Robert Louis Stevenson
1850 - 1894

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Biography:

Robert Louis Stevenson (1850 - 1894): Born in 1850, he grew up in Edinburgh, and the city had a great impact on his writing. From early childhood, he suffered from various ailments, and the fragility of his state is often seen as a reason for his fertile imagination. His father was an engineer, and it was assumed that Robert would follow in his footsteps. He even studied at Edinburgh University, but it was soon clear that his ambitions lay in literature.

Stevenson started writing fiction when still a teenager, but his first publication was the 1878 travel account *An Inland Voyage*, followed by *Edinburgh, Picturesque Notes* in 1879. Today, Stevenson is famous mainly for his adventure stories, such as *Treasure Island*, or *Kidnapped*, as well as his narrative *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, an attack on the hypocrisy of Victorian values, and a best seller both in Europe and America. Stevenson's unconventional lifestyle, and his marriage to American divorcee Fanny Osborne, caused tensions within his family. Due to his bad health, he spent much time away from home in France, Switzerland, and the South of England, but even from a distance, he explored the dualism of the Scottish psyche in his short fiction. On his father's death in 1887, he went to America, and continued to go West to the South Pacific, where he finally found a climate suited to his condition, and settled down in Samoa. He never returned, and besides Scottish issues, turned to new themes in his fiction, incorporating native traditions, and supporting the case of anti colonialism.

His exile inspired some of his best work about Scotland and the Scots language, such as *Catriona*, or *The Weir of Hermiston*, which he worked on until his death, and which remained unfinished.

Stevenson's oeuvre also includes eight volumes of letters, haunting short stories, *The Child's Garden of Verses* and other poetry. He died in Samoa in 1894.
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Contexts:

Robert Louis Stevenson was one of the most widely read writers of the Victorian age. He was a gifted diarist and letter writer, poet and essayist, but he is remembered mostly for the haunting stories and novels like *Kidnapped* and *Treasure Island* which brought him a large audience and an enduring popularity. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* in particular has entered the popular imagination with a huge number of imitations, derivatives and references in all kinds of places from cartoons to feature films as well as other stories and novels, such as Emma Tennant’s 1989 novel *Two Women of London*.

Stevenson had a tremendous facility for language and plot. His writing is always sharp, never flaccid or slack, and his stories burn with a vivid intensity that many people believe to be a product of the illness that stalked him throughout his life and which eventually forced him to leave the country in search of a climate where he would feel more at ease. He went first to France, where he met the woman – an American eleven years his senior – who would become his wife. Thereafter he travelled widely throughout Europe and across the United States, finally settling in Samoa in the South Pacific where he became an active member of the community and continued writing. He was working on his final novel, *The Master of Ballantrae*, when he died at the age of 44.

He is best known for the dark, gothic satire on Victorian values *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the adventure stories *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped*, and his collection of poems *A Children’s Garden of Verse*, along with his short fiction, outstanding amongst which is the grim tale *Thrawn Janet*.

The theme of dualism is strong in his fiction which many people have interpreted as a commentary on the many divisions which existed in Scottish, or indeed British, society. Not least of these divisions can be found in Stevenson’s home city of Edinburgh with its two very different Old and New Towns. This is a theme in Walter Scott’s novels too but with Stevenson the divisions are internal, more psychological, as well as social. In *Kidnapped* the two main characters are the lowland Whig, David Balfour, and the Highland Jacobite, Alan Breck Stewart. It is interesting to note the development of this theme since Scott, as Stevenson’s two characters are friends, not enemies, suggesting that Scotland’s divisions (political, social, geographical etc.) are not wholly irreconcilable.

*The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) presents us with a more psychological kind of dualism: the guilty secrets and furtive goings-on among the middle classes; particularly professional men who present the world with a respectable face while getting up to all kinds of immoral mischief in private. Stevenson’s target is Victorian hypocrisy. His book satirises a society where the clothes one wears and the company one keeps is of more importance than whatever personal qualities one may possess; it is a world not very unlike our own, where surface frequently carries more value socially than substance. These double standards are manifest in the character(s) of Dr. Jekyll and Mr.
Hyde, the latter a malformed reflection of the former. Behind the respectable exterior of this middle class doctor and pillar of the community lurks an evil ‘inner self’. The message is clear: the faces we put on for the world may conceal a darker, uglier truth.

