

GENERIC AND MORAL AMBIGUITY IN
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON'S *MÄRCHEN*

by

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Soli Deo gloria

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ABSTRACT

Robert Louis Stevenson was an enthusiastic experimenter in a variety of genres who viewed the writer's role as both that of an entertainer of his readers and as a provocateur regarding the moral and ethical. *Märchen*, patterned on old German folktales, allowed him to amuse his audience and to bring to their attention important issues of his day and how they impacted the cultures in which the stories were situated. While he directed that three of his stories be published together as *märchen*, his publisher ignored his instructions. The two Polynesian *märchen* were published with another Polynesian story that he insisted did not belong with the *märchen*. His Icelandic *märchen*, an adaptation of a saga, was not even published during his lifetime.

This thesis examines the three stories that Stevenson intended to be published together in one volume of *märchen*: “The Bottle Imp,” “The Isle of Voices,” and “The Waif Woman.” It claims that these stories, one original and two retellings, should be considered as *märchen* based on the author's stated intention and the generic elements of the stories. The study arose, in fact, from questions about critical reluctance to treat Stevenson's three *märchen* in terms of his insistence on their generic character and the lack of scholarship examining these stories in terms of fairy tale adaptation. He wrote the works that this study analyzes while he was living in Hawaii during the late nineteenth century, soon before he settled permanently in Polynesia, specifically Samoa, a region that he had come to love. Two of these tales, “The Bottle Imp” and “The Isle of Voices,” reflect his fascination with Polynesian culture and his strong interest in the impact of colonialism and Christianity on native populations. In these two stories, Stevenson explores nineteenth-century Polynesian society precisely in terms of the effects of the

meeting of traditional beliefs and practices with European colonialism and Christianity. The third story, “The Waif Woman,” is set in medieval Iceland during the time when Christianity was established there. Based on a saga translated and published by William Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon during the time that Stevenson was writing, Stevenson adapts one episode of the saga, transforming its epic narrative into a domestic folktale that features both the magic and supernatural aspects of Icelandic tradition alongside Christian practices.

Employing studies of fairy and folk tales by the Grimms, Propp, Tolkien, Zipes and other theorists of fantasy genres, this study analyzes the features of *märchen* that made the genre so appealing to Stevenson and suitable to his purposes. Specifically, the genre features elements of folk and fairy tale, allowing Stevenson to write engaging stories that also record vanishing folk ways. It features the fantastic, which appears in Stevenson’s stories as elements of traditional beliefs that he sought to record. Furthermore, *märchen* employ elements of legends by situating stories in particular cultural times and places, a feature through which Stevenson documented disappearing traditions in Polynesian culture and explored Icelandic heritage that Scotland inherited.

This study looks at how Stevenson’s adaptation of previously existing tales and his subversion of generic elements critique social, economic, and political structures resulting from invasion and colonialism, a historical process that he recognized as pervasive in terms of the formation of national identities. Finally, the *märchen* genre enabled Stevenson to develop his observations that all humans are capable of good and evil—colonists, natives, missionaries, those in power, and those who are ruled. His *märchen* demonstrate that all human-constructed systems, whether meant for harm or

help, are capable of both good and evil. The world of Stevenson's *märchen* is thus a morally ambiguous place where situations and people, like genres and history, do not fit neatly into categories. The study concludes that Stevenson's insistence that his stories be read as *märchen* should be taken seriously by scholars since to do so elucidates the complex cultural work they perform.

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INTRODUCTION

Robert Louis Stevenson was born November 13, 1850, in Edinburgh, Scotland. He died December 3, 1894, at his Vailima Estate in Apia, Samoa, and was buried on Mount Vaea not far from his home in Apia. Although his native Scotland was dear to him, Stevenson spent much of his adult life traveling around the world looking for adventure and relief for his chronic poor health. He finally found relief from his respiratory ailments and a new adopted home in Polynesia, specifically Samoa. In his travels in the South Seas region, Stevenson discovered a rich cultural heritage represented by the native population, which reminded him of his own proud Scottish heritage. He also found in Polynesia a culture struggling against the intrusion of colonial forces that threatened to destroy native custom and tradition. Stevenson connected the Polynesian struggle against colonialism with the historic Scottish conflict with British imperialism that had threatened to devastate his native culture. His strict Scottish Presbyterian upbringing provided him with a foundation for recognizing and calling out hypocrisy when he saw it among those who claimed Christianity. It was in this environment and with this background that Stevenson began writing his *märchen*.

Stevenson enjoyed wide popularity and a devoted readership during his lifetime (Dury). After his death, however, his work fell into disfavor in literary circles, especially among those in the modernist movement, as evidenced by his exclusion from the *Norton Anthology of British Literature* from its first edition in 1962 until the 2006 edition (Robertson 7). The emergence of the modernist movement, central features of which some critics now say are foreshadowed in Stevenson's work, led to a reconsideration of the literary value of Stevenson's work. Leonard and Virginia Woolf along with their

literary circle, the Bloomsbury Group, harshly criticized Stevenson's writing and affected literary opinion throughout the modernist movement and later (Kelley 39).¹ Nonetheless, Stevenson's impact on popular culture remains extensive, largely based on numerous adaptations and iterations of *Treasure Island* and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Much of the blame for the short shrift given Stevenson's work by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century critics comes from the fact that detractors considered him to be a writer of children's and fantasy literature, genres that still do not meet the standards of serious literature for many scholars. Furthermore, Stevenson's status as a commercially successful, popular author with a large, devoted reading public disqualified him in the eyes of some as a serious writer worthy of scholarly and critical consideration.

Fortunately, the centenary of Stevenson's death in the 1990s sparked a renewed interest in the author's work. While scholars began examining his writing with critical interest, much of his work remains largely unexamined to this day due to the large body of work he produced. Among his largely neglected works are his self-titled *märchen*, stories that he intended to place together in a volume of fairy tales called *Island Nights' Entertainments*. Although Stevenson published a volume under that name, it did not contain all three of the stories that the author intended to appear together. While two of the stories, "The Isle of Voices" and "The Bottle Imp," were included, the third story, "The Waif Woman," was replaced with "The Beach of Falesá," a realistic tale that was, according to Stevenson, "simply not to appear along with 'The Bottle Imp'" since he

¹ Virginia Woolf (née Stephen), the daughter of his old friend and business associate Leslie Stephen, was a fan of Stevenson's work early in his career but later became a harsh critic (Kelley 39).

considered it to be “a story totally different in scope and intention” from the other tales (*Letters, Vol. 7* 350).²

This study focuses on these three *märchen*, two retellings and one original, in light of the author’s chosen genre and adaptation choices and the cultural and moral commentary he makes through those choices. Stevenson locates two of his stories, “The Bottle Imp,” which had its origins in European culture, and “The Isle of Voices,” in Polynesia during the late nineteenth century. The third tale, “The Waif Woman,” is located in medieval Iceland just after Christianity became the established religion. His choice of settings was influenced by several factors. The Polynesian tales reflect Stevenson’s keen interest in the folklore and traditional culture of the region, the area that became his new home, and the Pacific Islanders’ struggle against British colonization. The medieval Iceland setting represents Stevenson’s fascination with Norse saga, which in itself was a reflection of his interest in Scottish experiences with invasion and colonization, especially the clashes between pagan nature religions and Christianity.

The first story, “The Bottle Imp,” considered by Stevenson to be the centerpiece of his collection of *märchen*, is a retelling of an 1828 production of Englishman Richard Brinsley Peake’s play of the same title. Stevenson credits Peake’s play for popularizing the tale, although other earlier versions, all by European authors, precede Peake’s version, and textual evidence suggests that Stevenson incorporates elements of these former iterations of the tale into his own story. In Stevenson’s version, Keawe, a native

² William Gray has led the charge for many years to produce a volume of Stevenson’s three fairy tales together in his intended *Island Nights’ Entertainments*, but no book has yet been published. Dr. Gray’s recent illness and subsequent passing further complicates the potential publication of the intended volume.

Hawaiian, finds and purchases a bottle while visiting San Francisco on a steamer, where he works as a seaman. The bottle contains a creature that brings both luck and curses to its owner. The only way Keawe can rid himself of the bottle will bring certain damnation to the new owner, thus representing the moral crisis central to the story. Christianity appears in the story as a nominal influence that has not entirely displaced magic and the supernatural as forces that affect Keawe's life. The story reflects the effects of colonization on the traditional culture of Hawaii and its native inhabitants, focusing on the moral ambiguities that Keawe must negotiate within himself as well as the other characters and situations he encounters. While the story ends with Keawe and his wife escaping the power of the imp, the ending implies that there are finally no morally pure choices, even for the well-intentioned.

The second story, "The Isle of Voices," is an original *märchen* inspired by Polynesian legend and folklore. A lazy trickster figure, Keola, demands too much of his sorcerer father-in-law, Kalamake, after helping the warlock harvest leaves and shells from an island through magical means. When Kalamake leaves Keola for dead in the sea, a colonial trading ship rescues Keola, but he finally is forced to escape the vessel due to harsh treatment. Keola ends up stranded on the same island that he visited by magic, an island of cannibals and disembodied voices. Indeed, Keola's adventures are a series of ambiguous situations populated with morally confusing characters with which he must come to terms. Like the protagonist of many fairy tales, Keola survives his adventures, but he does not do so as a result of his own prowess or cunning. He does nothing to affect his own circumstances, but rather, he is rescued twice by women, ultimately by his wife,

and the expected happy ending is qualified by continued threats to their well-being from both human and supernatural agents.

The third story, “The Waif Woman,” is Stevenson’s adaptation of William Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon’s *Eyrbyggja Saga* (or *The Story of the Ere-Dwellers*), an English translation of an Icelandic saga that was published just as Stevenson was writing his own stories. Stevenson’s tale focuses on Aud the Light-Minded, the vain and envious wife of Finnward Keelfarer who is the weak-willed leader of Frodis Water. The story involves the conflict between Aud and Thorgunna, a mysterious female traveler who arrives with riches and treasure that throws Aud into a frenzy of desire. Thorgunna goes to live with Aud and Finnward since she has no family in the area, and they prosper under her mysterious powers. However, Aud steals the brooch that supplies Thorgunna’s power after the woman refuses to sell her goods to Aud. This theft sets up the conflict that ultimately results in the deaths of Thorgunna, Aud, and Finnward. Thorgunna’s dying wishes, which she entrusts to Finnward, include being buried in the distant churchyard by the priest and the burning of her bed linens. When Aud bullies her husband into ignoring Thorgunna’s last requests, Thorgunna’s ghost walks, leaving a curse on Aud’s household that cannot be lifted until the children of Aud and Finnward carry out the dead woman’s death wishes. The story is notable for shifting the epic focus of Iceland’s legendary sagas to that of the daily lives of its characters. Stevenson retains the magic and supernatural features that characterized the Old Norse culture that helped established Scotland, but he explores ordinary rather than heroic life through his characters. His focus is on their domestic lives and the necessarily ambiguous nature of morality at the intersection of pagan and Christian religions.

This study examines Stevenson's three tales as *märchen*, a term that Stevenson insisted on. The significance of this term lies in its generic features, which the study examines in terms of the literary genealogies of the two retellings, "The Bottle Imp" and "The Waif Woman," and the elements and influences of Polynesian folklore incorporated into the original tale, "The Isle of Voices." It examines the social, political, and moral commentary represented by Stevenson's adaptation choices and genre subversions. This study looks at how Stevenson used his stories to explore social and political forces that threatened nineteenth-century Polynesian culture: the British colonial project and the Victorian Christian missionary effort that was central to its economic aims.³ It also examines Stevenson's preoccupation with moral contradictions and ambiguity within the larger institutional systems of colonization and Christian mission alongside the human capacity for both good and evil and the moral ambiguity inherent in human experience.

In fact, the most salient argument for analyzing these three stories in a study of Stevenson's fairy tales is that the author intended "The Bottle Imp," "The Isle of Voices," and "The Waif Woman" to be published together as *märchen*. Stevenson expressed his intention to publish the tales together in one volume to be entitled *Island Nights' Entertainments* in a letter sent from his home in Samoa to his British literary representative and friend, Sidney Colvin. Concerning "The Bottle Imp," Stevenson tells Colvin that he "had always meant it for the centre piece of a volume of *märchen* which [he] was slowly to elaborate" (*Letters, Vol. 7* 464). *Island Nights' Entertainments* was

³ I employ the term *project* to refer to colonialism as do other scholars (Bob White, Lance Selfa, Magaret Kohn, Kavita Reddy, to name a few). I extend the term to the Christian missionary effort in an attempt to show the connections, in Stevenson's mind, between the two operations.

meant to include the three stories together (*Letters, Vol. 7* 436). In fact, only the Polynesian tales were published during Stevenson's lifetime, contrary to the author's stated instructions. This study argues that these three stories belong together as *märchen* and should be treated critically as such. This study examines the author's claims in this regard, noting that scholars have failed to recognize these claims and to examine the tales in terms of fairy tale adaptation. The connective tissue that links the three stories together are Stevenson's intention to create a volume of *märchen* and the inclusion of folkloristic elements in the original story and adaptations of previous tales in the retellings.

Stevenson wrote "The Bottle Imp" and "The Isle of Voices" as a result of the strong interest he developed in Polynesia, where he finally came to live after traveling for much of his adult life in search of good health, leaving his beloved Scotland as a result of chronic respiratory illness. The culture and folklore of the South Seas made a strong impression on Stevenson, sparked a renewed interest in folklore, and inspired the writing of these stories. Stevenson's earnest attempt at writing *märchen* commenced with his introduction to the culture and folklore of the South Seas. In June of 1888, Stevenson and his wife Fanny embarked from San Francisco on a series of Pacific Island cruises, which included stops in Hawaii, Tahiti, and Samoa, among other places in the region (McLynn 310). During these cruises Stevenson began to develop a love for the Polynesian people and their culture and set about writing their stories. In January of 1890, he actually purchased the Vailima Estate in Apia, Samoa, where he was to live out the remainder of his life. Stevenson inserted himself into island life and became involved in political life.

Stevenson's experiences and observations in the South Seas influenced his social and political opinions concerning the devastating effects of British colonialism on the

culture and inspired him to try his hand at *märchen*. During his time in the Pacific, Stevenson became acquainted with King David Kalakaua of Hawaii and his niece Princess Kaiulani, the heir to his throne.⁴ In befriending the royal family, Stevenson became familiar with encroaching colonialism in Hawaii at the time, and he became a supporter of Hawaiian sovereignty. In his letters home, Stevenson began to use terms like *haoles*, a Hawaiian reference to whites, and he expressed his annoyance at what he considered to be foreign intrusion in the region by British colonial forces (McLynn 340). At the same time that Polynesia's social and political issues began to influence Stevenson, the author also became aware of King Kalakaua's work in compiling a book of Hawaiian folktales and legends that sought to capture the vanishing culture, and Stevenson's intimate acquaintance with the King made it possible for him to read the folktales that the King was collecting (Swearingen 145). Exposed to this environment of deep social and cultural upheaval and the diminishment of a rich and unique Polynesian heritage, Stevenson found ample inspiration to experiment with a kind of story that he had never written before but with which he had been enamored since his childhood: *märchen*.

