to see Stevenson this morning, Colvin’s friend, and told him all about this poor creature, and am going to take him there this afternoon. He will be able to lend him books, and perhaps to

¹ I am indebted to the American Philosophical Society for a 1971 grant from its Penrose Fund, under which the research for this article was begun; and to the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, San Marino, California, for an award in the winter of 1972 which considerably abetted the progress of my work.
read his MSS. and be otherwise useful. So I hope that my coming to Edinburgh will have done good to one living creature.\textsuperscript{4}

Henley was the "poor contributor."\textsuperscript{3} And the friend of Sidney Colvin, who was then Slade Professor of Fine Arts at Cambridge, was Robert Louis Stevenson. The following day Stevenson wrote to Mrs. Fanny Sitwell:

Yesterday, Leslie Stephen, who was down here to lecture, called on me and took me up to see a poor fellow, a bit of a poet who writes for him, and who has been eighteen months in our Infirmary and may be, for all I know, eighteen months more. It was very sad to see him there, in a little room with two beds, and a couple of sick children in the other bed; a girl came in to visit the children and played dominos on the counterpane with them; the gas flared and crackled, the fire burned in a dull economical way; Stephen and I sat on a couple of chairs and the poor fellow sat up in his bed, with his hair and beard all tangled, and talked as cheerfully as if he had been in a King's Palace, in the great King's Palace of the blue air. He has taught himself two languages since he has been lying there. I shall try to be of use to him.\textsuperscript{4}

This account of the first meeting of Henley and Stevenson records a moment of significance in both their lives, the beginning of a long and romantic friendship which was to weather many a storm but one. And while most interpreters have attempted to excuse the tone of the concluding sentence as the style which Stevenson often adopted in his letters to Mrs. Sitwell, it may be suggested that the relationship would never have developed had Henley known then of this patronizing facet of his visitor's character.

But Henley and Stevenson brought to one another certain qualities which each man desperately required in fulfillment of his own personality. Stevenson, though twenty-four years old, still was very much the delicate boy; often isolated in his parents' home in Edinburgh from his London literary connections, he had retreated inevitably into the role of the mollycoddle. Surrounded by close friends and doting cousins who were beginning to acquiesce to the demands of manhood, he longed for a companion who might share his inclination to shun adult responsibilities. Henley, only a year older, had matured by suf-


3. Stephen had accepted Henley's poem "Morning" for publication in the Cornhill; the work was printed in the issue for July, 1875 (XXXII, 174).

ferring. He had succumbed in his youth to tubercular arthritis, had survived in his adolescence the near-fatal amputation of one foot, and had recently endured two operations at the hands of Joseph Lister to save his other foot. His past was a history of hospitalization, his future an uncertain prognosis. Infirm and uncured, isolated with two invalid children in a small and dingy room in the Old Surgical Hospital in Edinburgh, he urgently needed conversation and companionship.

During the first weeks of the friendship Stevenson did make himself "of use" to Henley. He ransacked the private collections of his Edinburgh friends and carried up to the infirmary the latest belles lettres from the continent. Often too he brought with him his schoolmate Charles Baxter, already a barrister, a mature and sagacious man who was eventually to become the would-be arbitrator in the quarrel which was to reverse the spirit of the friendship. Stevenson could not but be inspired by Henley’s physical courage; he marveled at the bluff determination of the patient who — while lying on an iron bed with his foot bandaged and propped — would play tunes upon a penny whistle and set the wards to music. Henley, whose principal source of achievement was the manuscript of his "hospital" poems, could not but be attracted to the Stevenson who visited him time and again after that initial February meeting, who was otherwise irresponsible and carefree, who had already been elected to the Savile Club and had already published in the Portfolio, the Fortnightly, the Cornhill, and Macmillan’s.

In the late winter Stevenson read Henley’s poems and reported to his cousin Bob: "He writes straight enough verses, I think. He’s learning, you know. But he makes good songs and here and there has a good idea. His hospital sonnets are very true and boldly read."5 Stevenson was off in London, and Henley, arranging the sequence for submission, wrote to him in mid-March requesting his "pencil-marks";6 the extant manuscripts bear those thoughtful emendations, and letters of Stevenson to Colvin and Mrs. Sitwell suggest that copies of the poems were sent for their criticism as well. Finally, on April 15, just two days before his discharge from the infirmary, Henley announced to Stevenson that Leslie Stephen had accepted the "Hospital Outlines" for the Cornhill.7 The contribution which Stevenson made to the works

5. The Stevenson Library of Edwin J. Beinecke [Beinecke Library, Yale University], MS. 8401. This letter and other documents of the Beinecke Collection are published by permission.
7. Beinecke Collection, MS. 4695.
cannot be precisely determined, but a fair estimate of the poet’s indebtedness to him is suggested in his own remark to Mrs. Sitwell: "They were to have been dedicated to me, but Stephen wouldn’t allow it — said it would be pretentious."