*Jeckyll and Hyde* wasn’t the first Scottish novel to explore psychological dualism. More than 60 years before, another novel, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) by James Hogg, dealt with a similar theme, with a similar purpose. This novel, considered one of the greatest in European literature, set out to expose and satirise the double standards and hypocritical values of the age, in Hogg’s case a particularly extreme form of Presbyterianism. As Hogg in *Justified Sinner* uses a radical structure to unsettle the reader and force him or her to question the text, so too does Stevenson experiment with structure, giving the reader only a slippery, almost intangible sense of the title characters for much of the narrative.

Critical favour towards Stevenson’s work soured somewhat in the 20th century, as the cold eye of Modernism began to survey much that was written in the previous century with detachment and a disapproval that bordered on disdain. The *Times Literary Supplement* wrote of Stevenson in December 1919: ‘His writing is a game… We like to see him playing with his toys; but it is a game in which we are seldom tempted to share.’ Critic HL Mencken, writing in the literary journal *The American Mercury*, gave a further twist of the knife in 1924 when he dismissed him as an adolescent who never grew up: “His weakness as an imaginative author lies in the fact that he never got beyond the simple revolt of boyhood – that his intellect never developed to match his imagination. The result is that an air of triviality hangs about all his work and even at times, an air of trashiness. He is never very searching, never genuinely profound.”

Generations of readers who have fallen under Stevenson’s spell would disagree. But writers come into and out of taste and fashion, even the best of them. Despite the influence of the Modernists Stevenson remains a hugely popular writer throughout the world and his most famous works have never been out of print. As we begin to rediscover the writers of the Victorian period of literature Stevenson stands out as much for the breadth and variety of his achievements as for the high quality of his best works.

Written by Colin Clark
From a Railway Carriage:

Faster than fairies, faster than witches,
Bridges and houses, hedges and ditches;
And charging along like troops in a battle,
All through the meadows the horses and cattle;
All of the sights of the hill of the plain
Fly as thick as driving rain;
And ever again in the wink of an eye,
Painted stations whistle by.

Here is a child who clammers and scrambles
All by himself and gathering brambles;
Here is a tramp who stands and gazes;
And there is the green for stringing the daisies!
Here is a cart run away in the road
Lumping along with man and load;
And here is a mill and there is a river:
Each a glimpse and gone forever!

Thrawn Janet

The Reverend Murdoch Soulis was long minister of the moorland parish of Balweary, in the vale of Dule. A severe, bleak-faced old man, dreadful to his hearers, he dwelt in the last years of his life, without relative or servant or any human company, in the small and lonely manse under the Hanging Shaw. In spite of the iron composure of his features, his eye was wild, scared, and uncertain; and when he dwelt, in private admonitions, on the future of the impenitent, it seemed as if his eye pierced through the storms of time to the terrors of eternity. Many young persons, coming to prepare themselves against the season of the holy communion, were dreadfully affected by his talk. He had a sermon on 1 Pet. V. 8, “The devil as a roaring lion,” on the Sunday after every 17th of August, and he was accustomed to surpass himself upon that text both by the appalling nature of the matter and the terror of his bearing in the pulpit. The children were frightened into fits, and the old looked more than usually oracular, and were, all that day, full of those hints that Hamlet deprecated. The manse itself, where it stood by the water of Dule among some thick trees, with the Shaw overhanging it on the one side, and on the other many cold, moorish hilltops rising toward the sky, had begun, at a very early period of Mr. Soulis’s ministry, to be avoided in the dusk hours by all who valued themselves upon their prudence; and guidmen sitting at the clachan alehouse shook their heads together at the thought of passing late by that uncanny
neighbourhood. There was one spot, to be more particular, which was regarded with especial awe. The manse stood between the highroad and the water of Dule, with a gable to each; its bank was toward the kirktown of Balweary, nearly half a mile away; in front of it, a bare garden, hedged with thorn, occupied the land between the river and the road. The house was two stories high, with two large rooms on each. It opened not directly on the garden, but on a causewayed path, or passage, giving on the road on the one hand, and closed on the other by the tall willows and elders that bordered on the stream. And it was this strip of causeway that enjoyed among the young parishioners of Balweary so infamous a reputation. The minister walked there often after dark, sometimes groaning aloud in the instancy of his unspoken prayers; and when he was from home, and the manse door was locked, the more daring school-boys ventured, with beating hearts, to “follow my leader” across that legendary spot.