In addition to his familiarity with King Kalakaua's work on Hawaiian legends, Stevenson also became acquainted with the work of prominent nineteenth-century Polynesian folklorists who had been actively collecting folktales of the South Seas culture before the stories disappeared. Among these folklorists was Abraham Fornander, who with the help of Hawaiian scholars and folklorists collected folktales and stories

⁴ Another connection existed for Stevenson: the princess's father was a businessman and a fellow Scot originally from Edinburgh; her mother was King Kalakaua's sister (McLynn 340).

from native Hawaiians before his death in 1887 (Colum xi). Although his entire collection of papers and manuscripts was not published until 1916, well after Stevenson's death, Hawaiian newspapers published Fornander's work while he was writing (Colum viii). Scholars think that Stevenson read these accounts, in addition to others. Although Fornander died the year before Stevenson arrived in the South Seas, documentation demonstrates that the author read the folklorist's work. An article appearing in the 1895 edition of *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* describes the marginal comments in Stevenson's personal copy of Fornander's book *Polynesian Race* (Newell 238). Therefore, Stevenson certainly studied Fornander's accounts of the Pacific culture and may have been familiar with his collection of Polynesian folktales.

This study argues that these stories should be critically treated as *märchen* not only because of the author's intentions but also because they exhibit the characteristics of the genre. The German term *märchen*, literally translated as *news* or *gossip* by fantasy and folklore scholar Jack Zipes, resists definition as a genre (*Breaking* 27). *Märchen* reflect stories from oral, pre-literate cultures as well as their retellings. These retold stories record tales of the folk as accurately and as closely as possible to their oral forbears, thus chronicling the cultures from which they arose. The term *märchen* is often rendered as *fairy tale* in English, although the origin of the term *fairy tale* comes from the French term *conte de fées* (stories of fairies) to refer to stories told in aristocratic French salons of the seventeenth century and popularized in England during the eighteenth century. Those fairy tales, explains Zipes, were a literary product of the aristocracy and specifically related to concerns other than those of the common people. On the other hand, *märchen*, or *volksmärchen*, literally *folktales*, express the desires, anxieties, fears,

and values of the common people couched in fanciful and entertaining situations involving magic and supernatural occurrences (29). Zipes notes that *märchen* provide fertile soil for the discussion of larger issues, of representing social and cultural concerns of the folk. Because they originate in the oral traditions of a culture, *märchen* are associated with the stories and tales of the people and can express both concerns and possibilities of life of the common folk (Schenda 79). *Märchen* is thus an attractive genre for writers who seek to tell tales that reflect the social, moral, and political concerns of ordinary people, while the fantasy elements of *märchen* allow for the incorporation of supernatural elements associated with native belief systems.

The three stories examined in this study represent the concerns of the folk and exhibit other elements of the folk/fairy tale genre. “The Bottle Imp” is an amalgamated adaptation based on previous versions of the same story. “The Isle of Voices” is an original tale that incorporates aspects of Hawaiian folklore and can be compared to the wondertale as described by Vladimir Propp and elucidated by Jack Zipes. “The Waif Woman” is a folkloristic retelling of an Icelandic saga. Examining these three stories as *märchen*, this study explores the ways in which the tales speak to and represent the cultures in and for which Stevenson wrote them, both Polynesian and nineteenth-century British society. Through the use of *märchen*, Stevenson was able to critique and comment on moral issues as they involved ordinary people, while also critiquing the treatment of the Polynesian people by colonial agents, including those agents identifying themselves as Christians. “The Waif Woman” continues his interest in the effect of modernity on traditional cultures represented by the clash of Christianity and native belief systems.

Stevenson was certainly trying to identify “The Bottle Imp” and “The Isle of Voices” with the Polynesian people and the complex cultural moment represented by Western colonization. In an interview, he asserted that with his Polynesian stories he was exploring “the unjust (yet I can see the inevitable) extinction of the Polynesian Islanders by our shabby civilization” (qtd. in Swearingen 176). This assertion is not insignificant, especially since “The Bottle Imp,” according to Stevenson, was “designed and written for a Polynesian audience,” even if not exclusively (“The Bottle Imp” 72). Stevenson’s adaptations within the *märchen* genre allowed him to employ magical and supernatural elements associated with a pre-Christian culture that preceded colonial life, simultaneously preserving old folkways while creating entertaining modern fairy tales that diverge from more realistic genres of the nineteenth-century literature. For one thing, the otherworldly characteristics of *märchen* allowed Stevenson to represent the role of the supernatural in traditional Polynesian culture. In addition, as *märchen*, Stevenson’s stories capture the folkways of the culture he observed, which in itself was a mixture of pre-colonial traditions and emerging capital and Christian values and practices. Indeed, his stories draw on the conventions of *märchen* that allow retelling and adaptation according to the author’s point of view and historical and cultural moment. Vanessa Joosen argues that fairy tale retellings can challenge assumptions about the cultural and social contexts that shape both the old and new stories (13). In creating a sort of parody or subversion in which many significant elements of the fairy tale genre are twisted, tweaked, or in some way modified, Stevenson is able to make crucial statements about society and provide a sharp contrast between what is and what should be. With adaptation of existing tales and subversion of fairy tale elements, Stevenson explores the morally

ambiguous nature of humankind emblemized by the forces of British colonization and the Christian missionary project while entertaining his audience with a tale of enchantment set in Polynesia.

Examining these stories as *märchen* clarifies the intentions of the author. These three stories otherwise defy easy categorization. Debates over their categorization follow debates over distinctions among related genres of fantasy, fairy tale, and legend. For instance, a case could be made to categorize “The Isle of Voices” as a fantasy rather than a fairy tale according to the eclectic composition of the stories (Nikolajeva 140). Such a designation, however, ignores Stevenson’s claims, while it also fails to take into account his adaptation choices and genre subversions. Looking at “The Bottle Imp,” “The Isle of Voices,” and “The Waif Woman” as *märchen* calls for scholars to examine the elements and previous iterations of folktale/legend/myth/fairy tale that Stevenson employed; how he subverts or adapts those elements or pre-existing tales; and how the *märchen* genre allowed him to critique his own cultural moment. Some scholars regard Stevenson as a writer of romance, a designation that captures some elements of his stories, such as the appearance of the supernatural and the recording of heroic deeds. However, the romance tradition arose from elite societies, a situation that does not meet Stevenson’s needs to record folkways.

To ignore Stevenson’s claim that his stories are to be read as *märchen* is to invite formal and other critical problems. For instance, William Scheick’s disregard of Stevenson’s designation in his critique of “The Isle of Voices” leads him to designate the story as an *ethical romance*, which is “intrinsically dialectical” in its treatment of moral ambiguity (Scheick 19). Scheick’s term reflects a desire to emphasize the story’s moral

content by way of distancing Stevenson's work from the aestheticism of some *fin de siècle* writers, which eschewed moral, ethical, and social content in art (Altick 296). Certainly Scheick's effort is well-founded, echoing Stevenson's own abhorrence of such sentiments about the purposes of art. Furthermore, Scheick's categorization of the tale as *romance* arises from his definition of the romance as a tale that "blends the fantastic and the commonplace" (29). He also quotes William Penn's discussion of the elements of romance, which include "strange adventures," "grand impediments," "miserable disappointments, wonderful surprises, unexpected encounters," "languishing voices echoing from solitary groves," and "overheard mournful complaints" (qtd. in Scheick 23). While such elements appear in Stevenson's story, other important aspects of the romance genre, particularly their origins in elite culture, do not pertain, and in fact are antithetical to Stevenson's aims to construct a modern folktale situated in real time and space. Indeed, Scheick focuses on the moral implications of Stevenson's tale rather than genre distinctions. Not only does Stevenson's story foreground the magical and supernatural elements and the social concerns of the people associated with *märchen*, but the fact that the author himself claims this story as an attempt at the genre supports the distinction. Part of what Stevenson hoped to accomplish was to draw attention to the plight of the Polynesians as their culture suffered the deleterious effects of British colonization. The *märchen* genre allowed him to employ the supernatural as a fact of the traditions he sought to capture rather than aspects of an elite story-telling tradition based on assumptions and representations that Polynesia itself defies. Stevenson's stories feature the concerns of the people rather than that of nobles and heroic figures, even in "The Waif Woman," whose origins are in a heroic tradition. Rather than a strict retelling

of the *Eyrbyggja Saga* with its heroic figures and deeds that make up Iceland's epic past, Stevenson's story focuses strictly on domestic issues, adapting the saga into a folktale that eliminates the epic hero entirely by way of drawing connections between Scotland's history of invasion and Christianization and the more recent experiences of Polynesia.

While modern systems for categorizing folktales such as the Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) system and Vladimir Propp's morphology attempt to distinguish among fairy tale, folktale, legend, and myth, writers of the nineteenth century and beyond, Stevenson included, did not and do not create stories that fit neatly into categories, precisely because they set out to create works that address their own visions and preoccupations (Zipes Introduction). Stevenson's free use of elements from legend, myth, fairy tale, folktale, and saga incorporated into his *märchen* reflects the flexible and category-resistant nature of the genre. Writers of literary fairy tales in the nineteenth century borrowed heavily from all of these related fantastic genres. They did not feel overly obligated to conform to strict categorizations of genre prescribed by folklorists or anthropologists (Newton xiii), and Stevenson was no exception. His desire to experiment in this genre was a matter of taste and creative curiosity with a genre that allowed him to express his thoughts and concerns about the issues of his day. Tolkien's treatment of fairy tales in his essay "On Fairy Stories" also provides some insight into Stevenson's practices concerning uses of the fairy tale genre. Tolkien's interest in defining fairy tales as a genre is for the purpose of examining what they allow a writer to communicate to a reader. He is less concerned with classification of *märchen*, whether legends, myths, fairy tales, or folktales, than he is with the purpose of the genre, which involves transporting readers to the realm of "Faerie," a land that is much like our own but infused with magic

and the supernatural (4). It is a “Perilous Realm” where anything might happen (4). Although it is hard to define, readers and writers recognize it and its effects, which often involve seeing the real world anew. The otherworldly setting affords writers the opportunity to experiment with ideas about human experience, allowing the reader to see their world and its possibilities through fantastical eyes.

The German Grimm brothers’ commentary on the function of legend also provides insight into Stevenson’s stories. All three of Stevenson’s self-titled *märchen* feature specific temporal and national settings portraying the clash of cultural values and attitudes during a time of colonization. In “The Bottle Imp,” for instance, Stevenson transforms elements of a German legend into a Polynesian, specifically Hawaiian, tale. According to Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in the foreword to their *Deutsche Sagen*, first translated into English in 1981 by Donald Ward and published as *The German Legends of the Brothers Grimm*, unlike fairy tales, legends are tied to time and place. Therefore, the Grimms contend, “the fairy tale is more poetic, the legend is more historical” (Grimm 2). Stevenson’s adaption of a German legend, by situating the tale in a distinctly Hawaiian colonial culture and context, reflects Stevenson’s sensibilities concerning his adopted home, for which he developed great sympathy and concern about the imminent destruction of South Seas culture.

Cultural tension thus manifests itself through movement in “The Isle of Voices,” “The Bottle Imp,” and “The Waif Woman.” In both his life and his work, Stevenson was concerned with time, place, and movement as exemplified in an often-quoted line from one of his travel books, *Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes*. For Stevenson, “the great affair is to move” (51). On the precipice of a new century and modernity, movement

became an easier venture for Stevenson and his contemporaries (Hill 1). Yet paradoxically, this movement brought modernity to traditional cultures and threatened the way of life for many. The Polynesian culture encountered by Stevenson in the late nineteenth century was in danger of extinction by the colonial and Christian missionary forces that sought control of the region. Hawaii of Stevenson's day was an example of modern progress. With this new movement came the potential for clashes of culture, tradition, identity, and values. From Stevenson's vantage point, Western colonial forces threatened to destroy traditional Polynesian culture, and he even expressed his concern in a letter writing campaign about the deleterious effects that European forces exerted on the South Seas (Keown 52).

In addition to his concern about cultural tensions in Polynesia, Stevenson also felt the pull of his native Scotland, identifying the struggle of the Polynesian people with the struggle of his Scottish forbears. Upon visiting one of the South Sea Islands, he recorded his thoughts about their similarities and the importance of knowing one's cultural history:

It was perhaps yet more important that I had enjoyed in my youth some knowledge of our Scots folk of the Highlands and the Islands. Not much beyond a century has passed since these were in the same convulsive and transitory state In both cases an alien authority enforced, the clans disarmed, the chiefs deposed, new customs introduced, and chiefly that fashion of regarding money as the means and object of existence. The commercial age, in each, succeeding at a bound to an age of war abroad and patriarchal communism at home. In one the cherished practice of tattooing, in the other a cherished costume, proscribed. In each a main luxury cut off: beef, driven under cloud of night from Lowland

pastures, denied to the meat-loving Highlander; long-pig, pirated from the next village, to the man-eating Kanaka [native Hawaiian]. The grumbling, the secret ferment, the fears and resentments, the alarms and sudden councils . . . reminded me continually of the days of Lovat and Struan [Scottish clans]. (“Making Friends” 20)

Stevenson saw the struggles that the Polynesians were experiencing as a result of encroachment by outside forces paralleled what he knew about his own Scottish culture. Stevenson was not transferring his attention and affection to Polynesian culture but adding it and mingling it with his feelings about his Scottish heritage. He came to view Samoa and the South Pacific cause, the desire to be free from the imposition of British imperial values and culture, as his cause, not unlike the historical Scottish cause, a struggle against the encroachment of nonnative forces.

One of the colonial forces that Stevenson’s stories deal with is the Christian missionary project, which Stevenson thought should do good in the area by helping the native population. Thus, the abhorrent and hypocritical behavior that he witnessed among some of the missionary population in the South Seas disgusted him. One such instance with a Presbyterian minister in Honolulu named Reverend Dr. Charles McEwen Hyde⁵ represented for Stevenson the hypocrisy of Christians who professed philanthropy and Christian love but lived in luxury amid the needy. Hyde had accused Father Damien, a Catholic priest who died caring for the lepers of the Hawaiian leper colony of Molokai, of being “dirty” and immoral (qtd. in *Father Damien* 7). When the Reverend Dr. Hyde’s

⁵ Ironically, this Hyde did not serve as an inspiration for Stevenson. The incident involving the real Dr. Hyde occurred several years after the publication of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

letter maligning Damien's character appeared in print in a church journal, Stevenson felt that it was his duty and obligation to answer openly, harshly criticizing Hyde for his hypocrisy and defending Father Damien for his Christian mercy.

This doubleness of character in one who purports to abide by Christian values yet acts in opposition to those values was a long-time concern for Stevenson. Father Damien himself represented the duality of human nature with which Stevenson was fascinated, symbolizing the morally ambiguous nature of human experience. Stevenson recognized that Damien was "dirty, bigoted, untruthful, unwise, [and] tricky," yet he also exemplified the best in human generosity, in his "candour" and "fundamental good humour" (qtd. in Furnas 337).⁶ The idea that good and evil, light and dark, could exist in one individual became a theme in Stevenson's *märchen*, as it was in many of his works. The presence of leprosy in Polynesia features in his *märchen* as a symbol for the doubleness of human nature: Europeans brought leprosy to the South Sea, and some helped alleviate its horrors.