Throughout the spring and summer Henley was convalescing at Portobello, working on a second hospital series, and reading proofs of the original sequence. Charles Baxter was a constant visitor, and Stevenson, whenever he was in Edinburgh, came down to help with the corrections and to take Henley for drives in the country. They began to think of themselves as the "Three Musketeers" — Henley and Baxter and Stevenson — and as Henley’s health began to improve their life together took on a bohemian flavor. It was only natural that the three of them, each rebelling for his own reasons against the expectations and strictures of a close-knit Victorian society, should seek out at night the world of the pubs and oyster-bars. But with the coming of fall Henley began to survey his prospects for the future: penniless, he realized that he could not continue long to subsist on the generosity of his friends; in love with Anna Boyle, the sister of a fellow patient in the infirmary, he was anxious to marry and support her. And so his mood changed and his nocturnal roistering was curtailed.

At the very end of 1875, Henley briefly turned his attention to a series of lyric character sketches provisionally titled "Men & Women." From Portobello he wrote to Baxter:

I have been busy a taking portraits. Squeezing people into sonnets is my line of curiosity just now! — One of my pictures is not unlike you. I suppose you will hate me mortally after reading it, so I shall not let you see it. I sent one of himself to Lewis on Sunday; I suppose that when he returns he will borrow a brace of pistols, & invite me to a handkerchief duel."

Many of the manuscripts in the two sonnet groups — twelve men and ten women — have remained unpublished. One, a study of a house surgeon, was included in the "In Hospital" sequence in *A Book of Verses*, 1888. But the most significant portrait, only less famous than

10. The holographs — two or three drafts of each poem — are preserved in the Henley Archive [MA 1617] of the Pierpont Morgan Library and are placed together, with the whole in sequence, as numbered by the poet, on a makeshift title page Henley has dated their composition: "December/75- January/76." These drafts and other documents of the Henley Archive are published by permission of the Pierpont Morgan Library.
"Invictus" among all the works in the Henley canon, was the celebrated description of Robert Louis Stevenson.

The initial three drafts of this poem — A1, A2, A3 — are dated "16-20/12/75." The first, marked with several interlineations, reveals not only the craftsmanship which went into each of Henley's sonnets but also the painstaking care he took to represent his friend with fidelity:

Thin legged & chested, slight unspeakably,
   Neat footed & long fingered, all his face,
   Lean, high boned, round of nose & quick with race,
The brown eyes glittering with vivacity,
Bold lipped, rich tinted, changeful as the sea,
   Is instinct with a strange romantic grace,
   Intense, wild, delicate, where yet you with many a trace
Of a fitful force, & a feminine energy.
Valiant in velvet, light in ragged luck  
   Loud, keenly most vain, most sensitive, seemly yet most critical,
       Buffoon & poet, lover & sensualist,
Of Bottom take a little, much of Puck,
Yet more Titania, Hamlet most of all,
Combine, constrain, release &—have you missed?

The eclectic image of "Lewis" which is conjured here clearly captures the tenor of the youth's life in these Edinburgh days: "Buffoon & poet, lover & sensualist." In the spring, Stevenson had played Orsino in a local production of Twelfth Night; but aside from the reference to Hamlet — which may suggest the ambiguous role he was playing in real life as both doting son and libertine — the governing spirit of the likeness is that of A Midsummer Night's Dream. There is "a little" of Bottom, stolid and impertrrable, who keeps his head, though it be an asshead; "much" of Puck, with his Robin Goodfellow element of mischief and malice; and "yet more" Titania, whose dignity prevails throughout. In short, the sonnet is a tour de force; the varied characterization in the play is a brilliant mirror against which Henley reflects the complex nature of his friend, now adolescent and unserious, now sensitive and resolute: "the lunatic, the lover, and the poet are of imagination all compact."