This atmosphere of terror, surrounding, as it did, a man of God of spotless character and orthodoxy, was a common cause of wonder and subject of inquiry among the few strangers who were led by chance or business into that unknown, outlying country. But many even of the people of the parish were ignorant of the strange events which had marked the first year of Mr. Soulis’s ministrations; and among those who were better informed, some were naturally reticent, and others shy of that particular topic. Now and again, only, one of the older folk would warm into courage over his third tumbler, and recount the cause of the minister’s strange looks and solitary life.

Fifty years syne, when Mr. Soulis cam’ first into Ba’weary, he was still a young man, – a callant, the folk said, – fu’ o’ book-learnin’ and grand at the exposition, but, as was natural in sae young a man, wi’ nae leevin’ experience in religion. The younger sort were greatly taken wi’ his gifts and his gab; but auld, concerned, serious men and women were moved even to prayer for the young man, whom they took to be a self-deceiver, and the parish that was like to be sae ill supplied. It was before the days o’ the Moderates – weary fa’ them; but ill things are like guid – they baith come bit by bit, a pickle at a time; and there were folk even then that said the Lord had left the college professors to their ain devices, an’ the lads that went to study wi’ them wad hae done mair and better sittin’ in a peat-bog, like their forebears of the persecution, wi’ a Bible under their oxter and a speerit o’ prayer in their heart. There was nae doubt, onyway, but that Mr. Soulis had been ower-lang at the college. He was careful and troubled for mony things besides the ae thing needful. He had a feck o’ books wi’ him – mair than had ever been seen before in a’ that presbytery; and a sair wark the carrier had wi’ them, for they were a’ like to have smoored in the Deil’s Hag between this and Kilmackerlie. They were books o’ divinity, to be sure, or so they ca’d them; but the serious were o’ opinion
there was little service for sae mony, when the hail o’ God’s Word would gang in
the neuk of a plaid. Then he wad sit half the day and half the nicht forby; which was
scant decent – writin’, nae less; and first they were feared he wad read his sermons;
and syne it proved he was writin’ a book himsel’, which was surely no fittin’ for ane
of his years an’ sma’ experience.

Onyway, it behooved him to get an auld, decent wife to keep the manse
for him an’ see to his bit denners; and he was recommended to an auld limmer;
– Janet M’Clour; they ca’d her; – and sae far left to himself as to be ower-persuaded.
There was mony advised him to the contrar’, for Janet was mair than suspect
by the best folk in Ba’weary. Lang or that, she had had a wean to a dragoon; she
hadnae come forrit for maybe thretty year; and bairns had seen her mumblin’
to hersel’ up on Key’s Loan in the gloamin’, whilk was an unco time an’ place for
a God-fearin’ woman. Howsoever, it was the laird himsel’ that had first tauld the
minister o’ Janet; and in thae days he wad have gane a far gate to pleesure the
laird. When folk tauld him that Janet was sib to the deil, it was a’ superstition by
his way of it; and’ when they cast up the Bible to him, an’ the witch of Endor, he
wad threep it doun their thrapples that thir days were a’ gane by, and the deil was
mercifully restrained.

Weel, when it got about the clachan that Janet M’Clour was to be servant
at the manse, the folk were fair mad wi’ her an’ him thegether; and some o’ the
guidwives had nae better to dae than get round her door-cheeks and chairge her
wi’ a’ that was kent again’ her, frae the sodger’s bairn to John Tamson’s twa kye.
She was nae great speaker; folk usually let her gang her ain gait, an’ she let them
gang theirs, wi’ neither fair guid-e’en nor fair guid-day; but when she buckled to,
she had a tongue to deave the miller. Up she got, an’ there wasnae an auld story in
Ba’weary but she gart somebody lowp for it that day; they couldnae say ae thing
but she could say twa to it; till, at the hinder end, the guidwives up and clawed
haud of her, and clawed the coats aff her back, and pu’d her doun the clachan to
the water o’ Dule, to see if she were a witch or no, soum or droun. The carline
skirled till ye could hear her at the Hangin’ Shaw, and she focht like ten; there was
mony a guid wife bure the mark of her neist day an’ mony a lang day after; and
just in the hettist o’ the collieshangie, wha suld come up (for his sins) but the new
minister:

“Women,” said he (and he had a grand voice), “I charge you in the Lord’s
name to let her go.”