Stevenson thought that asking ontological questions about the nature of humankind and exploring the moral implications of behavior were the province of writers, that writers had "the power to do great harm or great good" with their work ("Morality" 54). Therefore, a writer must represent the truth of life to the best of his or her ability. According to Stevenson:

⁶ Certainly Damien's decision to sacrifice his life for the sake of his mission to help others exemplified Christianity's highest form of value and action. Indeed, self-sacrifice for others is the only unambiguous moral behavior to which Stevenson subscribes, as evidenced by Keawe and Kokua's actions in "The Bottle Imp."

. . . the sum of contemporary knowledge or ignorance of good and evil is, in large measure, the handiwork of those who write. Those who write have to see that each man's knowledge is, as near as they can make it, answerable to the facts of life; that he shall not suppose himself an angel or a monster; nor take this world for a hell; nor be suffered to imagine that all rights are concentrated in his own caste or country, or all veracities in his own parochial creed. Each man should learn what is within him, that he may strive to mend; he must be taught what is without him, that he may be kind to others. It can never be wrong to tell him the truth; for, in his disputable state, weaving as he goes his theory of life, steering himself, cheering or reproving others, all facts are of the first importance to his conduct; and even if a fact shall discourage or corrupt him, it is still best that he should know it In one word, it must always be foul to tell what is false; and it can never be safe to suppress what is true. ("Morality" 57-59)

Stevenson was adamant that a writer should express the truth of reality, of the nature of humankind, and of human behavior, even if that truth was difficult.

Thus Stevenson's fanciful *märchen* examine and reveal the truth about the doubleness of human nature and the moral ambiguity of the world. By utilizing recognizable tropes of fairy/folk tales, Stevenson calls attention to beliefs, values, and actions through the adaptation and subversion of those motifs. Stevenson's stories reflect his awareness that social and cultural upheaval made the themes of these tales relevant. His adaptation of elements of the stories allowed Stevenson to make those themes relevant for his audience. For instance, he subverts the expectation that fairy tales have happy endings (Warner 33). Even if the story is unfamiliar to the reader, the genre

suggests that the conflict that the protagonist inevitably faces will somehow be resolved in the end. However, to challenge the happy ending implies, perhaps, that no satisfying resolution is possible (Joosen 13). Stevenson's less-than-happy endings reveal the ambiguity of the world. According to Stevenson, this treatment reveals truth about the world to his readers, prompting them to consider for themselves the nature of existence.

Writing in the genre of *märchen* also allows an author to broach taboo subjects in a less direct way than realistic fiction, essays, or sermons permit. Supernatural events, magical elements, and extraordinary circumstances circumvent direct conversations about controversial political, social, or religious issues (Newton ix). Writing just one year after Stevenson's death, George MacDonald, Stevenson's contemporary and fellow Scotsman, advocated for the free interpretation of fairy tales, arguing that such stories allow writers "not to give [the reader] things to think about, but to wake things up that are in him" and "to make him think things for himself" (400). Although Stevenson's concerns about the time and culture in which he lived were many, a main concern in "The Bottle Imp" and "The Isle of Voices," as expressed by MacDonald, is to awaken sympathy for the cause of the Polynesians. Stevenson makes it clear in his letters and essays that he thought writers had an obligation to provide readers with meaningful experiences. He was convinced that authors and their stories largely determine the way people view the world ("Morality" 517). As Tolkien argues, then, fairy stories illuminate the world (8). Through the use of symbols, supernatural characters, and magical elements, writers can explore timeless or situated themes that help readers understand life and the nature of being. Fairy tales permit the reader to "stand outside [their] own time, outside Time itself, maybe" (11). Fairy tales possess a transcendent quality that lends itself to the communication of

timeless messages. Since Stevenson viewed all literature “which conveys faithful facts or pleasing impressions” to be “a service to the public,” it is not surprising that he found in *märchen* a charming and infinitely effective mode in which he could emphasize, adapt, and subvert tropes to convey his messages (“Morality” 520).

Stevenson’s love of Polynesian and Icelandic culture, his concern about the deleterious effects of colonialism, and his desire to write *märchen* come together in the three tales that this study analyzes. Chapter one examines “The Bottle Imp” as an adaptation of R. B. Peake’s play as well as its predecessors from other countries and times. It traces the genealogy of the Bottle Imp tale and explores how Stevenson incorporated elements from previous literary versions. Using adaptation theory, the chapter examines how and why Stevenson changed particular elements of existing versions to represent situated concerns about Polynesian life and the colonial/Christian mission in the South Seas. Chapter one also examines how Stevenson adapts his “Bottle Imp” story to assert that moral ambiguity is the inevitable condition of men and women as well as cultural institutions.

Chapter two examines “The Isle of Voices,” the only story in the collection that is not a retelling of an existing tale. This chapter explores features of *märchen*, including legends, folktales, and the wondertale as defined by Propp and elucidated by Zipes to identify the story’s association with these genres rather than the romance tale, as some scholars consider it. The chapter also explores Polynesian folktales and other elements of Hawaiian culture that Stevenson drew on to create and situate this tale, analyzing “Isle of Voices” in terms that identify his preoccupation with the world as a morally ambiguous

place where everyone is capable of both good and evil actions and is thus suspect, using the motif of doubles to develop his moral vision.

Chapter three studies “The Waif Woman,” the only story of the three not set in Polynesia, as a *märchen* that incorporates Icelandic history and saga. It explores Stevenson’s adaptation of an episode within a larger account entitled *The Story of the Ere-Dwellers*, a Norse saga, which was translated by William Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon and published while Stevenson was engaged in writing his *märchen*. This chapter identifies elements of Norse folklore that Stevenson incorporated into his version of the tale. It also discusses the ways in which Stevenson adapted the epic features of the Icelandic saga to write a story of the folkways of the medieval culture, narrating a domestic story rather than one about heroic deeds and epic feuds. Similar to the work in chapter one on “The Bottle Imp,” chapter three examines Stevenson’s adaptations as they reflect the ways in which colonization results in a new culture, thus connecting Stevenson’s fascination with Scotland’s medieval history of invasion and colonization with the Polynesian struggle. As with the other stories, this chapter also analyzes characters and their actions in relation to Stevenson’s moral vision. The study concludes that the stories that Stevenson called his *märchen* are best analyzed in terms of that genre in order to understand the complex cultural work that he intended for them to perform.

CHAPTER ONE: "THE BOTTLE IMP"

"The Bottle Imp," the first story in Stevenson's intended volume of *märchen*, is the author's experimentation with a genre that allows him both to critique the forces that threatened to destroy the native culture of Polynesia and to comment on the always ambivalent nature of human morality. Indeed, the only moral ethic that Stevenson considers unambiguous is the foundational notion of Christianity: giving one's life for love of another. "The Bottle Imp" draws on traditional tales of creatures in bottles with the power to grant wishes to the owner, of which there are many, as discussed below. Stevenson's story, which is set in San Francisco and, most prominently, on the Kona Coast of Hawaii during the late nineteenth century, tells the tale of Keawe, a native Hawaiian whose real name, we are told, "must be kept secret" because he is still alive (Stevenson, "The Bottle Imp" 73). The narrator names him for a local Hawaiian king, tying him to his native culture. Indeed, Keawe was born "not far from Honaunau, where the bones of Keawe the Great lie hidden in a cave," which further identifies the protagonist with the traditional past of Hawaii (73). Keawe's identity reflects both native and colonial influences. He can "read and write like a schoolmaster" due to opportunities afforded him by colonization. In addition, Keawe "was a first-rate mariner" who sailed "in the island steamers, and steered a whaleboat on the Hamakua coast," referencing his occupation as a whaler, a distinctly colonial enterprise that at the time Stevenson was writing threatened the world's whale population (73). With the money he earns, he travels to San Francisco and becomes enamored with the "great houses" he sees there, thinking "how happy must the people be who dwell in them, and take no care for the morrow!" (73). The owner of a house that Keawe particularly admires sees him and tricks

him into buying the bottle that has been the source of the “love, fame, money” of Napoleon, allowing him to become “king of the world,” and, significantly, Captain Cook, who “by [the bottle] found so many islands” (74-75). These conquerors attained their riches and power through the bottle. When “the devil brought it first upon earth,” the bottle’s first owner was Prester John, a legendary medieval Christian king who ruled over a vast kingdom (75). These references to empire-builders, both religious and secular, appear as ominous cautionary elements, and also highlight the European and American contexts of Keawe’s identity and experience. In addition, the implication is that power and riches come at the cost of making a deal with the devil, situating the Christian/colonial project in terms of gaining riches and power at the cost of one’s soul.

The story relates Keawe’s subsequent misadventures with the bottle, which contains a spirit that results in prosperity for the bearer but comes at a cost: the person who retains possession of the item at death is condemned to hell, which in Stevenson’s story means burning in fire for eternity, a Christian concept that Keawe firmly believes in despite the absence of explicit references to his religion or faith system. In fact, Keawe, described as “poor, brave, and active,” practices a type of Christian ethic in his desire to avoid harming others, further identifying the protagonist with both the Christian/colonial project and his own native Hawaiian culture. His moral values demand that he consider the wellbeing of others as important as his own, and the story’s narrative is driven by his encounters with various conflicts that would require him to accept good fortune at the cost of the misfortune of others. For instance, as he returns to Hawaii in possession of the bottle, he learns that his uncle and nephew have died, leaving him heir to land “a little way south of Hookena” where his uncle grew some “coffee and ava and bananas” (79).

Keawe is morally conflicted that his inheritance has come as a result of the death of his family, but on consulting a lawyer, another colonial figure, he finds his uncle has become “monstrous rich in the last days, enough to fund the building of Keawe’s house (79). The wealth, in fact, could not have accrued if it were not for colonial trade, complicating further the moral implications of the colonial enterprise. Then, Keawe’s good fortune continues when the architect he consults, yet another figure of colonialism, has drawn a sketch of Keawe’s dream house. Furthering representing the dual nature of human morality, Keawe is identified with both Christian ethics and traditional Hawaiian belief. Keawe’s moral values compel him to seek the good of others and cause him to fear hellfire and, therefore, identify him with Christian ethics, yet his belief in traditional superstitions also associate him with his native Hawaiian culture. These native beliefs lead him to rush back to his home after being away because “the night then coming on was the night in which the dead of old days go abroad in the sides of Kona” (83). Thus, Keawe identifies with both Christian ethics and traditional Hawaiian belief, symbolizing the dual nature of human morality.

Throughout Keawe’s adventures, then, he comes into contact with colonial forces that have permeated the culture for both good and evil. For instance, he contracts leprosy after he has gotten rid of the bottle and become engaged to Kokua, the girl he has fallen in love with, and he mourns. His sadness is not because he will have to leave all behind to enter a leper asylum, but because he will not be able to marry Kokua; Keawe does not wish to hurt her in any way. Leprosy serves as an emblem for Stevenson of both the desecration of Polynesian society by the colonial project and the opportunities that the Christian presence affords for refuge, a morally ambiguous proposition to be sure. These

intruding forces introduced the disease and also sheltered sufferers from it, offering comfort to those afflicted and protecting others from contracting the disease. The situation thus parallels the colonial project that brought progress to the area in the form of economic development and wealth for some. Like leprosy, colonialism brought suffering and misery to those who did not benefit from capitalism and trade and who could not continue to support themselves with native lifestyles that were no longer economically viable. Like the afflicted sent to the leper colony, those impoverished by colonialism are isolated from the benefits of economic development, desiring, like Keawe before he gains his wealth, to partake of its wealth and the perceived happiness that it brings. Rather than providing a reductive moral lesson, though, Stevenson's version of this retold tale relates incidents that portray human morality as an inescapably complex mixture of good and evil. Indeed, a recurring motif is Keawe's notion that he "may as well take the good along with the evil" (79). His story ends, for instance, with Keawe selling the bottle to a white trader, a moral degenerate who fully accepts his fate in return for enjoying the bottle's benefits while he lives. This resolution captures Stevenson's approach to moral ambiguity in that it positions Keawe as a responsible moral actor who seeks the well being of others even though his final act of relinquishing the bottle results in someone else being doomed to hell, even if that someone is a colonist, "an old brutal Haole," who accepts his fate voluntarily so that he might spend his last days fulfilling his desires through the benefit of owning the bottle (11).

In order to retell "The Bottle Imp" as a complex, nuanced critique of human morality against the backdrop of the colonial/Christian project, Stevenson adapts various folktale elements of previous literary versions of the tale. The history of the story's

origins and influences on Stevenson are central to understanding his adaptation. He was likely working on “The Bottle Imp” as early as the spring of 1889, writing it sometime between early 1889 and early 1890 at a time when he was seriously engaged in learning about Hawaiian culture. Judge Monsarrat, with whom the author stayed while visiting the Kona Coast of Hawaii in April and May of 1889, asserts that Stevenson wrote “The Bottle Imp” while his guest (Swearingen 145). A passenger on board ship with Stevenson during a series of Polynesian cruises corroborates those dates by claiming to have heard an early version of “The Bottle Imp” in May or June of 1889, suggesting that the story was at least in a first draft at this time (145). The timing is significant in that it provides insight into Stevenson’s thinking regarding the story and various versions with which he was probably familiar. During this time, he was visiting and researching Hawaii and its folktales (144). McLynn, a biographer of Stevenson, also suggests that Stevenson wrote it after hearing a version of the tale in Hawaii, implying that it was an adaptation of a Hawaiian folk tale (371). However, I cannot find a Hawaiian version of the tale, and Stevenson states in a prefatory note to the story that Richard Brinsley Peake’s early nineteenth century dramatic version provided at least some of the inspiration.¹

Stevenson’s wife Fanny would later recall that during their trip to Hawaii her husband talked about both the Hawaiian folktales that he was encountering and Peake’s play “The Bottle Imp,” comparing elements that he believed the tales shared; Stevenson saw some similarity in “imaginative qualities” between “The Bottle Imp” and the Hawaiian folktales he was discovering (Swearingen 144-145). Despite the variety of influences that

¹ The possible existence of a Hawaiian version of “The Bottle Imp,” although beyond the scope of this study, warrants future in-depth research.

contributed to Stevenson's version, the author's note published with "The Bottle Imp" expressly states that he adapted the tale for a "Polynesian audience," thus indicating its relationship to tales that chronicle folk ways of the South Sea culture (72).

"The Bottle Imp" was first published serially in the New York *Herald* and London's *Black and White* in early 1891 (Maixner 408). Details of publication reveal Stevenson's insistence that his stories were written as *märchen*, a genre, as discussed earlier in the introduction and below, that features elements of fantasy, as found in fairy and folk tales, and in legends, which reinforce cultural identity. Stevenson's letters reveal his strong feelings about the nature of his story. His ultimate intention was that it would be published eventually alongside at least two other tales, "The Isle of Voices" and "The Waif Woman," as part of a volume of *märchen*. Stevenson wrote to Colvin that "The Bottle Imp" was to be his "*piece de résistance* for [his] volume, *Island Nights' Entertainments*[,] . . . the centrepiece of a volume of *Märchen* which [he] was slowly to elaborate" (qtd in Swearingen 178).² Due to circumstances beyond the author's control, however, that volume was never published.³ Although "The Bottle Imp" appeared in a collection entitled *Island Nights' Entertainments* along with "The Isle of Voices," the third intended story, "The Waif Woman," was replaced with "The Beach of Falesá" even though Stevenson had made it clear to his literary agent, Charles Baxter, that "*The B. of Falesá* [was] *simply not* to appear along with *The Bottle Imp*, a story of totally different

² Emphases and italics are Stevenson's.