In the second and third drafts — between which there are but few differences — lines 7-8 are altered to read:

11. Stevenson had written to Mrs. Sitwell: "I play Orsino every day, in all the pomp of Solomon, splendid Francis the First clothes, heavy with gold and stage jewellery. I plant it ill enough, I believe; but me and the clothes, and the wedding wherewith the clothes and me are reconciled, produce every night a thrill of admiration." (Stevenson, Letters, I, 258-259).
with a subtle trace
Of feminine force and fitful energy.

And "Titania" has been superseded by "Cleopatra." While on the surface these emendations may seem but slight, their implications demand a close consideration. It is significant that the entire story and success of nearly every account of the tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra must turn upon the character of Cleopatra herself: to Plutarch, and then to Shakespeare, she is a magnificent courtesan, a woman of unparalleled charm and personality, quite apart from her physical beauty, who can control and fascinate any man; she is a creature of gaiety, instinct, and passion, unique among women. The delineation of Stevenson in these terms — as a man of "feminine force" — is not an indictment, but rather a revelation. Henley was, of course, deeply indebted to this friend who had cheered him at his bedside and had introduced him to the little word of the prosperous professional middle class of Edinburgh; his own life up to this point had been one of poverty and pain. It had been easy for him to submit to the contagious spirit of Stevenson's reckless generosity and almost narcissistic sensitivity. But at the precise moment when Stevenson was fighting desperately to protect his romantic adolescence, often feigning illness in order to postpone the passing of his advocate examinations, Henley, healing but still uncured, was on the threshold of marriage, eager to assume the responsibilities of adulthood. Just before his release from the infirmary, he had composed a draft of "Invictus," and Stevenson had simply marked it: "good." It seems unlikely that Stevenson, although he drew strength from its external qualities, was able to understand the true nature of Henley's attitude toward life itself; though continually troubled emotionally and physically by the conflict between a demanding father and an indulgent mother, he had never felt pressed to take life seriously. As it developed, then, Henley's portrait began to serve as a sort of psychological prism breaking down his friend's character to its fundamental colors. At this critical transition in both their lives it was perhaps inevitable that Henley should discern in Stevenson's manner something "most vain, most sensitive, yet most critical" — something almost "feminine."

Stevenson's own response to his portrait has never been recorded, so that his reaction upon receiving it cannot be determined with certainty. What is known, however, is that Henley also sent a fair copy of the poem — further revised between December 1875 and February

12. See the Appendix for a collation of drafts A1, A2, and A3.
1876 — to Stevenson’s mother. Her response provides a genuine clue to her proud and protective nature:

17 Heriot Row
Edinburgh

Dear Mr. Henley,

I must write you a line to thank you for my boy’s portrait. I have long wished that you would use your wonderful power of word painting on his behalf & I was very much pleased when at last the full length picture arrived. I think it is very beautifully painted & that on the whole the features are delicately & skillfully brought out. Perhaps modesty should make me say that here & there the likeness is a flattered one but I think a mother may be excused for any amount of quiet acquiescence in the praise bestowed by others on her son. Perhaps, who knows? It may be from that mother that he gets his vanity & so no wonder she is vain of him. But do you really think he is most vain? I am not quite prepared to admit that, nor yet the “sensualist.” I hope you put in that word for the sake of the rhyme—in that case I will forgive you. To me it seems too coarse an epithet to fit in at all with the graceful & elegant expressions that go before. After all you see I only object to two words, with all the rest I am more than satisfied.

The version which Mrs. Stevenson received, BI or B2, bears but three significant variants from the original three drafts. First, Henley has affixed a title, an epigraph from Shakespeare: "Men of all sorts take a pride to gird at me” (Henry IV, Part II, I, ii, 7). Second, the "long fingered" of line 2 has been changed to "artist handed" — reflecting, perhaps, the poet’s attitude toward Stevenson’s shift in 1876 from prose to fiction. Third, "constrain" in line 14 has been supplanted by "restrain"; it is obvious, in the initial drafts, that all the rich and varied elements of the subject’s character have been constrained or narrowly encompassed within the sonnet’s demanding form, but what has here been restrained — repressed or curbed — requires attention.