Janet ran to him – she was fair wud wi’ terror – an’ clang to him, an’ prayed
him, for Christ’s sake, save her frae the cummers; an’ they, for their pairt, tauld him
a’ that was kent, and maybe mair:

“Woman,” says he to Janet, “is this true?”

“As the Lord sees me,” says she, “as the Lord made me, no a word o’ t.”
Forby the bairn,” says she, “I’ve been a decent woman a’ my days.”

“Will you,” says Mr. Soulis, “in the name of God, and before me, His unworthy minister; renounce the devil and his works?”

Weel, it wad appear that, when he askit that, she gave a girn that fairly frichtit them that saw her; an’ they could hear her teeth play dirl thegether in her chast; but there was naething for it but the ae way or the ither; an’ Janet lifted up her hand and renounced the deil before them a’.

“And now,” says Mr. Soulis to the guidwives, “home with ye, one and all, and pray to God for His forgiveness.” And he gied Janet his arm, though she had little on her but a sark, and took her up the clachan to her ain door like a leddy of the land, an’ ‘er scrieghin’ and laughin’ as was a scandal to be heard.

There were mony grave folk lang ower their prayers that nicht; but when the morn cam’ there was sic a fear fell upon a’ Ba’weary that the bairns hid theirsel’s, and even the folk folk stood and keekit frae their doors. For there was Janet comin’ doun the clachan, – her or her likeness, nane could tell, – wi’ her neck thrawn, and her heid on ae side, like a body that has been hangit, and a girn on her face like an unstreakit corp. By-an’-by they got used wi’ it, and even speered at her to ken what was wrang; but frae that day forth she couldnae speak like a Christian woman, but slavered and played click wi’ her teeth like a pair o’ shears; and frae that day forth the name o’ God cam’ never on her lips. While she wad try to say it, but it michtnae be. Them that kenned best said least; but they never gied that Thing the name o’ Janet M’Clour; for the auld Janet, by their way o’ ‘t, was in muckle hell that day. But the minister was neither to haud nor to bind; he preached about naething but the folk’s cruelty that had gien her a stroke of the palsy; he skelpt the bairns that meddled her; and he had her up to the manse that same nicht, and dwalled there a’ his lane wi’ her under the Hangin’ Shaw.

Weel, time gaed by, and the idler sort commenced to think mair lichtly o’ that black business. The minister was weel thocht o’; he was aye late at the writing – folk wad see his can’le doon by the Dule Water after twal’ at e’en; and he seemed pleased wi’ himsel’ and upsitten as at fi rst, though a’ body could see that he was dwining. As for Janet, she cam’ an’ she gaed; if she dinnae speak muckle afore, it was reason she should speak less then; she meddled naebody; but she was an eldritch thing to see, an’ nane wad hae mistrysted wi’ her for Ba’weary glebe.

About the end o’ July there cam’ a spell o’ weather, the like o’ ‘t never was in that countryside; it was lown an’ het an’ heartless; the herds couldnae win up the Black Hill, the bairns were ower-wareriet to play; an’ yet it was gousy too, wi’ claps o’ het wund that rumbled in the glens, and bits o’ shouers that slockened naething. We aye thocht it but to thun’er on the morn; but the morn cam’, an’ the morn’s morning, and it was aye the same uncanny weather; sair on folks and bestial. O’ a’ that were the war; nane suffered like Mr. Soulis; he could neither sleep nor eat, he
tauld his elders; an’ when he wasnae writin’ at his weary book, he wad be stravagin’
ower a’ the country-side like a man possessed, when a’ body else was blithe to
keep caller ben the house.