³ According to several sources, William Gray has been working on a volume edition containing the three stories treated in this study that Stevenson originally intended to make up *Island Nights' Entertainments*, but as of yet, no volume has been published.

scope and intention” (*Letters, Vol. 7* 350).⁴ Stevenson considered “The Beach of Falesá,” a realistic tale set in Polynesia, and “The Bottle Imp” to be entirely different types of stories.

Stevenson certainly wrote the story at a time when many were concerned about the ongoing destruction of Pacific Island culture. Prominent and emerging folklorists, both native Polynesians and non-natives, participated in a concerted effort to collect the folktales of the South Seas (Colum viii). In Hawaii, King David Kalakaua and Abraham Fornander were two of the many who traveled throughout the region collecting the stories of the people. Stevenson’s interest in Hawaiian culture led him to create his own *märchen*, a genre that features mixed origins and allows the adapter the opportunity to provide cultural critique and commentary as well as to chronicle folk ways. Stevenson’s story is thus a retelling that adapts various motifs and elements of previous versions, allowing him to capture threatened features of Polynesian culture while critiquing the forces that threatened them. Stevenson could thus tap into the fantastic element that is common to *märchen* to document the non-rational, non-Christian elements of a disappearing Polynesian nature religion and culture in conflict with Christianity and western culture.

Reviewing previous literary adaptations of the tale elucidates Stevenson’s adaptive technique and his aims. The Grimms published their 1816 version of the tale, “Spiritus Familiaris,” in their volume *German Legends*. According to the brothers Grimm, “The Bottle Imp” exists in versions earlier than their own and should be categorized as a legend. The Grimms posit that legends differ from fairy tales in that

⁴ Emphases and italics are Stevenson’s.

legends are grounded in an historical region while fairy tales are not (*German Legends, Volume II* 1). As Germans, the Grimms collected their household tales and legends for nationalistic reasons, and their stated scholarly purposes were in recording oral tales of the folk in the interest of preserving German culture.⁵ Thus, for “The Bottle Imp,” Stevenson appropriates the legendary element of place and culture to authorize situating his tale within Polynesian culture in a story aimed primarily at Polynesian readers.

Despite the Grimms’ claim that “*Spiritus Familiaris*” is an oral folktale, evidence suggests that the story is not strictly from an oral source but a literary hybrid of other tales, a situation that parallels Stevenson’s retelling (Kirtley 69). In 1670, Hans Jakob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen published the earliest known literary version of the tale. The narrative episode containing the *spiritus familiaris* motif appeared as part of a larger work entitled *Trutz Simplex* or *The Life of Courage: The Notorious Thief, Whore, and Vagabond*, which revolves around the life of Courage, a camp follower and prostitute during the Thirty Years’ War (Kirtley 68).⁶ In Grimmelshausen’s story, Courage buys the bottle from an old soldier, not fully aware of the implications of owning it. She experiences great wealth but finds that the bottle mysteriously finds its way back to her when she becomes separated from it. Courage is finally told by her foster mother, who humorously mispronounces the term as “*stirpitus flamiliaris*” possibly suggesting intoxication, that if the owner of the bottle is in possession of it upon death, his or her

⁵ Questions exist about the sources from which the Grimms recorded their tales, and Wilhelm’s well-known ongoing editing of the tales calls into question their pure oral sources. While these are significant concerns, they are tangential to the scope of this work.

⁶ Many similarities between the Grimmelshausen version and the Grimms’ version suggest that the former may be the genesis of the Grimms’ tale.

soul will be damned to hell; the only way to get rid of the object is to sell it to someone else for less than the buying price (Grimmelshausen 121). Courage eventually pawns off the bottle on her abusive boyfriend for less than she bought it. When he learns of the full story of the bottle, he is able to destroy it by throwing it into a baker's oven, thus bypassing the moral conundrum of having to save one's own life by destroying another.

As noted above, the folklore of many cultures includes tales of spirits trapped in bottles (Kirtley 70). Grimmelshausen's story of Courage appears to incorporate elements of more than one folktale: the Spirit in the Bottle tale and the German legend of the *Galgenmännlein* (69). "The Spirit in the Bottle (Type 331) or the Bottle Imp," a tale famously treated in *The Arabian Nights* with versions existing throughout history in a variety of cultures, features a spirit trapped in a bottle or some other container who is inadvertently freed by the unsuspecting opener of the bottle (Thompson 47). The unleashed spirit desires to kill the person who opened the bottle, but he or she tricks the spirit back into the bottle. Many versions include the opener of the bottle receiving some kind of material reward from the spirit, either voluntarily or through trickery. However, while Courage has no contact with the spirit in the bottle, Grimmelshausen's familiar spirit parallels other versions in that the being is captive in a container and provides the owner with material desires.

Other elements of Grimmelshausen's story correspond to the tale of the *Galgenmännlein*, a creature associated with the mandrake plant. German folklore held that the *Galgenmännlein*, or mandrake, arose from the bodily secretions of a hanged man and required much bathing, grooming, and care in exchange for the worldly wealth it would bestow (Kirtley 70). Courage asks the seller of the bottle what she must do in

return for the riches that the spirit of the bottle will bestow upon her. She is expecting to have to bathe or care for the creature, which she equates with a “gallows-wight,” the *Galgenmännlein*, which literally translates to *gallows man* (Grimmelshausen 120). Courage believes that the spirit that is contained within the glass bottle is the *Galgenmännlein*. However, her spirit differs from the German folktale in several ways. The old soldier assures Courage that the “familiar spirit” is “quite different from a gallows-wight” (Grimmelshausen 119-120). The owner of the bottle will experience wealth and luck when in possession of the spirit, and although the soldier refuses to tell Courage what she must exchange in return, the seller assures Courage that the creature requires no service to be rendered to it by the owner of the bottle. Not only does the creature not need to be groomed and cared for, which would require direct bodily contact, Courage does not have any direct interaction or communication with the familiar shut in the bottle; indeed, her only exposure to the spirit is what Courage can see through the bottle, a creature appearing as not “quite a spider, nor quite a scorpion” that seemed to be “constantly moving and crawling around inside” (Grimmelshausen 118). Thus, Grimmelshausen’s creature is not the *Galgenmännlein* of German folklore. However, Grimmelshausen’s familiar spirit and the *Galgenmännlein* share some similarities. Like the *Galgenmännlein*, Courage’s bottle spirit must be sold for less than she paid for it, and if she possesses it upon her death, her soul will be condemned to hell. Thus, while not strictly a tale about the *Galgenmännlein* or the Spirit in the Bottle tale type (ATU 331), Grimmelshausen’s story about the familiar spirit uses elements of both tales.

Several other versions of the bottle imp story exist, all of which were published subsequent to Grimmelshausen’s 1670 book about Courage. Those most relevant to this

study include Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué's 1810 version of the tale "Das Galgenmännlein," variously translated as "The Mandrake" or "The Bottle Imp," (Beach 13); the Grimms' "Spiritus Familiaris" published in 1816; and Peake's drama "The Bottle Imp" published and performed in 1828. Scholars contend that Stevenson had no direct contact with any of these versions except Peake's melodrama. Joseph Warren Beach (12) in 1910 and Bacil F. Kirtley (67) in 1971 recognize previous versions of "The Bottle Imp" tale. However, both argue that Stevenson had no prior knowledge of the extant sources of the tale. Swearingen posits that although Stevenson was aware of earlier versions of the tale, "there is no evidence that Stevenson knew the story of 'The Bottle Imp' except in [Peake's] dramatic version" (146). Jolly (270) and Capitani (200) reaffirm the claim that no evidence exists of Stevenson's direct familiarity with the specifics of previous versions of "The Bottle Imp" other than of Peake's drama. Scholars support this view by referring to Stevenson's author's note appearing as a prefatory comment to the published version of the story:

Note—Any student of that very unliterary product, the English drama of the early part of the century, will here recognize the name and the root idea of a piece once rendered popular by the redoubtable O. Smith. The root idea is there and identical, and yet I hope I have made it a new thing. And the fact that the tale has been designed and written for a Polynesian audience may lend it some extraneous interest nearer home.—R.L.S. ("The Bottle Imp" 72)

However, while acknowledging Peake in his note, Stevenson does not disavow direct knowledge of any other versions of the tale, an important point in analyzing his adaptation.

The note accomplishes two things for the purposes of tracing the influences on Stevenson's "The Bottle Imp." First, it acknowledges Peake's version as Stevenson's inspiration for the retelling, which is corroborated by Fanny's claims that he discussed the play with her in relation to Hawaiian folklore. Secondly, the note provides a point of connection for Stevenson's British audience⁷ who may or not have been aware of the tale's origins. Stevenson's reference to actor "O. Smith" is to Richard John Smith, also known as Obi Smith, who appeared in Peake's production of "The Bottle Imp" and later became a renowned performer for his portrayal of monsters and other supernatural creatures (Jolly 270). This allusion is Stevenson's attempt to capitalize on the British public's recognition of the well-known figure and garner some interest in this thoroughly Polynesian retelling of the tale. Making a British connection with the German folktale that he was retelling in a Polynesian setting might allow him to more easily sell the tale to the public back in England.

What Stevenson does not say in his prefatory note is that Peake's dramatic version of "The Bottle Imp" is the only source from which he draws his retelling. He says that the "root idea," or basic plot of the tale, was made popular by Smith when he portrayed the imp in the dramatic version staged in 1828 at Covent Garden, a performance that solidified Smith's popularity and career (Jolly 270). However, Stevenson must also have recognized the influence of a similar tale that appears in *Arabian Nights' Entertainments* that includes the trope of an imprisoned spirit in a bottle. His fascination with that collection is well known, as is his ownership of the book ("What

⁷ While Stevenson also intended a Polynesian audience, his reference to Smith is specifically aimed at his British audience.

Stevenson Read”). Although the author specifically names Peake’s play in his note, evidence suggests that Stevenson already knew of the Spirit in the Bottle trope and may have been familiar with the German legend of the *Galgenmännlein*. Similarities between Stevenson’s version and Grimmelshausen’s that differ from Peake’s may suggest that Stevenson was at least familiar with the 1610 tale of Courage and the *spiritus familiaris*. I argue that although Stevenson acknowledged that Peake’s drama contained the basic plot elements that he adapted to create “The Bottle Imp,” evidence suggests that the dramatic version was not the only version of the tale to which he was privy and that elements of Stevenson’s adaptation resonate with earlier versions of the tale, especially Grimmelshausen’s, in several important details.

Specific elements of Stevenson’s tale suggest that he may have had at least some knowledge of the details of versions other than the dramatic rendering. One such detail is the author’s treatment of the relationship between the owner of the bottle and the spirit contained within. Stevenson’s version of the bottle imp/owner relationship differs from the one portrayed in Peake’s play, which very closely follows Fouqué’s version. In both Peake’s and Fouqué’s stories, the imp appears outside of the bottle in physical form at night so that he might torment the protagonist. Albert, Peake’s protagonist, suffers nightly from torment as the creature slips out of the bottle and stays by his side all night (Peake 16). Albert can also hear the spirit speaking to him from the bottle any time it is near, constantly taunting him. In contrast, Keawe, Stevenson’s protagonist, only has one physical encounter with the imp when the next buyer, Keawe’s friend Lopaka, desires to see the creature before purchasing the bottle. The “imp look[s] out of the bottle, and in again,” which constitutes the extent of the imp’s physical manifestation (“The Bottle

Imp” 81). Nonetheless, this experience strikes them both with fear and leaves no question that the imp is a “devil” (81). Similarly, in Grimmelshausen’s tale, Courage has no contact with the spirit except to see it moving in the bottle, while the Grimms’ *spiritus familiaris* has no contact with its owner except when it is let out of the bottle and manifests as a fly (Grimms 96). Stevenson, then, follows other versions in minimizing the imp’s presence rather than Peake’s in which the spirit explicitly manifests outside of the bottle.

Stevenson’s choice to minimize direct contact between bottle owner and imp complicates the moral implications of the spirit and its relationship with the owner. In Peake’s version the spirit manifests as a demonic character whose sole enjoyment is to torment Albert, illustrating the moral point that we pay for contact with evil. However, Stevenson’s version features a spirit that is not so conspicuously evil, and the consequences of bottle ownership are not so immediately tangible. When Keawe and his shipmate Lopaka catch a quick glimpse of the imp’s face they are terrified, and the spirit does provide Keawe’s wishes and makes his life better. However, the imp does not physically torment the men. While his soul will be condemned should he die owning the bottle, Keawe, unlike Albert, does not suffer immediate consequences at the hands of the imp. Stevenson’s choice to render the spirit incorporeal avoids representing the creature as overtly evil, thus complicating by obscuring the nature of Keawe’s moral agency and responsibility. The ambiguities produced by this characterization of the imp and Keawe’s agency reflect those involved in the colonial project: supporters can laud the immediate benefits of the enterprise while minimizing the far-reaching costs.

Similarly, communication between spirit and owner differs significantly between Stevenson's and Peake's versions, enabling Stevenson to further complicate ideas of moral responsibility. In Peake's version, Albert communicates with the imp on a regular basis. Albert can hear the spirit speaking to him even when it is in the bottle, and Albert can speak back to it. In Stevenson's version, however, Keawe does not directly communicate with the imp. He makes his desires known in his thoughts or by voicing them, only occasionally addressing the entity in the bottle aloud. More often the spirit seems to read his thoughts and somehow arranges events so that Keawe's desires become a reality, as when he describes his dream home to Lopaka, and later learns that the architect has already prepared "the picture of his thought exactly drawn" ("The Bottle Imp" 79). Grimmelshausen's Courage communicates in the same way with her familiar. She sometimes voices her desires, but sometimes the desires that she expresses in her thoughts come to fruition without her speaking directly to the spirit, including having a prosperous business. Again, when Courage decides she would like to get rid of her abusive boyfriend, events occur that lead to his departure. The ambiguous conditions that surround the protagonists communicating their desires without directing the spirit to act provides a means by which Stevenson can portray moral agency as inherently ambiguous, even when the actor is well-meaning and self-protective. Peake's play explicitly divides agency between Albert and the spirit, while Stevenson portrays the connection between the imp and Keawe ambiguously. Albert asks for what he wants and the spirit torments him. Keawe and the spirit communicate indirectly, which leaves explicit moral responsibility unassigned, simultaneously raising questions about the moral quality of desire itself, even when unexpressed. This situation is especially true in Stevenson's tale,

where Keawe's and Lopaka's desires and opportunities for wealth are so clearly constructed by colonialism.