When Henley received the letter from Mrs. Stevenson, he had returned to Edinburgh to assume his responsibilities as a contributor to the ninth edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica, a position which Stevenson probably secured for him. In the following months he was


14. Two holographs of this version are known to exist. BI, in the National Library of Scotland, MS. 9754, fol. 146 [reprinted by permission of the Trustees], is dated—as in the case of the three original drafts—"16-20/12/75"; B2, in the Beinecke Collection, MS. 7242, is dated "12/75-2/76": but it must be hypothesized, upon collation, that both fair copies date from the later period. See the Appendix for a collation of drafts BI and B2.
to produce several articles on French literature, at least one of which was sufficiently considerable to warrant the inclusion of his initials. But at the same time he lamented to Austin Dobson: "I have abandoned the Muse. . . . Journalistic prose . . . [has] apparently put all my rhyme and rhythms to flight."¹⁵ Henley wished desperately to succeed as a poet, but he was relegated to journalism for his subsistence; Stevenson, with unlimited funds at his disposal, had already achieved some success as an essayist but was neglecting his art for the sake of fliers to London and Swansont and Fontainbleau. It was only natural, as the brief but intensely romantic period of their friendship began to wane and as the differences in their circumstances became more pronounced, that Henley should begin to think critically of Stevenson and to reaffirm his own activism. Time and again the second series of his "hospital" poems was rejected, yet he wrote to an old friend: "In this life effort means success — on fait ce qu'on veut."¹⁶ And his reply to Mrs. Stevenson, on 26 February 1876, clearly reflects his conception of the artist's integrity:

19 Balfour St.
Leith Walk.

Dear Mrs. Stevenson,

I am very gratified indeed to hear that you are so nearly content with my little sketch of Robert Lewis. Had it not been the labour of love it was, your reception of it would have more than compensated me for any pains I might have bestowed upon it.

I shall not venture to dispute with you as to the propriety of certain epithets. With regard, however, to the most objectionable qualification I ought perhaps to say something. You know the battle in which unfortunate rhymesters are always engaged—their blind & furious pursuit of proper consonants—& your surmise that a certain word was introduced for the mere rhyme's sake may very possibly be correct. But you can hardly expect of me to own the impeachment! That would amount to nothing less than a confession of weakness, & the Muse of Poetry is perhaps the vainest of Muses. But I shall not contest your assumption, & that is always a point against me.

This also I will say: That since I have received your letter my life has been a burden to me thro' the concourse of rhymes in sit that have offered themselves as substitutes for their offending kinsman. The unfortunate thing is, that they will none of them do! Boranist, antiquinist, phrenologist—you see I get farther & farther


off the mark. I am afraid therefore that we must let the objectionable word stand, & I am sure that you will forgive me a more formal confession of error.

Very faithfully yours,
W. E. Henley

Henley's patronizing tone and his calculated failure to name "certain epithets" may well underscore a playful sarcasm in his letter. But his steadfast refusal to change the "offending" word suggests something more, something of his uncompromising standard as a poet. Years later he was to find an appropriate iambic rhyme, but then it was designed to complement — not to replace — "sensualist."

As the years passed it was inevitable that Henley and Stevenson should be drawn apart in pursuit of their own careers. After Stevenson's marriage in 1880 to Fanny Osbourne, the carousing of his Edinburgh days had finally been abandoned. His health was frequently poor, and throughout the succeeding decade Fanny served as his anxious nurse; she cared for him at their chalet at Hyères — "La Solitude" — and protected him from his cousin Bob who came to revel, and from Henley — continually moving from one editorial position to another — who came to borrow money. In the winter of 1884, when Stevenson, Henley, and Baxter were off on a flier to Nice and Monte Carlo, Stevenson fell dangerously ill, and Fanny — who respected Baxter's sagacity — proceeded to blame Henley for the incident. Probably she never liked Henley: she was jealous of his close collaboration with her husband on the four plays they wrote; she disliked his tendency to drink excessively; she was fearful of the way he had of exciting and draining Stevenson with his hearty and raucous talk and laughter. Fanny's influence over Stevenson was considerable. Even Sidney Colvin was suspicious of her domineering personality. And Henley especially regretted the change in his friend's character after his marriage; he believed that Fanny was making Stevenson over "into an insincere poseur," and it was this attitude which prompted the final rift between the friends.18

The actual circumstances of that quarrel, seldom interpreted from an unbiased point of view, are worth summarizing. In the spring of 1887 — sometime before Stevenson and Fanny left England for Saranac, New York — Mrs. Katharine de Mattos (Stevenson's cousin) outlined a story about an encounter in a train between two characters,