Abune Hangin’ Shaw, in the bield o’ the Black Hill, there’s a bit enclosed
ground wi’ an iron yert; and it seems, in the auld days, that was the kirkyaird o’
Ba’weary, and consecrated by the papists before the blessed licht shone upon
the kingdom. It was a great howff, o’ Mr. Soulis’s onyway; there he would sit an’
consider his sermons’ and indeed it’s a biely bit. Weel, as he came ower the wast
end o’ the Black Hill, ae day, he saw first twa, an’ syne fower, an’ syne seiven corbie
craws fleelin’ round an’ round abune the auld kirkyaird. They flew laigh and heavy,
an’ squawked to ither as they gaed; and it was clear to Mr. Soulis that something
had put them frae their ordinar. He wasna easy flayed, an’ gaed straucht up to the
wa’s; and what suld he find there but a man, or the appearance of a man, sittin’
in the inside upon a grave. He was o’ a great stature, an’ black as hell, and his een
were singular to see. Mr. Soulis had heard tell o’ black men, mony’s the time; but
there was something unco abut this black man that daunted him. Het as he was,
he took a kind o’ cauld grue in the marrow o’ his banes; but up he spak’ for a’ that;
an’ says he, “My friend, are you a stranger in this place?” The black man answered
never a word; he got upon his feet, an’ begude to hirsel to the wa’ on the far side;
but he aye lookit at the minister; an’ the minister stood an’ lookit back; till a’ in a
meenute the black man was ower the wa’ an’ rinnin’ for the bield o’ the trees. Mr.
Soulis, he hardly kenned why, ran after him; but he was sair forjaskit wi’ his walk an’
the het, unhalesome weather; and rin as he likit, he got nae mair than a glisk o’ the
black man amang the birks, till he won doun to the foot o’ the hillside, an’ there he
saw him ance mair; gaun, hap, step, an’ lowp, ower Dule Water to the manse.

Mr. Soulis wasna weel pleased that this fearsome gangrel suld mak’ sae free
wi’ Ba’weary manse; an’ he ran the harder, an’ wet shoon, ower the burn, an’ up the
walk; but the deil a black man was there to see. He stepped out upon the road,
but there was naebody there; he gaed a’ ower the gairden, but na, nae black man.
At the hinder end, an’ bit feard as was but natural, he lifted the hasp and into
the manse; and there was Janet M’Clour before his een, wi’ her thrawn craig, and
nane sae pleased to see him. And he aye minded sinsyne, when fiirst he set his een
upon her, he had the same cauld and deidy grue.

“Janet,” says he, “have you seen a black man?”

“A black man?” quo’ she. “Save us a’! Ye’re no wise, minister. There’s nae
black man in a’ Ba’weary.”

But she didna speak plain, ye maun understand; but yam-yammered, like a
powny wi’ the bit in its moo.

“Weel,” says he, “Janet, if there was nae black man, I have spoken with the
Accuser of the Brethren.”
And he sat down like ane wi’ a fever, an’ his teeth chittered in his heid.

“Hoots!” says she, “think shame to yoursel’, minister;” an’ gied him a drap brandy that she keept aye by her.

Syne Mr. Soulis gaed into his study amang a’ his books. It’s a lang, laigh, mirk chalmer, perishin’ cauld in winter, an’ no very dry even in the top o’ the simmer; for the manse stands near the burn. Sae doun he sat, and thocht of a’ that had come an’ gane since he was in Ba’weary, an’ his hame, an’ the days when he was a bairn an’ ran daftin’ on the braes; and that black man aye ran in his heid like the owercome of a sang. Aye the mair he thocht, the mair he thocht o’ the black man. He tried the prayer; an’ the words wouldnae come to him; an’ he tried, they say, to write at his book, but he couldnae mak’ nae mair o’ that. There was whiles he thocht the black man was at his oxter, an’ the swat stood upon him cauld as well-water; and there was other whiles when he cam’ to himsel’ like a christened bairn and minded naething.

The upshot was that he gaed to the window an’ stood glowrin’ at Dule Water. The trees are unco thick, an’ the water lies deep an’ black under the manse; and there was Janet washing’ the cla’es wi’ her coats kilted. She had her back to the minister; an’ he for his pairt, hardly kenned what he was lookin’ at. Syne she turned round, an’ shawed her face; Mr. Soulis had the same cauld grue as twice that day afore, an’ it was borne in upon him what folk said, that Janet was deid lang syne, an’ this was a bogle in her clay-cauld flesh. He drew back a pickle and he scanned her narrowly. She was tramp-trampin’ in the cla’es, croonin’ to hersel’; and eh! Gude guide us, but it was a fearsome face. Whiles she sang louder, but there was nae man born o’ woman that could tell the words o’ her sang; an’ whiles she lookit sidelang doun, but there was naething there for her to look at. There gaed a scunner through the flesh upon his banes; and that was Heeven’s advertisement.