Stevenson's tale and Peake's drama also differ in the motivation of the bottle's buyer. Peake's protagonist Albert buys the bottle from its previous owner with the express intention of getting as rich as possible; he will do anything to acquire wealth and women, and he is enticed by the promise of wealth (Peake 11). He is thus clearly identified as using his agency to violate his Christian values in ways that harm others as well as himself. On the other hand, Keawe, whose religious adherence gestures towards Christian ethics if not doctrine and practice, is reluctant at first to purchase the bottle: "I would not meddle with the thing. I can do without a house, thank God; but there is one thing I could not be doing with one particle, and that is to be damned" (75). Significantly, he is ultimately tricked into buying it by its previous owner. Stevenson thus portrays his protagonist as having little control over the events that he must then deal with, paralleling the forces of colonialism at work on native populations. In Grimmelshausen's tale, Courage has no idea that the bottle spirit will make her rich; she simply buys the bottle because the old soldier is offering an expensive-looking bottle for a good price. When Courage finds that the price of the bottle is actually her soul if she still owns it when she dies, she decides that although she has gotten a bad deal she will "make the most of this little talisman as long as [she] can" (Grimmelshausen 121). In Stevenson's tale, Keawe returns home to Hawaii from San Francisco with the bottle and finds that his uncle and cousin have both died, leaving an inheritance that includes land in Keawe's favorite coastal town and enough money to build his house. He is troubled at first by the fact that his family's demise has led to his good fortune, but he decides that "

little as [he] like[s] the way it comes to [him], [he is] in for it now, and [he] may as well take the good along with the evil” 79). Neither Grimmelshausen’s nor Stevenson’s protagonists act out of greed, but they accept the consequences, at least for a time, in order to realize the fulfillment of their desires. Similarly, agents and participants can enjoy the immediate benefits that colonialism affords while ignoring the long-term effects on native peoples and natural resources.

Regardless of the mix of sources that may have contributed to Stevenson’s version of “The Bottle Imp”, the Grimm brothers’ definition of legend is significant in that locale and national identity are important in each version. In all aforementioned tales that existed prior to Stevenson’s version, the story is set in either Germany or Venice and includes German protagonists. Stevenson specifically chose Polynesia for the setting of his version of “The Bottle Imp.” Without necessarily concerning himself with generic distinctions among folktales, legends, fairy tales, and *märchen*, Stevenson senses the important emphasis on locale in the legendary treatment of the bottle imp tale. The Hawaiian Islands are integral to Stevenson’s version and securely tied to the situations that unfold in the tale, which rests upon the cultural milieu of the South Seas. The action, characters, plot, and setting of “The Bottle Imp” revolve around Hawaii and its customs and traditions. Keawe, who is named for a legendary ruler, reflects in his desires the fully local, Polynesian, character of his vision, comingled as it is with colonial elements:

“[. . .] to have a beautiful house and garden on the Kona Coast, where I was born, the sun shining in at the door, flowers in the garden, glass in the windows, pictures on the walls, and toys and fine carpets on the tables, for all the world like the house I was in this day — only a storey higher, and with balconies all about

like the King's palace; and to live there without care and make merry with my friends and relatives." (78)

While Keawe's desires are firmly embedded in the natural resources and beauty of his native Hawaii, they also covet the wealth and material comforts afforded by colonialism.

That Stevenson's story cannot be separated from its cultural settings accounts for the changes that he made in his adaptation in order to transform it from a German tale into a Polynesian one. The unique struggle of the Polynesian culture and its destruction dictated his choices. The South Seas, specifically Samoa, as the author's later life eventually shows, became important to Stevenson, enough to assuage at least some of his grief at having to be away from his beloved Scotland. As the *New York Times* noted in Stevenson's 1894 obituary, "He loved Samoa better than any other place, except Scotland," and according to Fanny, she and Stevenson "would leave [their] bones there," as Keawe wished for himself ("On This Day").

Stevenson's fascination with Hawaiian folk culture led him to become a keen observer of current events and a critic of the colonial forces at work in the South Seas. At its best, colonialism brought with it opportunities that would not otherwise exist in Hawaii, both for natives and colonizers. Stevenson himself was in the region due in part to that project. Christianity brought with it a large population of missionaries, many of whom spent their lives caring for the lepers at Molokai. However, at its worst, colonialism and Christianity worked in conjunction with one another through spiritual and physical means to subdue and dominate native cultures. Hale Keawe, the royal burial chamber that fascinated Stevenson and provided his protagonist's name, had suffered desecration at the hands of colonial forces and Christian missionaries who viewed it as a

hindrance to efforts to civilize/Christianize the country of Hawaii (Jolly 270-271). Hale Keawe was a sacred space, a monument and tomb containing the bones of the former kings of Hawaii. After the coming of Christianity to Hawaii in 1820, missionaries and colonial powers attempted to discourage traditional Hawaiian religious beliefs, and when Queen Kaahumanu herself became a Christian, Hawaii officially adopted the religion, rendering traditional Hawaiian religious practices illegal (Kim). The colonial power structure saw traditional Hawaiian culture as an impediment to native assimilation into western culture. In “The Bottle Imp,” Keawe’s seafaring occupations reflect his assimilation into the economic elements of the colonial project, while his name and his persistent identification with his native land call into question the extent to which assimilation actually creates converts.

Furthermore, by deriving the protagonist’s pseudonym from Hale Keawe, Stevenson highlights the destructive influences of Christianity and colonialism on Hawaiian culture. Keawe’s name reflects the fate of the royal bones, which were removed from Hale Keawe and hidden somewhere in a cave on the coast in order to keep them safe from nonnative intrusion (Jolly 271). Similarly, Keawe’s true identity “must be kept secret,” so we never know his real name (“The Bottle Imp” 73). The protagonist himself symbolizes and embodies the sacred bones of Hawaiian culture. If Hawaiian culture is to be saved, it must be kept hidden from destructive forces whose mission is to replace native culture with western practices.

Again, for Stevenson, leprosy in the islands emblemizes the destruction of Polynesian culture, even while the colonial response to the problem highlights Christian charity and caring. On an excursion to Honaunau and the Hale Keawe, the good and evil

of western influence became apparent to Stevenson. While in Honaunau, where the Hale Keawe had been historically a place of refuge in which those seeking asylum might find safety, Stevenson met a woman and her daughter who had been hiding out and living in the forest surrounding the area (Gray, *A Literary Life* 126). The daughter had contracted leprosy and, if found, would be taken from her mother and sent to the leper colony on Molokai. The mother, not wanting to be separated from her daughter, took the child and hid in the woods. The woman could only hope that the authorities and those at Molokai would allow her to accompany her daughter to the leper colony where the mother could work as a servant (126).

That experience highlights several factors pertinent to Stevenson's stance on the moral ambiguity of power systems and of human nature in general. First, the very presence of leprosy on the island stands as a reminder of the incursion of colonial forces on the Polynesian culture. Furthermore, as another result of western incursion, the woman and her daughter were no longer able to find refuge without recourse to the forces that had created their problems. With the destruction of the temple at Hale Keawe, the Christian colonial project had taken away any hope of refuge in which mother and daughter might have found shelter, forcing them to hide in the woods where meeting basic needs was difficult. However, colonial administrators had created the leper colony to provide for the sick and to keep the population safe from the disease. Christian missionaries living in the colony with the lepers cared for the sick, trying to create a humane quality of life for them. Colonizing forces in conjunction with Christian missionaries had both destroyed a traditional place of refuge and created a replacement. Keawe's leprosy thus marks him as a casualty of colonialism, even while the solution to

the problem in his case is to buy the bottle back from its most recent owner so he can ask for one last request, to be free from leprosy so he can marry his beloved and live happily ever after. The bottle, obtained from a foreign source in San Francisco, has brought both blessing and curse, representing the colonial project. Keawe is compelled by his contraction of leprosy to buy the bottle back once again, to suffer curse in order to gain advantage.

Leprosy as an emblematic representation of the contradictions and ambiguities associated with the colonial/Christian project became a theme in Stevenson's life and art. Stevenson had a heated letter-writing exchange with a Christian missionary about Molokai's leper colony. A Presbyterian newspaper had published a letter written by Reverend Dr. Charles McEwen Hyde that attacked Father Damien, a Catholic priest who spent a great portion of his life caring for the lepers of Molokai. Father Damien eventually contracted leprosy and died of the disease before Stevenson came to the region, but the priest remained a celebrated figure, well known for his love and compassion for the lepers. Dr. Hyde took issue with what he considered to be moral failures of Father Damien, citing rumors of bad hygiene, loose sexual practices, and other indiscretions, even going so far as to say that Father Damien's contraction of leprosy could be "attributed to his vices and carelessness" (qtd. in Stevenson, *Father Damien* 7). In reply, Stevenson penned a scathing letter to Dr. Hyde that was published in the newspaper accusing Dr. Hyde of sectarianism and admonishing him, using both scripture and Presbyterian doctrine. Stevenson declared Father Damien a saint and dismissed Dr. Hyde as a man who cared only for the "comfort of [his] home" (9). Father Damien's supposed moral failures and membership in the Catholic Church did not preclude him

from doing good, indeed, great good, for the lepers, and he had even given his own life to care for them. Dr. Hyde, a fellow Presbyterian, should have been, according to Stevenson, providing mercy and refuge rather than criticizing those who were. To Stevenson, the Rev. Dr. Hyde represented all that was wrong with Christian and colonial attitudes and practices in the South Seas. Stevenson insisted that Dr. Hyde, a fellow Presbyterian, should have known better. This experience further illustrated for Stevenson the complex moral ambiguities of human beings. This ambiguity is reflected in Keawe's experience of healing when he regains the bottle and asks for his leprosy to be gone. While he has been blissfully happy with his beautiful house and beloved wife, on regaining the bottle, he becomes so downcast by thoughts of hell, even though his leprosy is cured, that his wife becomes estranged from him and neither is happy any longer.

The motif of moral ambiguity appears even in the formal aspects of "The Bottle Imp." The story begins with a white man, the American in San Francisco who sells the bottle to Keawe, and ends with a white man, the Haole who last buys the bottle (Capitani 208).⁸ This significant plot frame further complicates moral concerns about human nature and calls into question the intent behind human transactions. In Stevenson's story, the first white man in the tale, the owner of the bottle imp, tricks Keawe into buying the bottle. The man, an American living in San Francisco, persuades Keawe to give the bottle a try, which leads to a transaction that makes Keawe's purchase official. So, although the man deceives Keawe into taking an accursed object that will eventually cause the damnation of its owner's soul, the man is also the medium through which Keawe obtains

⁸ In his article, Capitani treats "The Bottle Imp" as fairy tale, but he does not examine adaptation choices and their implications. His interests reflect the cultural exchanges related to language inherent in a translated text with a diverse intended audience.

the bottle that makes it possible for him to have whatever he wants. The man also makes sure to charge a high enough price so that Keawe might get rid of the bottle later by selling it for a lower price, thus avoiding damnation. Stevenson portrays the man as simultaneously having both good and evil intentions, a situation that characterizes the motives of all the buyers and sellers of the bottle, except its final owner, who threatens to “smash [Keawe’s] mouth” if he refuses to sell him the bottle (“The Bottle Imp” 101).

However, even the actions of this last white man offer conflicting moral results. Keawe convinces the boatswain with the promise of liquor and money to purchase the bottle from Kohua, who has bought it to redeem her beloved husband’s life after he has regained the bottle to cure his leprosy, but at the cost of their happiness and his soul.⁹ In this way, Keawe can buy back the imp from his wife without telling her that it is he who is purchasing it thus saving her soul while again damning his own. After the deed is done, Keawe attempts to keep his promise to buy the bottle back from the boatswain. However, the boatswain realizes the benefits of owning the bottle and refuses to allow Keawe to buy it back. The man threatens violence if Keawe tries to take it. The boatswain keeps the bottle, knowing full well the implications of his purchase: his soul is irrevocably damned because he cannot sell the bottle for less than the purchase price. This action is merciful from the perspective of Keawe, whose soul will be saved from damnation. However, Stevenson suggests that this final action is a matter of justice, having previously described the boatswain as a stereotypical colonizer, a man of low moral character: “an old brutal Haole,” who had been “a runaway, a digger in gold mines, a convict in prisons

⁹ Stevenson does not reveal the nationality of the boatswain, although he introduces the man as a “Haole” (“The Bottle Imp” 98), the term for a white man not native to Hawaii.

. . . . He had a low mind and a foul mouth; he loved to drink and to see others drunken” (“The Bottle Imp” 98). The boatswain is a white colonizer, a misogynist, and prone to violence and drunkenness. His reasoning for retaining ownership of the bottle is that he expects to end up in hell anyway, so he wants to get as much as he can from the devil before he must face him. Although the boatswain’s motivations are selfish, his actions ultimately save Keawe and Kohua from damnation.

Stevenson was keenly aware that native islanders, just like their European counterparts, were capable of both good and evil in their behavior and their interactions with one another. For Stevenson, the idea of the noble savage paled in the light of reality. People could not be separated into neat categories. Stevenson came to realize that the decisions people make and their motives for making them are morally ambiguous and fall somewhere along a continuum rather than polar extremes, regardless of the individual’s social, ethnic, political, or religious identity. Thus, Stevenson portrays Keawe, a native Hawaiian, as an honest dreamer, one named for kings, who is perhaps a little naive about the world, so naive, in fact, that he allows himself to be tricked into buying the bottle imp. His greatest moral imperative is to bring harm to no one, even sacrificing his own life for those he loves. However, his naive notion that the fulfillment of his material desires will make him truly happy leads him to the seller in the first place. Keawe’s greed drives him to try out the bottle at the behest of the owner, even with the knowledge of the consequences that accompany it, ultimately purchasing the bottle and sealing his fate. Keawe again exhibits moral ambiguity when confronted with the initial rewards afforded by ownership of the bottle. He is upset when he realizes that his uncle and cousin have perished to fulfill his desires for his dream home. Although he at first thinks it “a very ill

way to serve [him] by killing [his] relatives” (80), Keawe eventually decides to “take the good along with the evil” (79) after he see his material desires begin to come to fruition. Even the good, honest Keawe, named for royalty, is capable of overlooking evil actions to realize the material desires of his heart.

The moral nature of Kokua, Keawe’s wife, is also difficult to discern. In attempting to get rid of the bottle in order to protect her husband, Kokua engages with an old man through a series of actions and motivations that complicate our perceptions of Kokua’s moral makeup. She has been selfless in her love for Keawe and thus represents a good woman. The old, poor man with a chronic cough is “a stranger in the island,” so he is not a native Hawaiian (95). The old man thinks that Kokua is a witch straight out of Hawaiian folklore who “seek[s] to entangle . . . [his] old soul,” an impression gained through observation of Keawe’s and Kokua’s seeming deal with the devil, which has made them extraordinarily wealthy. In reality, Kokua wants to use the man as her proxy to purchase the bottle from Keawe to save his soul, all the while intending to buy the bottle back from the man. Kokua orders him not to tell Keawe that it is she who is buying the bottle, knowing that if Keawe knows this he would never let her sacrifice her own soul for his. The old man eventually agrees to help Kokua by buying the bottle from Keawe. The man, however, doubts Kokua’s intentions and never really trusts her, even after she tells him the whole story. Kokua’s identity as a native, and one suspected of having a pact with the devil, has led the man to distrust her. He attempts to categorize her, assuming she has a low moral nature because she is a Polynesian. However, Kokua’s very name means *clean*, which signifies her pure intentions (Gray, *A Literary Life* 126). As a nonnative, the man does not understand the meaning of Kokua’s name, symbolically

enacting colonial distrust of natives. Furthermore, the man's status as a nonnative demands that Kokua's true name be unknown to him for her protection, much like Keawe's real name must be hidden.

Likewise, the exchange between Kokua and the old man exemplifies the ambiguous moral nature of the man himself. Just as the man cannot know Kokua's true intentions, Kokua also cannot know the man's true motives. The man invokes God against Kokua if she dares lie to him, but if he identifies with the Christian religion, he should be sympathetic to Kokua's attempts to release her husband's soul from the clutches of hell. Her moral imperative, much like Keawe's, is to sacrifice her own life for those she loves, a foundational Christian principle. The man, however, wants to have nothing to do with the bottle, even refusing to use it to alleviate his cough, telling Kokua that an old man such as he is "too near the gate of the grave to take a favour from the devil" (96). From the man's perspective, Kokua's dealings with a bottle that will lead its owner to hell do not align with her stated benevolent intentions.