17. Beinecke Collection, MS. 4691.
one of whom was to be a young girl who had recently escaped from an asylum. Apparently, Mrs. de Matos discussed this story with Fanny Stevenson, in Henley’s presence. Fanny liked the donnée of the story, but she suggested that the girl be made a water-sprite, a Nixie. Katharine did not like this alteration; but Fanny extracted from her a reluctant promise that if the work should prove unsuccessful, then she would be free to attempt her version. In August the Stevensons sailed from Tilbury. Whether Katharine ever wrote the story remains debatable; certainly she never published it in her form, and Fanny, still taken with the idea, wrote the story her way and sold it to Scribner’s Magazine. A copy of the issue reached England, where Henley read it, and on 9 March 1888 he wrote to Stevenson:

I read the Nixie with considerable amazement. It’s Katharine’s; surely it’s Katharine’s? The situation, the environment, the principal figure—voyons! There are even reminiscences of phrase and imagery, parallel incident—que sais-je? It is all better focused, no doubt; but I think it has lost as much (at least) as it has gained; and why there wasn’t a double signature is what I’ve not been able to understand.  

This epistolary affront marked the beginning of the dispute.

While Henley has been maligned by nearly every biographer for his lack of tact in leveling this charge of plagiarism, it is wise to recall that he had always maintained a scrupulous standard of artistic authority. It is important to consider too that at this precise moment he was finally achieving his long-sought goal of recognition as a poet. In 1887, after years of personal frustration, several of the poems of his second “hospital” sequence were printed in a subscription volume, Voluntaries for An East London Hospital, edited by H. B. Donkin and published for the benefit of the East London Hospital for Children and Dispensary for Women.  

David Nutt discovered the volume and offered Henley the chance to publish his collected verses; and Henley later reflected upon the opportunity:

The work of revision has reminded me that, small as is this book of mine, it is all in the matter of verse that I have to show for the years between 1872 and 1897. A principal reason is that, after spending the better part of my life in the pursuit of poetry, I found myself (about 1877) so utterly unmarketable that I had to own myself beaten in art, and to addict myself to journalism for the next ten years. Came the production by my old friend,


Mr. H. B. Donkin, in his little collection of "Voluntaries," compiled for that East End Hospital to which he has devoted so much time and energy and skill, of those unrhyming rhythms in which I had tried to quintessentialize, as (I believe) one scarce can do in rhyme, my impressions of the Old Edinburgh Infirmary. They had long since been rejected by every editor of standing in London—I had well-nigh said in the world; but as soon as Mr. Nutt had read them, he entreated me to look for more. I did as I was told; old dusty sheaves were dragged to light; the work of selection and correction was begun; I burned much; I found that, after all, the lyrical instinct had slept—not died; I ventured (in brief) "A Book of Verses."  

One of the "old dusty sheaves . . . dragged to light" was the sonnet-portrait of Stevenson, and Henley again corrected it and affixed to it a title:

\textbf{An Apparition}

Thin legged, thin chested, slight unspeakably  
Neat-footed & weak fingered, in his face—  
Lean, large-boned, curved of nose, & touched with race  
Bold lipped, rich tinted, mutable as the sea,  
The brown eyes radiant with vivacity—  
There shines a brilliant & romantic grace  
A spirit intense & rare, with trace on trace  
Of passion & impudence & energy.  
Valiant in velvet, light in ragged luck  
Most vain, most generous, sternly critical,  
Buffoon & poet, lover & sensualist:  
A deal of Ariel, just a streak of Puck,  
Much Antony, of Hamlet most of all  
With something of the Shorter Catechist.