But Mr. Soulis just blamed himself, he said, to think sae ill of a puir auld afflicted wife that hadnae a freend forby himsel’; an’ he put up a bit prayer for him an’ her; an’ drank a little caller water; – for his heart rose again’ the meat, – an’ gaed up to his naked bed in the gloaming.

That was a nicht that has never been forgotten in Ba’weary, the nicht o’ the seeventeenth of August, seventeen hun’er’ an’ twal’. It had been het afore, as I hae said, but that nicht it was hetter than ever. The sun gaed doun amang unco-lookin’ clouds; it fell as mirk as the pit; no a star, no a breath o’ wund; ye couldnae see your han’ afore your face, and even the auld folk cuist the covers frae their beds and lay pechin’ for their breath. Wi’ a’ that he had upon his mind, it was gey and unlikely Mr. Soulis wad get muckle sleep. He lay an’ he tummled; the gude, caller bed that he got into brunt his very banes; whiles he slept, and whiles he waukened; whiles he heard the time o’ nicht, and whiles a tike yowlin’ up the muir, as if somebody was deid; whiles he thocht he heard bogles claverin’ in his lug, an’ whiles he saw
spunkies in the room. He behooved, he judged, to be sick; an’ sick he was – little he jaloosed the sickness.

At the hinder end, he got a clearness in his mind, sat up in his sark on the bedside, and fell thinkin’ ance mair o’ the black man an’ Janet. He couldnae weel tell how; – maybe it was the cauld to his feet, – but it cam’ in upon him wi’ a spate that there was some connection between thir twa, an’ that either or baith o’ them were bogles. And just at that moment, in Janet’s room, which was neist to his, there cam’ a stamp o’ feet as if men were wars’lin’, an’ then a loud bang; an’ then a wund gaed reishing round the fower quarters of the house; an’ then a’ was ance mair as seelent as the grave.

Mr. Soulis was feard for neither man nor deevil. He got his tinder-box, an’ lit a can’le, an’ made three steps o’ ‘t ower to Janet’s door. It was on the hasp, an’ he pushed it open, an’ keeked bauldly in. It was a big room, as big as the minister’s ain, an’ plenished wi’ grand, auld, solid gear, for he had naething else. There was a fower-posted bed wi’ auld tapestry; and a braw cabinet of aik, that was fu’ o’ the minister’s divinity books, an’ put there to be out o’ the gate; an’ a wheen duds o’ Janet’s lying here and there about the flor. But nae Janet could Mr. Soulis see, nor ony sign of a contention. In he gaed (an’ there’s few that wad hae followed him), an’ lookit a’ round, an’ listened. But there was naethin’ to be heard neither inside the manse nor in a’ Ba’weary parish, an’ naethin’ to be seen but the muckle shadows turnin’ round the can’le. An’ then a’ at aince the minister’s heart played dunt an’ stood stock-still, an’ a cauld wund blew amang the hairs o’ his heid. Whaten a weary sicht was that for the puir man’s een! For there was Janet hangin’ frae a nail beside the auld aik cabinet; her heid aye lay on her shouther, her een were steeked, the tongue projecket frae her mouth, and her heels were twa feet clear abune the flor.

“God forgive us all!” thocht Mr. Soulis, “poor Janet’s dead.”

He cam’ a step nearer to the corp; an’ then his heart fair whammled in his inside. For – by what cantripp it wad ill beseem a man to judge – she was hingin’ frae a single nail an’ by a single wursted thread for darnin’ hose.

It’s an awfu’ thing to be your lane at nicht wi’ siccan prodigies o’ darkness; but Mr. Soulis was strong in the Lord. He turned an’ gaed his ways oot o’ that room, and locket the door ahint him; and step by step doon the stairs, as heavy as leed; and set doon the can’le on the table at the stair-foot. He couldnae pray, he couldnae think, he was dreepin’ wi’ caul’ swat, an’ naething could he hear but the dunt-dunt-duntin’ o’ his ain heart. He micht maybe have stood there an’ hour; or maybe twa, he minded sae little; when a’ o’ a sudden he heard a laigh, uncanny steer upstairs; a foot gaed to an’ fro in the cham’er whair the corp was hingin’; syne the door was opened, though he minded weel that he had lockit it; an’ syne there was a step upon the landin’, an’ it seemed to him as if the corp was lookin’ ower
the tail and doun upon him whaur he stood.