Although the protagonists enjoy a happily-ever-after ending as they escape with their souls intact, moral ambiguity remains. Following their adventures with the bottle, Keawe and Kokua enjoy "the peace of all their days in the Bright House of his dreams" (102). However, although Keawe and Kohua have gotten rid of the bottle, someone else has to suffer the consequences. Keawe and Kokua are both eager to sacrifice themselves to save the other. Although Keawe actively uses the bottle to cure his leprosy, his story is one of trying to find a way to get rid of the bottle without doing harm, discovering in the end that that is not possible. The boatswain is condemned so that Keawe and Kokua do not have to be. Stevenson subverts the ostensibly happy ending of "The Bottle Imp" with

a morally ambiguous one that parallels the good and evil of life in general, with colonial life in particular being implicated in evil. The bottle comes to Keawe through an American agent who he is in contact with as a result of colonial shipping enterprises, and it ends with another colonial figure, a corrupt emblem of colonialism at its worse.

Not long after Stevenson wrote “The Bottle Imp” it was translated into the Samoan language (Swearingen 146). Whether or not Stevenson marked this story out for translation or if it was later suggested to him is not clear, but in March 1891, Reverend Arthur E. Claxton began translating “The Bottle Imp” (Swearingen 145-146). Samoans read the story, and some believed in the magic and mystery of the bottle. After the Stevensons were installed at Vailima, Samoan visitors would occasionally ask to see the bottle (*Letters, Volume II* 363). These requests suggest that they were familiar with the story intimately enough to know its circumstances. The native islanders associated Stevenson’s wealth, especially the size and relative splendor of his house, with Keawe’s Bright House, acquired through ownership of the bottle. They assumed that Stevenson had modeled the tale on his own life.

The Samoans’ belief that Stevenson possessed the bottle reflects the persistence of the native islanders’ beliefs in supernatural objects and powers. Although many native islanders converted to Christianity, folk belief was still a central part of life in the South Seas. Christian teaching and colonial efforts of forced western assimilation had not obliterated Polynesian confidence that other means were available to obtain their wishes, just as, ironically, supernatural beliefs persist in European cultures that practice beliefs in Santa Claus, the Easter bunny, or the tooth fairy, which are also remnants of pre-colonial cultures.

Writing “The Bottle Imp,” Stevenson was able to experiment with *märchen*, which allowed him to take advantage of the opportunities the genre afforded him to preserve a vanishing culture while also critiquing the colonial effort and its effects on the world around him. Stevenson’s adaptation makes significant changes to previous versions of the tale that represent his views about the state of the Polynesian cultural struggle against the destructive forces of colonialism and Christianity. With honest introspection about the nature of these cultural forces, Stevenson represents these systems as capable of both good and evil, bringing both harm and help. This representation follows from his understanding that all individuals are capable of both good and evil; their cultural labels and identities do not categorize them in neat boxes of good or evil. For Stevenson, to be human and to live in the world meant that one had to “take the good along with the evil” (“The Bottle Imp” 90).

CHAPTER TWO: "THE ISLE OF VOICES"

In "The Isle of Voices," Stevenson continues his experimentation with *märchen*, this time by creating an original fairy tale that features magical elements and borrows heavily from Hawaiian folklore. Although he continues his critique of the colonial/Christian power structures of nineteenth century Polynesia, he focuses more on examining the dual and ambiguous nature of human morality. Stevenson's main characters are all native islanders, and magical human and natural forces drive the plot, unlike "The Bottle Imp" where magic is confined to a mysterious object. This story features a hapless protagonist, Keola, who is married to "Lehua, daughter of Kalamake, the wise man of Molokai," with whom they live and by whom they are supported ("Isle of Voices" 103). While Kalamake "was come of the best blood in Molokai and Maui, of a pure descent," he "was more white to look upon than any foreigner," and, due to his albinism, he is also blind (102). Kalamake's features and biology identify him with both his Hawaiian ancestry and the white colonizer. His power is so great all sought his wisdom, even the King, so much so that "prudent people bought, and sold, and married, and laid out their lives by [Kalamake's] counsels" (103). In fact, he is also a ruthless wizard who makes money with the help of magic rituals involving the burning of leaves and destroys his enemies through ruthless means.

In addition to the magic that Kalamake performs, another central magical feature of the story is the eponymous Isle, where Kalamake voyages, invisible to the inhabitants of the place, to acquire the magic shells that turn into money. When Keola accompanies his father-in-law for this purpose, he notices only a beautiful young girl, and later her

fellow islanders, are struck with fear since they can only hear but not see him as they rush to gather the shells before the leaves completely burn, bringing them back home.

Kalamake's dual nature, specifically his identification with colonial forces and native Hawaiian culture, allow Stevenson to critique the colonial/Christian project and to document the vanishing resources of Polynesia. For instance, Kalamake benefits from the colonial enterprise and exploits the natural resources of Hawaii to get rich, just as the colonizers do, as he "makes dollars of sea-shells" (108). Furthermore, with his presence on the Isle to plunder the environment, he creates fear among the native Islanders who are rendered helpless to stop his invisible raid of their homeland, symbolizing the depredation of the land for economic gain by colonial forces. In addition, Kalamake's connection with Christianity, symbolized by his ownership of a "family Bible," further associates him with western values (104). On the other hand, Kalamake's position as a legendary local figure to whom the natives go for counsel links him with Hawaiian culture. "All the Kingdom of Hawaii" trusts him with their lives and fortunes (103). Yet Kalamake betrays both of his identities. He hides his Bible when he performs his magical rituals, symbolizing his denial of foundational Christian ethics of doing no harm to others, and he steals resources from his own people for gain.

Kalamake's dual nature and ambiguous ethical status leave Keola unsure of the moral foundations of his world, as do other enigmatic characters and experiences throughout his adventures. Keola is an antihero, "an idle dog" who lives off of Kalamake's material wealth and is taken into his confidence in the supernatural moneymaking scheme (104). However, "there was never a man so terrified as this Keola" when he learns the full power of Kalamake's sorcery when the man tries to kill him

(111). In addition to Kalamake's treachery, Keola also experiences the abstruse behavior of a group of white colonizers who save him from drowning. For instance, when they first fish him out of the water "they gave him gin and biscuit and dry clothes," yet thereafter the mate would "beat and curse him daily" (112). Therefore, Keola surmised that "the trouble with these white men [. . . was] that you could never be sure of them," which becomes a refrain for everyone Keola encounters, both whites and natives (113). This morally ambiguous world through which Keola adventures represents the contradictory moral environment precipitated by the colonial presence and Christian hypocrisy that Stevenson witnessed in the region.

Stevenson composed the tale at the latest before December 1892, when he sent it to Sidney Colvin for publication (Swearingen 175). Along with the manuscript, Stevenson sent another story, "The Waif Woman," and a letter informing Colvin that the author intended that the two tales be published jointly in the upcoming volume entitled *Island Nights' Entertainments* (176). Despite Stevenson's intentions, "The Isle of Voices" first appeared in serialized form in the *National Observer* throughout February 1893 and never appeared together with "The Waif Woman" in any publication (175).

As with "The Bottle Imp," scholars have assigned "The Isle of Voices" to various categories. William Scheick, for instance, considers "The Isle of Voices" to be an "ethical romance," acknowledging the supernatural elements of the story, while highlighting the fact that Stevenson was working with ethical and moral concerns of humankind in his tale (Scheick 141). Although Stevenson does deal with moral questions, these are less foregrounded than in "The Bottle Imp," while the romance distinction also ignores Stevenson's particular designation of the "Isle" as a fairy tale. While romance and fairy

tale both feature the supernatural, the *märchen* distinction was important to the author and thus should be to critics examining this story. Stevenson specifically designated this tale as part of his collection of *märchen*, obviously finding appeal in the affordances of the genre—detailing beliefs in the supernatural that characterized traditional Polynesian beliefs while also situating the supernatural within the folkways. The *märchen* form allows Stevenson to cast Polynesian supernatural belief systems as controlling forces, whereas such a construction would be incongruous in traditionally less fantastical genres, such as the romance, which would also take focus away from folk beliefs. Kalamake’s capacity for evil and his status as a godlike personality could be conveyed through the conventions of another genre but not with the power and “extravagan[ce]” that demonstrate the depth of native belief systems (Stevenson qtd. in Scheick 141).

Unlike “The Bottle Imp,” this story more centrally reflects Stevenson’s interest in the folklore of the land than in the effects of colonization and Christianization, which are largely represented in the story by the details of the dwelling place of Kalamake and his family, decorated and furnished in “European style” (“Isle of Voices” 104). Indeed, when Kalamake casts the magic spell by which he and Keola are transported to the island where they will gather the shells that will refill his coffers with coins, Kalamake hides the family Bible, which usually sits in the middle of a table in the parlor, demonstrating the nominal extent to which Kalamake has subscribed to Christian belief and ethics. In secret, after he “close[d] the shutters of the windows [. . . and] locked all the doors,” Kalamake brings out the implements of ritual, which are usually hidden away, exchanging places with the Bible (105). Christianization has failed to usurp native beliefs, and Kalamake will use whatever means available to him to gain advantage.

Nonetheless, there is no mistaking signs of colonization, which include the parlor itself, “a very fine room, papered and hung with prints, and furnished with a rocking-chair, and a table and a sofa,” as well as participation in trading activities evidenced by the presence of goods brought by steamer, including “tinned salmon and gin, and all manner of rare luxuries” (104). The “photograph of Queen Victoria with her crown” alongside “a print of Kamehameha the Fifth,” further illustrating Kalamake’s conflicting loyalties, situated over the “lockfast writing desk against the wall” complete the description of the room, which “anyone could see [. . .] was the house of a man of substance” (104). In order to establish his reputation in this new colonial environment and cover all of his social and political bases, Kalamake must exploit his native culture and identify with the colonial/Christian project, while secretly he uses supernatural means to gain economic advantage.

Rather than colonization, then, “The Isle of Voices” focuses on the magical story of Keola’s treatment by Kalamake and his subsequent rescue by his wife, Lehua. Kalamake asks Keola to help him travel to the isle so he can renew his store of the shells that he transforms into money. Kalamake does all this through magical means by a ritual he performs with a pan full of sand, “a mat of a wonderfully fine texture,” “necklaces hung with charms and shells, a bundle of dried herbs, and the dried leaves of trees, and a green branch of palm,” in which he burns the leaves and herbs on the mat in the sand-filled pan while “mutter[ing] and wav[ing] the branch of palm,” actions that further conflict with Kalamake’s alleged allegiance to the Christian faith (105). To ensure his silence after the ritual is performed, Kalamake gives Keola a small amount of money from the venture and tells him “if you are a wise man (which I am doubtful of) you will

think you slept this afternoon on the verandah, and dreamed as you were sleeping. I am a man of few words, and I have for my helpers people of short memories” (108). However, after “his share is spent,” Keola decides to use his knowledge, against the advice of Lehua, to attempt to extract a concertina from Kalamake, thinking to himself, “I am as cunning as he, and hold his secret” (108). Yet when he tells his wife, she warns him that “as sure as you thwart my father, you will be no more heard of,” like others, even “a noble of the House of Representatives,” who disappeared and was never heard from again (108).

True to his word, Kalamake tricks Keola into going on a fishing expedition to acquire money through magical means, supernaturally changes himself into a giant, and abandon’s Keola in the Sea of the Dead to die, revealing Kalamake’s double nature to Keola. However, Kalamake’s attempt to kill his son-in-law is subverted when a passing colonial trading schooner rescues Keola. The ship seems to be “a good place” at first, perhaps suggesting the process of colonization itself, which promises economic progress (112). However, the mate “was the most difficult man to please Keola had ever met with, and beat and cursed him daily, both for what he did and what he did not,” which represents the difficult position of native Hawaiians living under colonial authority, a morally ambiguous proposition to Keola (112). Keola thus abandons the boat when he is close to an island that he judges to be ideal for him, since no trading is done in the place and “the mate will never come” (113). As for Kalamake, “it is not possible he can ever get as far as this” (113). Keola thinks if he can escape the first mate and Kalamake, symbolically escaping the trappings of the oppressive colonial enterprise, he will be safe. The remainder of the story outlines Keola’s life with the islanders, whom he learns are

cannibals, existing as another morally ambiguous community much like the colonial trading schooner, and his subsequent rescue by Lehua, who uses Kalamake's own magic against him.

The story, then, captures several aspects of Polynesian culture and folklore. The influence of Hawaiian legend and folktale on Stevenson's *märchen* came partly through the author's relationship with King Kalakaua, whom Stevenson met in his travels in the region. Stevenson's friendship with King Kalakaua came at a crucial time during which the king was compiling a book of Hawaiian folklore that he would later publish as *Legends and Myths of Hawaii* (Jolly 276). According to Stevenson's stepson Lloyd, Stevenson had access to the notebooks on which the King recorded the folktales, and Stevenson and Kalakaua spent much time discussing the work (277). By this time, Stevenson had already taken an interest in the folktales of Hawaii and was actively seeking stories for inspiration for his own writing.

In crafting "The Isle of Voices," Stevenson generously adopted aspects of Polynesian legend, myth, and folktale to create his original tale. Some details in "The Isle of Voices" connect with Hawaiian legends included in King Kalakaua's *Legends and Myths of Hawaii: The Fables and Folk-lore of a Strange People* (Jolly 276). The title of the King's book reflects the irony of referring to Polynesian culture as "strange," suggesting that the King had adopted a fully Western view of his own people, whereby magic is ascribed to primitive, uneducated peoples.¹ However, his collection of folklore documenting a vanishing culture signals his common interest with Stevenson in

¹ A cursory reading of the introduction to Kalakaua's book indicates a Christian, possibly Mormon, orientation, reflecting the fact that the King's chief minister was a Mormon (Furnas 330).

preserving its folkways. In his story, Stevenson employs magical elements found in King Kalakaua's version of the folktale of "Hina, the Helen of Hawaii." Stevenson describes the magic of the wizard Kalamake in the same words that King Kalakaua uses to describe Kana, the warrior. In Kalakaua's tale, after Hina is kidnapped, her son Kana and his warriors rescue her. As they attack the island where Hina is held, their enemy begins to destroy their fleet of boats. According to traditional Hawaiian legend, Kana is known as the one who can stretch himself ("Hawaiian Legends Index"), a *kupua* or sorcerer (Kalakaua 528). In "The Isle of Voices," Stevenson describes Kalamake as a sorcerer and a wizard. Kana is able to stand in the deep water with his "head and shoulders above the water" (Kalakaua 91). Likewise, Stevenson describes Kalamake as standing in the deep water as "his head and shoulders rose like a high isle" when he abandons Keola to his supposed doom (111).