Almost all of the "hospital" poems were altered in preparation for their inclusion in \textit{A Book of Verses}; there are even startling variants between those first published in 1887 and then again less than a year later. The holograph record of these emendations is but slight, yet this text of "An Apparition" — draft C — is taken from a manuscript which must have been composed during this period; opposite the title there appears the number "XXV" which corresponds exactly with the place in the sequence that the poem was to occupy when printed in May.\textsuperscript{23} The new revisions are striking. Subtle shifts in accent have reinforced the dominant trochaic pattern, and alterations in punctua-

\textsuperscript{21}. "Advertisement" to the 1898 edition of Henley's \textit{Poems}.  
\textsuperscript{22}. Henley Archive, Pierpont Morgan Library.  
\textsuperscript{23}. William Ernest Henley, \textit{A Book of Verses} (London: David Nutt, 1888), p. 41. The copy in the British Museum is stamped: "25 May 1888." See the Appendix for a collation of draft C and the received text.
tion have brought about a coherent rhetorical statement where previously the effect had been one of an impressionistic image-portrait. Henley had once written that he "wished in writing these verses to treat the matter . . . subjectively," but now, with the process of transposition, the description has become more objective, almost a detached emotion. "Bottom" has become "Ariel"; "Puck" has remained, but all his rich merriment has been reduced to "just a streak." "Cleopatra" is no longer applicable — Fanny has usurped her role — and so Stevenson has become "Antony," blinded by love and degenerated into a fool. The progression in line 2 of "long fingered" in the A drafts to "artist handed" in the B drafts and to "weak fingered" here provides a further account of Henley's developing attitude toward Stevenson's art, as Stevenson moved from prose to experimental fiction and then to the "Lay Morals" which annoyed Henley so and represented to him the dialectical reversal of his friend's personality; such is implied in the most significant of all the changes, the concluding line, with its new rhyme in *it*.

When the sonnet first appeared, as "Apparition," in *A Book of Verses*, its effect was lost upon the "Stevensonians" — Graham Balfour, Sidney Colvin, Fanny Stevenson herself, and the rest of the coterie which devoted its efforts toward the exalting of RLS; they had learned of the quarrel from Stevenson and they knew only his point of view. They could not have known all. Stevenson had not told them of the intimation against Fanny, not only because Henley's facts were correct, but also — he begged — because Henley had marked his original letter "Private and Confidential." Moreover, they could not have known that the outburst with which Stevenson responded was prompted as much by coincidental agitation: he was in ill health, alone in the wintry gloom of Saranac, deserted by Fanny who had gone on to San Francisco; Henley, in Chiswick, had written in a tone of fanciful nostalgia and of optimism in anticipation of Nutt's publication of his poems. Finally, what the Stevensonians could not — and, perhaps, would not — have known were several other circumstances revealed in the letters which flew back and forth during 1888-1889 between Stevenson and Henley — and Charles Baxter, who offered to serve as arbitrator: that time and again Henley attempted to undo the damage he had caused and to renew "the old affection, the old kinship, the old affinity . . . as

living and dear as ever,"25 but that Stevenson repeatedly demanded an apology and an acknowledgement of Fanny's innocence; that Baxter had enlisted the aid of Katharine de Mattos, to attempt to stem the estrangement, but that her brief notes to Stevenson merely echoed and supported Henley's intimation regarding Fanny's publication of the story; and that Stevenson, the author of "Lay Morals," throughout these months was greatly aggravated by the fact that Henley possessed certain of his "highly unprofitable exercises" — scatological verses — which had not been destroyed. All of this the Stevensonians were never to learn.26

In 1900, when Graham Balfour was preparing his Life of Robert Louis Stevenson, Baxter wrote to Henley:

Graham Balfour, who is an extremely decent fellow, and whom I would very much like to oblige, writes asking—may he use your sonnet anent Louis, which we all think the best thing ever done of him? G. B. is not at all tarred with the Osbourne tar, so I hope you won't hesitate to oblige him.27

Henley's compliance with this request, and his subsequent review of Balfour's work, provided him with an opportunity to add a final commentary on the creative history of "Apparition." Balfour's Life, the "official" life, was a portrait biography, and as such it assumed as inherent in its form the principle of high selectivity; here was a quotation from a letter, there a personal anecdote, now and then some character illumination, almost never a critical judgment. The author, with all his documents and all his memories, had known his subject alive; and in choosing his point of view he had perhaps erred in writing

25. RLS: Stevenson's Letters to Charles Baxter, p. 207. This phrase marked the conclusion of Henley's first letter to Stevenson after the one which had started the whole imbroglio; Stevenson had written twice to Henley and four times to Baxter prior to Henley's response on 11 April 1888.