He took up the can’le again (for he couldnae want the licht), and, as saftly as ever he could, gaed straucht out o’ the manse an’ to the far end o’ the causeway. It was aye pit-mirk; the flame o’ the can’le, when he set it on the grund, brunt steedy and clear as in a room; naething moved, but the Dule Water seein’ and sabbin’ doon the glen, an’ yon unhaly footstep that cam’ plodding’ doun the stairs inside the manse. He kenned the foot ower-weel, for it was Janet’s; and at ilka step that cam’ a wee thing nearer, the cauld got deeper in his vitals. He commended his soul to Him that made an’ keepit him; “and, O Lord,” said he, “give me strength this night to war against the powers of evil.”

By this time the foot was comin’ through the passage for the door; he could hear a hand skirt alang the wa’, as if the fearsome thing was feelin’ for its way. The saughs tossed an’ maned thegeth’er; a long sigh cam’ ower the hills, the flame o’ the can’le was blawn aboot; an’ there stood the corp of Thrawn Janet, wi’ her gromg goun an’ her black mutch, wi’ the heid aye upon the shouther; an’ the girn still upon the face o’ t. – leevin’, ye wad hae said – deid, as Mr. Soulis weel kenned, – upon the threshold o’ the manse.

It’s a strange thing that the saul of man should be thirled into his perishable body; but the minister saw that, an’ his heart didnae break.

She didnae stand there lang; she began to move again, an’ cam’ slowly toward Mr. Soulis whaur he stood under the saughs. A’ the life o’ his body, a’ the strength o’ his speerit, were glowerin’ frae his een. It seemed she was gaun to speak, but wanted words, an’ made a sign wi’ the left hand. There cam’ a clap o’ wund, like a cat’s fuff; oot gaed the can’le, the saughs skrieghed like folk’ an’ Mr. Soulis kenned that, live or die, this was the end o’ t.

“Witch, beldam, devil!” he cried, “I charge you, by the power of God, begone – if you be dead, to the grave; if you be damned, to hell.”

An’ at that moment the Lord’s ain hand out o’ the heevens struck the Horror whaur it stood; the auld, deid, desecrated corp o’ the witch- wife, sae lang keepit frae the grave and hirselled round by deils, lowed up like a brunstane spunk and fell in ashes to the grund; the thunder followed, peal on dirling peal, the rairing rain upon the back o’ that; and Mr. Soulis lowped through the garden hedge, and ran, wi’ skelloch upon skelloch, for the clachan.

That same mornin’ John Christie saw the black man pass the Muckle Cairn as it was chappin’ six; before eicht, he gaed by the change-house at Knockdow; an’ no lang after; Sandy M’Lellan saw him gaun linkin’ doun the braes frae Kilmackerlie. There’s little doubt but it was him that dwalled sae lang in Janet’s body; but he was awa’ at last; and sinskyne the deil has never fashed us in Ba’weary.

But it was a sair dispensation for the minister; lang, lang he lay ravin’ in his bed; and frae that hour to this, he was the man ye ken the day.
Robert Louis Stevenson
1850 - 1894

Further Reading

Scottish Libraries Across the Internet
useful biography
http://www.slainte.org.uk/Scotauth/stevedsw.htm

Classicnote.com
detailed background information on Jeckyll & Hyde; plus thorough analysis of the text. The site itself is handy generally for critical essay material.
http://www.classicnote.com/ClassicNotes/Titles/jekyll/about.html

The RLS website
everything you never thought you needed to know about RLS, his life, his work, plus plenty of background info & links
http://www.westerni.unibg.it/rls/rls_temp_home.htm

A Child’s Garden of Verse – online
read the poems from Stevenson’s classic work for children

The following websites will be of general interest to the student of Scottish literature:

Scottish Literary Tour Trust
Featuring an extensive section on the Makars’ Literary Tour
http://www.scot-lit-tour.co.uk

National Library of Scotland
http://www.nls.uk/

Scottish Poetry Library
A very attractively laid out website with information on some of the major poets of the 20th century along with detailed readings of their best-known works.
http://www.spl.org.uk/index.html