In addition to the influence of King Kalakaua's collected folktales, Stevenson likely knew of other traditional Hawaiian folktales from his own studies. For instance, "The Isle of Voices" shares some elements with a traditional Hawaiian folktale about a rolling island, especially tropes of movement from one island to another and the power and danger of natural resources. The story features an island that is rolled around the sea by the gods. Young Chief Ka-ewe-aoho, after nearly drowning in the ocean through the betrayal of some fishermen, is saved by the god Ku, who rolls the island close so Ka-ewe-aoho can swim to it (Colum 147). Likewise, in "The Isle of Voices," Keola nearly drowns as a result of Kalamake's treachery when he falsely promises to teach Keola how to fish. Keola's island is not explicitly rolled to him but does suddenly appear when he least expects it. Both near drownings take place as a result of anger towards the

protagonist and lies that get them into a fishing boat. Also, in both stories, the protagonists find wives when they arrive on their respective islands. In the tale of the rolling island, Ka-ewe-aoho meets the god Ku's granddaughter, A-ne-li-ke, whom he takes as his wife (Colum 148). In "The Isle of Voices," Keola gains a wife among the inhabitants of the tribe when he shows up on the island after he jumps from the trading schooner. While minor, these details suggest Stevenson's knowledge of traditional Hawaiian folktales.

The natural features of Hawaii play an important role in the tale of the rolling island as well as Stevenson's tale. For instance, trees and leaves provide transport to and communication with another world in both stories. A-ne-li-ke uses coconut trees as a vehicle to bring her to see her grandfather-god in the "Country that Supports the Heavens" (Colum 151). In "The Isle of Voices," Kalamake burns leaves to accomplish his transport to and from the island. While A-ne-li-ke employs nature to commune with the divine powers at their bidding, Kalamake exploits and destroys nature by burning leaves for his own greedy purposes so that he can have access to the magic shells that become money. In the traditional tale, Ka-ewe-aoho also burns leaves, but they do not transport him to another place or lead to exploitation of any kind; he burns them to create warmth to care for his wife. Stevenson's story suggests that Hawaiians have been corrupted by mercantile practices of the colonists, which see nature in terms of utilitarian resources and opportunities for economic gain. Furthermore, in the traditional story, Ka-ewe-aoho, like Keola in "The Isle of Voices," ends up leaving his wife on the island, but they are reunited later. Keola leaves his island wife behind and is reunited with his original wife, Lehua. Stevenson's adaptations suggest that the colonial influences have

corrupted a prior, more natural Hawaiian culture that lived in harmony with nature that is reflected in the traditional tale.

Other details in “The Isle of Voices” reflect Stevenson’s familiarity with traditional Hawaiian folktales and legends. The name Lehua, for instance, comes from the traditional Hawaiian ‘Ōhi‘a-Lehua legend. As the story goes, Lehua, a flower blossom on the ‘Ōhi‘a tree traditionally used to make leis, was a maiden whose kindness and beauty made her lover, ‘Ōhi‘a, spurn the attentions of the goddess Pele. In her anger over ‘Ōhi‘a’s rejection, Pele destroys Lehua and ‘Ōhi‘a as they cling to one another amidst the goddess’s onslaught of lava, resulting in the couple’s eternal union on the ‘Ōhi‘a tree (Yuen). In “The Isle of Voices,” like the maiden of Hawaiian tradition, Stevenson’s Lehua exhibits the virtue of loyalty as she remains faithful to her husband Keola and rescues him despite the anger of her godlike father, Kalamake.

As well as borrowing material from traditional legend and myth, Stevenson also used elements of folktales and superstitions that he heard first hand among the Polynesians. In his book *In the South Seas*, Stevenson includes a chapter entitled “Graveyard Stories” about a specific island named Paumotos. The French Vice-Resident of this island was Donat-Rimarau, who, in “The Isle of Voices,” Keola’s new island wife tells him about, describing a process of assimilation and conversion by colonizers:

Donat-Rimarau comes and talks for the French, and there is a white trader there in a house with a verandah, and a catechist. Oh, that is a fine place indeed! The trader has barrels filled with flour, and a French warship once came in the lagoon and gave everybody wine and biscuit. Ah, my poor Keola, I wish I could take you

there, for great is my love to you, and it is the finest place in the seas except Papeete. (“Isle” 117)

In 1888, the Stevensons visited Paumotos, and Donat-Rimarau and native Paumotoans told them stories about superstitions and supernatural happenings on the island, noting that even among the significant number of islanders who had converted to Christianity, “the fear of and faith in the old lingering island deities” still existed (*South Seas* 245). Referencing one of many connections between the Polynesians and his beloved Highlanders, Stevenson compares the mingling of Christianity with their traditional Hawaiian deity worship, specifically mentioning his beloved Scottish Presbyterians, who still heed pre-Christian traditions and rituals.

Other elements of “Graveyard Stories” that appear in “The Isle of Voices” significantly include the islanders hearing sounds where no visible source is ascertained, which in both stories is associated with danger and a threat to continued life. For instance, Paumotoans recounted talk of hearing “sounds of battle...all along the coast,” thought to come from the gods warring against each other (244). Stevenson’s story echoes this trope in the native islanders hearing, but not seeing, Kalamake, who comes to harvest the leaves and trees that allow him to make magic, a situation that dismays the islanders, who fear for their island. One can perhaps trace the influence of colonialism and other more historically distant invasions, in these tales of outsiders/enemies who invade the islands in order to further their own gain by harvesting natural resources. Keola, in fact, describes these voices as arising from all over the world:

All tongues of the earth were spoken there; the French, the Dutch, the Russian, the Tamil, the Chinese. Whatever land knew sorcery, there were some of its

people whispering in Keola's ear. That beach was thick as a cried fair, yet no man seen; and as he walked he saw the shells vanish before him, and no man to pick them up. ("Isle" 119)

The voices of slavers and traders who extracted natural resources to return to their own nations' manufactories is thus a picture of the colonial project. Like Kalamake who exploits the natural resources for economic gain, they are powerful and death-dealing, and threaten the native islanders' traditional way of life. Surely Stevenson also meant to associate this situation with the Christian missionary project that, at its worst, operated in conjunction with the colonial enterprise to exploit native populations worldwide. This group representing "all tongues of the earth" mocks the Christian notion of the redeemed who are "of every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Holy Bible, NKJV, Revelation 5:9). However, this group of diverse people has not traveled to the Isle on a mission of mercy. They have come to exploit the natural resources of Hawaiian culture for their own gain.

Another form of the trope of invisible causes of sound occurs in tales about the sound of falling trees terrorizing the Paumotos islanders. In several stories told to Stevenson, the islanders claimed that they would search for downed trees after hearing a crash but could never find any, attributing the sound to the dead returning from the grave ("Graveyard Stories" 243). Likewise, the falling and the cutting down of trees play a significant role in "The Isle of Voices." Desiring to prevent Kalamake discovering his presence, Keola recommends that the islanders cut down the trees that Kalamake needs for his magic so that the "spirits" cannot collect leaves, which will thus prevent further invasion of the island. The sound of the falling trees brings the invading "spirits" to the

wood, where they are massacred, enabling Lehua to rescue Keola (“Isle” 120). The attribution of magic as an evil force suggests islanders’ continuing anxieties about the unseen forces of colonial exploitation at work, a trope that Stevenson employs throughout his story.

Another trope representing cultural anxiety that appears in both Stevenson’s story and the folktales he recounts in “Graveyard Stories” is that of cannibalism. Stevenson notes that the Paumotos islanders were formerly cannibals, and that the superstition grew up that the spirits of the dead would come to eat the living, not only their flesh but also their souls. The Paumotos islanders thus became afraid of the spirits of the dead feeding on them like they fed on the dead in times past (“Graveyard Stories” 251). In “The Isle of Voices,” the magic islanders are cannibals, and they plan to eat Keola, even though they first take him into the fold, allowing him to marry into the tribe and thereafter comply with his suggestion that they destroy the magic trees to keep out invaders. Thus the island tribe represents a morally ambiguous community as they accept him as a son and consider his advice worth following, yet also plan to eat him. Cannibalism plays no further part in the story other than to motivate Keola’s desire to escape an otherwise happy life, although it functions as a mark of anxiety reflecting Keola’s basic fears of the old culture and its magic practices, as well as continuing cultural anxiety about revenge for abandoning that culture. When the islanders begin destroying the magic trees, a dire action that summons the sorcerers to the island where neither group can see the other, Keola can only watch and listen as the “maneaters” and sorcerers swing their axes at each other, while cries of anguish fill the air and blood flows on the ground. Just when the head tribesman sees him, Keola runs to the beach, where Lehua, who has arrived with

Kalamake, burns leaves to carry the two of them back home, leaving Kalamake to his fate.

In addition to borrowing magic from the tales told on Paumotos, inspiration for the details of “The Isle of Voices” may have also come from Stevenson’s impressions of Fakarava, a small atoll that he and Fanny visited. He recounts their experiences in the chapter from *In the South Seas* entitled “Fakarava: An Atoll At Hand” (Jolly 278). The descriptions of Fakarava resemble some of the descriptions of the island in “The Isle of Voices,” especially in its elements of beauty coupled with danger. Stevenson notes “the sense of insecurity in such a [. . .] residence is more than fanciful” (“Fakarava” 199). The narrow atoll’s vulnerability to dangerous weather and the changing sea made it a difficult place to inhabit, and it suffered regular disasters. Stevenson’s appreciation of the multi-colored shells found on Fakarava later inspired him to address the exploitation of the natural and lush environment of Polynesia and possibly suggest the magic shells in “Isle” (“Fakarava” 204). His impressions also appear in “Isle” in an episode that references the fish of the lagoon, which could be poisonous depending on the season. The episode appears in Stevenson’s story as a cautionary tale for those who might ignore tradition. The trading schooner’s cruel mate dismisses the islanders’ warnings as folklore rubbish and eats the fish, dying a nasty death. Fakarava itself thus represented an environment of ambiguity, of beauty and danger.

In addition to employing elements of Hawaiian folktale and legend, Stevenson incorporates and subverts elements of the *zaubermärchen*, the oral wonder folktale or magic tale. Using Vladimir Propp’s description of folktales from *The Morphology of the Folk Tale*, Zipes elaborates the stable functions of *zaubermärchen*, “reducing and

summarizing” them in ways that elucidate the cultural work that Stevenson’s story performs (“Changing Functions” 10). For instance, Zipes notes that the protagonist often violates “an interdiction or prohibition,” akin to the “obey or die” prohibition of the Polynesian culture’s *tabu* (Kalakaua 32). In “The Isle of Voices,” Lehua, tells Keola not to challenge Kalamake. Even before Lehua cautions Keola, Kalamake demands that Keola not speak of the magic that allows transportation to the island and subsequent acquisition of the shells that turn into money. Keola ignores the injunctions of both his wife and his father-in-law when he uses his knowledge to attempt to exert some power over Kalamake. In Polynesian culture, Keola has broken the *tabu*.

As a result of violating the prohibition, Keola suffers the fate of the exile. Zipes explains that in the wonder tale, the violation of the prohibition makes it necessary for the protagonist to leave, often to accomplish some mission related to the original violation (“Changing Function” 10). Kalamake banishes Keola by taking him out to sea and leaving him for dead. Just as the sea almost causes Keola’s death, it is also his salvation. He catches a ship that saves him, but from which he must later escape. To save his life from harsh treatment of the ship’s mate, Keola jumps back into the sea. The sea becomes a sign for Keola, representing the dualism that exists in humankind and nature, both life-saving and life-taking. The dual nature of existence is thus a significant theme in “The Isle of Voices”: that which provides sustenance, such as his father-in-law Kalamake and the sea that saves his life, can also threaten it.

In the wonder tale, the protagonist encounters creatures, often three in number, who help and/or are helped by the protagonist, many times through magical means (“Changing Function” 10). Keola comes into contact with three dangerous people:

Kalamake, Keola's father-in-law; the mate on the ship; and Keola's new father-in-law, the leader of the tribe of cannibals. These three threats to Keola's safety, villains of sorts, are associated with another three doubles who help Keola: Lehua, Keola's original wife, who ultimately saves Keola; the ship's captain who saves Keola when Kalamake leaves him to drown and continues to be kind to him; and Keola's nameless island wife, the cannibal chief's daughter, who warns him of the danger he faces from her tribe.

Subverting fairy tale expectations, Stevenson's helpers do not possess magical abilities except for Lehua, whose only magical access is through her father, and although she ultimately uses the magic to save Keola, she is only on the island through her father's use of the magic. Indeed, the only magic that takes place is harmful and exploitative to the islanders, and ultimately to the sorcerers themselves, while it is also the source of Keola's salvation. Stevenson's story thus functions as a cautionary tale of a protagonist who almost dies as a result of his engagement with magic and his desire to gain economically through exploitation.

Traditionally, in a wonder tale, the protagonist engages and defeats evil forces ("Changing Function" 10). In this regard, Stevenson again challenges and subverts the expectations of the genre. While Keola overcomes and survives the threats to his life, Stevenson does not construct him as much of a hero, at least not one who is willing and able to save himself or anyone else. Keola's ultimate salvation comes not by his own hand but at the hands of his wives and the boat captain. He barely manages to survive until others rescue him. Circumstances happen to Keola, and he is carried along with the tide, sometimes literally. Instead of functioning as the traditional hero or folk protagonist who overcomes evil through his own cleverness, Keola is an anti-hero or a trickster

figure whose greed gets him into trouble, like Jack, the protagonist in “Jack and the Beanstalk,” a European fairytale. Keola bumbles into his troubles and must rely on others to rescue him. He is a cautionary rather than exemplary figure. Not only is Stevenson’s anti-hero incapable of fighting evil, but Keola even has a hard time distinguishing evil from good.

In the wonder tale, the protagonist usually experiences some “temporary setback” that leads to a renewed and stronger return (“Changing Function” 10). Stevenson subverts this element in “The Isle of Voices.” Keola only endures the various setbacks he encounters until his next deliverer comes along. Kalamake leaves him for dead; the ship’s mate abuses him; and the cannibals want to eat him. These setbacks do not make Keola stronger, nobler, or wealthier. He continues to be carried away by his next circumstance. However, Keola does learn from some of his mistakes. The second time he receives a warning from his wife (his second wife), he heeds her advice. Keola hides from the cannibal tribe, and he is saved from death.

The wonder tale generally sees the villain defeated in the end (“Changing Function” 10). For instance, Jack’s giant falls from the beanstalk and dies, no longer a threat. Stevenson’s story emphasizes the irony available within the genre in his treatment of all three of the threats to Keola’s life. Kalamake is left for dead on the island that he exploited and used for his own means of livelihood. The mate refuses to listen to the warnings of the natives who he thinks know nothing and ends up eating a fish known by them to be poisonous. The cannibals, who sustain themselves through killing and eating people, are slain on their own beach by invisible entities that they believe are the spirits of the dead that have come to avenge themselves. Stevenson deals out poetic justice in

the end to these three entities. However, these villains are defeated not at the hand of the hero but through their own greedy or evil acts, a comeuppance of sorts as their evil deeds find them out. Ultimately, they are judged by their own actions, or possibly an act of Providence from Stevenson's Presbyterian tradition, not by the actions of a human judge of behavior.