26. The quarrel itself was waged in a triangular correspondence between Henley in London, Stevenson in Saranac, New York, and Baxter in Edinburgh. The letters which Stevenson received from Henley he sent directly to Baxter, along with his own letters of explanation, and these Baxter meticulously annotated and collated; and Henley, for his part, took painstaking care in preserving the letters sent to him. Because most of these letters were kept confidential, the world was to know little of the particulars of the rift until well into the present century. In 1912, when Stevenson had been dead eighteen years and Henley nine, Baxter and Mrs. Henley presented the two sets of the correspondence to the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh—now the National Library of Scotland—where they remained sequestered until all restrictions on their use at last expired.

too frequently from commemorative emotion. Though the two volumes ran to several hundred pages, the effect was a biography of Stevenson in brief, of a saccharine figure, of only half the man; it simply advanced the tradition of those studies which, in their desire to perpetuate a Stevenson "legend" and to ignore Henley's role in it, had tended not only to disregard his many shortcomings but also to efface several of his positive attributes. And so Henley wrote:

Mr. Balfour does me the honour of quoting the sonnet into which I crammed my impressions of my companion and friend; and, since he has done so, I may as well own that "the Shorter Catechist" of the last verse was an afterthought. In those days he was in abeyance, to say the least; and if, even then, *il allait poudre à l'horizon* (as the composition, in secret and as it ashamed, of *Lay Morals* persuades me to believe he did), I, at any rate, was too short-sighted to suspect his whereabouts. When I realised it, I completed my sonnet; but this was not till years had come and gone, and the Shorter Catechist, already detected by more than one, was fully revealed to me.28

All his adult life Henley had known Stevenson intimately; and all his adult life — in his art, his criticism, his very philosophy — he had eschewed reticence and clung to an uncompromising standard of an honest portrayal of reality. With this standard and with his own memories, Henley could not but recoil from the injustice perpetrated by Balfour's portrait; with his own prejudices he could not but feel slighted by the complete omission from the *Life* of his long and genuine friendship — from its chance beginning to its portentous conclusion — with Stevenson.

It is doubtful that the Stevensonians, angered by the "assassin" review, believed what Henley wrote of his revisions of his sonnet-portrait. It is doubtful too that they would have believed the sincerity of Henley's response upon first learning of Stevenson's death, when he was moved to express his true feelings in a single sentence which echoed the spirit which had always prevailed in "Apparition": "It has upset us not a little; for though there had been differences, he was, save for my wife, the oldest friend, as he had been the dearest, I had on earth."29

Rollins College

Appendix:
Collations of Drafts A1, A2, and A3; B1 and B2; C and the Received Text (1888)

A1

Thin legged & chested, slight unspeakably,
Neat footed & long fingered, all his face,
Lean, high boned, round of nose quick with race,
The brown eyes glittering with vivacity,
Bold lipped, rich tinted, changeful as the sea,
Is instinct with a strange romantic grace,
Intense, wild, delicate, with many a trace
Of a fitful force, & a feminine energy.
Valiant in velvet, light in ragged luck,
Yet most vain, most sensitive, yet most critical,
Buffoon & poet, lover & sensualist,
Of Bottom take a little, much of Puck,
Yet more Titania, Hamlet most of all,
Combine, restrain, release &—have you missed?


B1

"Men of all sorts take a pride to gird at me"

Thin legged & chested, slight unspeakably,
Neat footed, artist handed,—All his face,
Lean, high boned, curved of nose & quick with race,
The brown eyes glittering with vivacity,
Bold lipped, rich tinted, changeful as the sea,
Is instinct with a bright romantic grace,
Intense, wild, delicate, with a subtle trace
Of feminine force & fitful energy.
Valiant in velvet, light in ragged luck,
Most vain, most sensitive, keenly critical,
Buffoon & poet, lover & sensualist:
Of Bottom take a little, much of Puck,
More Cleopatra, Hamlet most of all,
Combine, restrain, release, &—have we missed?
An Apparition

Thin legged, thin chested, slight unspeakably
Near-footed & weak fingered, in his face—
Lean, large-boned, curved of nose, & touched with race
Bold lipped, rich tinted, mutable as the sea,
The brown eyes radiant with vivacity—
There shines a brilliant & romantic grace
A spirit intense & rare, with trace on trace
Of passion & impudence & energy.
Valiant in velvet, light in ragged luck
Most vain, most generous, sternly critical,
Buffoon & poet, lover & sensualist:
A deal of Ariel, just a streak of Puck,
Much Antony & of Hamlet most of all
With something of the Shorter Catechist.