SLAINTE
The name stands for Scottish Librarians Across the Internet. This excellent site features brief, well-written biographies of many of the great Scottish writers.
http://www.slainte.org.uk/Scotauth/scauhome.htm

Scots Online
From essays to an online dictionary this is a web-based resource with everything you could possibly need to know about the Scots language and how it is used.
http://www.scots-online.org/
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Shudder at the Niffer
An essay in Scots about Scots.
http://www.fleimin.demon.co.uk/Bletherskite/Shudder_At_The_Niffer.htm

Gaelic & Scottish Connections
A resource on Gaelic language and culture, featuring poetry and essays and an online
dictionary.
http://www.gaelicscottish.com/

Electric Scotland
Electric Scotland is a real mixed bag of Scottish paraphernalia with nationalist overtones.
This page in particular allows you to hear and read complete Scots poems, from
MacDiarmid to Dunbar.
http://www.electricscotland.com/si/features/scots/complete.htm

Literature links
An encyclopaedic web of links to Scots magazines, monuments, libraries and languages.
http://www.burryman.com/scotland.html - lit

Project Gutenberg
This is a web-based publisher of copyright expired books.
http://www.ibiblio.org/gutenberg/cgi-bin/sdb/t9.cgi/

Poetry Archive
A good, user-friendly site, sponsored by a bookseller, which features examples from some
of the best poets in the world.
http://www.poetry-archive.com/

Poem Index
Almost 900 poems in the English language from 13th to 19th centuries.
http://tcsu.trin.cam.ac.uk/~john/pgbev/html-interface/full-index.html

Representative Poetry On-line
An enormous and easy to use resource based at the University of Toronto featuring
alphabetical and chronological lists of 450 poets with substantial selections of their work.
http://eirlibrary.utoronto.ca/rpo/display/poet42.html

Scottish PEN
The name stands for Poets, Playwrights, Editors, Essayists and Novelists and exists to
promote the friendly co-operation between writers in the interests of freedom of
expression throughout the world.
http://www.scottishpen.org/
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Writers’ Portraits
Photographic and biographical pen portraits of some of Scotland’s greatest contemporary writers.
http://www.nls.uk/writestuff/

Anthologies

The Book of Prefaces
edited and glossed by Alasdair Gray
Bloomsbury (2000)
Every home should have one. Dust jacket contains this advice: “Warning to Parents, Teachers, Librarians, Booksellers. Do not let smart children handle this book. It will help them pass examinations without reading anything else.”

The Faber Book of Twentieth Century Scottish Poetry
Edited by Douglas Dunn
Faber & Faber (1992)
A detailed account of the dramatic transformations the Scottish verse underwent in the previous century, with an enlightening introduction by Dunn.

The New Penguin Book of Scottish Verse
edited by Robert Crawford and Mick Imlah
Penguin (2000)
A beautifully presented chronology of some of the greatest Scottish poetry, from the 6th century to the present.

The Penguin Book of Scottish Verse
edited by Tom Scott
Penguin (1970)
Earlier incarnation of above, edited by Scott – a recent inductee to Makars’ Court. Contains the infamous and controversial rude verse attributed to Burns. Makes for an interesting comparison with Crawford & Imlah’s anthology.

An Anthology of Scottish Women Poets
Edited by Catherine Kerrigan
Edinburgh University Press (1991)
Covers folksong, ballad, Scots and Anglo-Scots, from the middle ages to contemporary poets.

Studies and Criticism

Scottish Literature
eds Douglas Gifford, et al
Robert Louis Stevenson
1850 - 1894

This is all just about all you need to know about Scottish literature. A comprehensive, and very readable book. Excellent.

The Mainstream Companion to Scottish Literature
Trevor Royle
Mainstream (1993)
Alphabetically arranged standard reference on Scottish literature.

Modern Scottish Literature
Alan Bold
Longman (1983)
Learned, erudite discussion of the major writers and texts of Scottish literature in the 20th century. Brilliant study material for Higher English.

Imagine a City: Glasgow In Fiction
Moira Burgess
Argyll (1998)
The definitive work on Glasgow’s place in Scottish literature, written by the author of the Makars Court Tour script.

A History of Scottish Women’s Writing
edited by Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan
Edinburgh University Press (1997)
This is the best book around for Scottish women’s writing at the moment. Tone can be a bit academic in places.

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