In the end, the protagonist's defeat of the villain and the completion of his mission usually lead to his "marriage, [riches,] survival and wisdom, [or] any combination" of those rewards ("Changing Function" 10). Keola, through no actions of his own, enjoys all of the above. He is reunited with his wife Lehua, with whom he inherits his father-in-law's wealth. He escapes with his life and, one could argue, wisdom: he and Lehua decide to confess all to a missionary and donate money to care for the lepers on their island of Molokai, whose plight Keola and Lehua have heretofore ignored. Stevenson, again subverting the elements of the genre, constructs a protagonist who enjoys all the spoils of a victor although he has not defeated his enemy. Keola has been saved through the actions of others, and his primary enemy, Kalamake, may still be alive. Although one could argue that Keola is dishonorable, lazy, and selfish, he nonetheless enjoys the rewards of a hero's victory without performing the actions of a hero. Good and evil, like justice itself, thus occur arbitrarily in Stevenson's tale. Some who do evil deeds receive death and some life. Stevenson's world is characterized by randomness and an arbitrary sense of justice. Zipes recognizes the fact that all of these elements do not have to be included in a tale for it to be considered a wonder tale. Indeed, Stevenson adapts the plot structures and other tropes of the wonder tale and *märchen* in

order to construct a fairy tale that entertains with magic and suspense while also preserving traditions of Polynesian folk belief and island culture.

In addition to adapting other features of the wonder tale, Stevenson subverts the happy ending characteristic of *märchen*, similar to his subversion of the happy ending in “The Bottle Imp.” The expected happy ending in the tale is qualified by the happy couple’s fears that their community now suspects them of being sorcerers and that Kalamake might return and seek vengeance. Stevenson’s adaptation of the *märchen* genre allows him to communicate important points when the audience’s expectations of the genre fail to materialize. In “The Isle of Voices,” Stevenson’s ending contrasts what should be a happily-ever-after ending with an ending that leaves the protagonist in apprehension that his adventures might not be over. Subverting audience genre expectations of a truly happy ending raises questions about why the author has failed to supply the expected closing. The ambiguities that characterize Stevenson’s *märchen* are in full force in the story’s ending, in the form of the moral inconsistency of the missionary as well as other potential threats to Keola and Lehua’s potentially happy future. First of all, their confidence in the missionary’s advice to contribute to the well being of the lepers lead Keola and Lehua to donate to the leper colony on the island. However, even though he has cautioned them not to tell anyone about the source of their wealth, the missionary questions Keola and Lehua’s story of magic, and informs the police that they may have been counterfeiting money. There is also no reassurance that Kalamake will not reappear and seek revenge on the pair. Keola and Lehua have no assurances that they will live happily ever after; they are left only with a question: “who shall say?” (“Isle” 122). As Zipes notes, the ending of wonder tales implies a

continuation of the story, “the true beginning” (“Changing Function” 10). Rather than experiencing a new beginning, Keola and Lehua experience something more akin to a warily ever after continuation as they must continue to be vigilant about the possible return of Kalamake, as well as their tenuous situation in their community.

The moral ambiguity and dualism present in colonialism appears in “The Isle of Voices” as a series of microcosms of morality existing in larger systems of immorality. Morally ambiguous characters inhabit Stevenson’s fairy tale as they work in and through paradoxical systems of ethics that feature dualisms that undermine any professed moral codes. A pivotal example of the dualisms arising from the intermingling of Western and Polynesian belief systems appear in the character of Kalamake, who in Polynesian traditions is a wise man and elder, while in Western traditions, is a man of wealth and influence. He serves to demonstrate the narrator’s opening comments that the Kingdom of Hawaii is a land filled with superstition and ancient folk belief. Kalamake commands respect and fear from the inhabitants of the land. Indeed, he functions as a legendary, mythical character might in a different type of story. Kalamake is a “cunning . . . prophet” whom the people of the community seek for advice, planning their lives according to his word (103). In addition to being a prophet, Kalamake is also a warlock, a sorcerer, and a wizard. The people trust him with their lives, even though they know that his methods include prognosticating “by the means of evil creatures” (103). Indeed, his power rests on the community’s knowledge that he exacts revenge through supernatural means on anyone who crosses him.

Kalamake’s wealth is also the stuff of legend, his riches giving rise to the saying that something is as “bright as Kalamake’s dollars” (103). However, Keola learns that

Kalamake obtains his riches through supernatural forces, or as Keola says, “out of the Devil’s pocket” (104). Kalamake’s function as the community wise man and prophet, coupled with his self-serving acquisition of wealth and revenge on those who try to thwart him, represent Stevenson’s views of colonizers and those who participate in their economic system, particularly Christian missionaries who utilize their elevated position in the colonized community for their own gain. Stevenson mistrusted many of the Christian missionaries in the South Seas because he believed them to be there for their own aggrandizement, despite the church’s stated aims to save non-Christians from eternal damnation. His characterization of Kalamake’s use and abuse of Christianity to shore up his political interests reflects Stevenson’s skepticism about the exploitative practices and hypocrisy of the organized church. The trusted prophet Kalamake is a wizard and a sorcerer out for his own profit. “Kalamake, the wise man of Molokai” (103), straddles the cultures in which he finds himself intertwined in British colonial Hawaii. He neither fully accepts nor embraces either culture whole-heartedly so he may acquire as much wealth as possible. Pictures of King Kamehameha V of Hawaii and Queen Victoria sit side by side in his house to further illustrate his dual allegiances (104). Kalamake has the books of an educated man and owns a Bible, yet he simply hides the Bible when he begins to work his magic, representing so-called Christian colonizers who would deny the foundational truths that they believed in order to exploit economic opportunities.

In Kalamake, Stevenson was exposing what he saw as corruption in religious places. Many of the ministers and missionaries in the South Seas were willing to depart from the tenets of Christianity to receive some profit or political favor to make their lives more comfortable. For instance, the Reverend Hyde represented all that Stevenson most

despised about hypocritical Christianity and colonialism; Father Damien symbolized all that was good about those same systems. Colonialism and the Christian missionary effort, which worked in tandem, made possible and supported Father Damien's mission to the lepers of Molokai. However, these same systems provided the rationale for the Reverend Dr. Hyde's moral judgment of Father Damien's supposed moral failings. Stevenson's letter argues against Hyde's assessment of Father Damien and proclaims his views that Father Damien's actions represent the essence of Christian thought and belief: "the man who tried to do what Damien did, is my father . . . and the father of all who love goodness; and he was your father too, if God had given you grace to see it" ("Father Damien" 30). According to Stevenson, Hyde missed the main point of the matter when he criticized the morality of Father Damien, who gave his life to bring comfort to the afflicted Polynesian lepers while Hyde enjoyed the comforts afforded to him by the exploitation of the Polynesian people.

Kalamake's dualism, helping and giving advice while exploiting the people and the land, represents a microcosm of British colonialism and missionary work. Kalamake's Bible and his magic sorcerer's implements alternately share the same hiding place. They are both used as a means to control people, exploit the land, and gain material wealth. Indeed, Kalamake's method of acquiring wealth involves the exploitation of the land at the expense of the people. He, along with others like him, takes advantage of those who ascribe to folk belief in the supernatural and those who hold to Christian belief to ensure that he might obtain his riches with impunity at any opportunity. Kalamake displays his dualistic nature when he leaves Keola for dead after Keola challenges Kalamake's authority and pride. Just as Long John Silver appears to

Jim Hawkins in *Treasure Island*, Kalamake behaves “like a father” to Keola, becoming a mentor to him (110). However, when the two reach the Sea of the Dead, “the warlock seemed to change” (110). Kalamake turns into a giant, crushes the boat, and leaves Keola for dead. In this passage, Kalamake is both father and warlock, again representing the dualism of his nature and reminiscent of the ambiguous relationship between Jim and Silver. The protagonist Keola himself goes from being prideful, greedy, belligerent, and lazy to a son and then to a victim who feels shame for the greed and fear that lead him to his distress (111).

In addition to Kalamake’s straddling of cultures, Stevenson’s portrayal of the colonizers’ boat exemplifies the misalignment and confusion of ethics. The captain of the boat is a “good man” who treats Keola well, even saving him from certain death, prompting Keola’s observation that “[i]n some ways the ship was a good place” (112). However, the captain operates within the larger system of colonization. Like Father Damien giving aid to the lepers of Molokai, the boat could not have saved Keola except through its presence in the region due to its colonial mission and purposes. Likewise, the ship’s crew is “no worse than other whites” (“Isle” 112), even though they are in reality foreign invaders. These paradoxical circumstances create moral ambiguity for the protagonist. Keola can “never be sure of them” (“Isle” 113). The captain and the mate operate as mirror images of each other. The captain “was a good man” but the mate was “the most difficult man to please Keola had ever met with” (112). The mate and the captain are doubles, representing two sides of human nature. They work in tandem and are said to “lay down on the house together” (113). Yet, the mate abuses Keola daily both physically and verbally while the captain treats him with kindness. The mate and the

captain seem to ultimately act as one body, which complicates the moral atmosphere of the ship. This makes life unbearable for Keola, whose survival is again afforded by the sea as he jumps from the boat to salvation.

When Keola jumps overboard to escape the ship by going to an island that has been spotted (he does not want to inadvertently sail back to Molokai), he comes to the island he originally visited with Kalamake through magical means. Stevenson here juxtaposes more paradoxical images to illustrate Keola's situation and the moral atmosphere of the story. On the boat, Keola is open to attack by the mate, but the next moment Keola is free from the mate's abuse as he jumps overboard. Although Keola is free from the mate's abuse in the water, Keola is now in danger of being attacked by sharks, although he finally reaches safety, even if only for the short term. Keola's time on the island is fraught with ambiguous moral circumstances that make assessing the situation difficult. The island itself has a dual nature. During part of the year, the cannibals live there, and the rest of the year they move to another island. Stevenson also describes Keola's time on the island as happening in "two periods," one in which he is alone and one in which he is in the company of the tribe (114). At first Keola finds no people on the island, but he finds houses in which people live. He finds ashes, which imply a fire, but the ashes are cold. Although he is on an island, Keola can find no potable water. Furthermore, he discovers that he is on the very island to which Kalamake transported him to restore his wealth. While Keola had wanted to return to this island and collect money, now he is terrified and stranded. Later, when told of the voices on the island, Keola learns that the voices only occur on the sea side of the island and that the lagoon is safe. Keola's safety, situation, and habitation could hardly be more ambiguous.

Nothing and no one are who they appear to be, and positive elements can become threatening in moments, making Keola's situation chaotic and filled with contradictions. Indeed, his emotions are influenced by his situation, and Keola is not exempt from possessing a double nature. Stevenson portrays Keola as emotionally complex. After he is with the tribe, Keola experiences subsequent states or conditions, one in which he is sad, one in which he is happy, and one in which he is more afraid than he has ever been in his life. The ambiguous conditions of life have had an effect on Keola's temperament.

Like the island, the inhabitants of the place exhibit a dual nature that Keola finds difficult to assess. When Keola first meets the tribe upon their return to the island, they welcome him, exempt him from work, and even provide for him with food and shelter and a wife. Later he learns that he is in the company of cannibals who plan to eat him. Much like his time among the ship's crew, Keola's dealings with the cannibal tribe sends confusing signals. Although they take Keola into their number, Keola can "never be sure of his new friends, for he judged they were too civil to be wholesome" (115). Indeed, by Keola's island wife's admission the tribe delights in taking communion of "wine and biscuit" as the ministers have catechized them (118), yet they are also "eaters of men" (117). Like Kalamake, the cannibal tribe plays both sides of the system. They engage in traditional tribal practices while enjoying the exploits of the colonial system and nominal adherence to Christianity.

While Stevenson portrays the island inhabitants as morally complex, the two women in the story also exhibit complex natures. On one hand, the women are the ones who save Keola. Lehua, Keola's first wife, tries to warn her husband about her father's power. She also ultimately saves Keola from his fate at the hands of the cannibals.

However, she is the daughter of Kalamake, so she has been knowingly giving her assent to his ways. Lehua has not left her father's house; she continues to remain under his roof and his protection. Lehua might not know the full extent of her father's evil, but she does know the danger he poses to those who cross him as seen in her warning: "I would let my father be. He is a dangerous man to cross. [. . .] Keola, you are a baby in my father's hands; he will take you with his thumb and finger and eat you like a shrimp" ("Isle" 108). To be sure, women in both traditional and colonial cultures depended on fathers and husbands for their very existence, so her assent to her father's domination is less a reflection of her moral ambiguity than of a complex dynamic of dependence and fear, reproducing the dynamics of colonialism itself. Keola's island wife, like Lehua, also exemplifies the dual nature of humankind and the morally ambiguous nature of the world. She is not given a name, reflecting perhaps the tenuous nature of her relationship with her husband and Keola's existence with the cannibals, but she warns Keola of danger from her family, the tribe. However, she is also a cannibal. She must act so as to protect herself, but she also acts unselfishly to save Keola.

Keola's experiences with the Christian missionary from whom he and Lehua seek counsel represent paradoxes that he encounters with other individuals. The missionary advises them to give away their "ill gotten" gain to the leper colony at Molokai, which they do ("Isle" 122). However, the missionary also informs the police about the possibility that Keola and Kalamake were minting counterfeit money. The missionary provides sound advice and tells the couple not to talk about the situation to anyone, yet he basically turns them in to the police so they can watch Keola and Lehua. The Christian missionary seeks to aid the couple while also exposing them to authorities that can jail

them. Like the people on the ship and the cannibal tribe, the missionary represents confusing moral impulses that represent a microcosm of Christianity operating within a colonial system that both protects and dominates through systems of fear and dependence.

In “The Isle of Voices,” Stevenson presents humans who are a mix of both good and bad; whether whites or natives, colonizers or missionaries, his characters cannot be neatly categorized as good and bad. Creating “The Isle of Voices” as *märchen*, Stevenson presents a highly engaging and entertaining wonder tale that preserves elements of a vanishing island culture that included cannibalism and supernatural belief systems. Adapting the genre’s formal elements, he can at the same time perform the cultural work of fairy tales whereby he can illuminate the moral ambiguities that he saw in the colonial system and institutional Christianity as well as in traditional Polynesian culture. Magical and supernatural elements of Stevenson’s *märchen* enliven the story, document a vanishing world, and critique the colonial system that caused its end.

CHAPTER THREE: "THE WAIF WOMAN"

The third story in Stevenson's intended volume of *märchen* is set in Iceland rather than in Polynesia like its two companion stories, "The Bottle Imp" and "The Isle of Voices." Stevenson's introduction sets up expectations in terms of the temporal and chronological setting. It is "a tale of Iceland, the isle of stories, and of a thing that befell in the year of the coming there of Christianity" ("The Waif Woman" 256). Like "The Isle of Voices," "The Waif Woman" portrays a culture in which Christianity comeslingles with pagan magical forces. Unlike "Bottle Imp" and "Isle of Voices," "Waif Woman" is not a Polynesian tale but an adaptation of an Icelandic saga, written after Stevenson read William Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon's translations. The saga tells the tale of Aud the Light-Minded, the vain and controlling wife of Finnward Keelfarer of Snowfellness, and the mysterious Thorgunna, an enigmatic newcomer to the land who sails in from the south islands with treasure and finery. Thorgunna's mystery lies in her appearance as well as the fact that her origins are unknown; she is "as tall as a man," possessing "hair of the dark red" and a face "dark, the cheeks full, and the brow smooth," of unknown age, "some saying sixty, others forty" (257). Those who have sailed with her "spoke of her in whispers, for they seemed to think that she was ill to deal with and not more than ordinary canny" (257).

Conflict arises between the two women when Aud becomes obsessed with owning Thorgunna's possessions, "chests of clothes beyond comparison, fine coloured stuffs, finely woven, the best that ever came into that island, and gewgaws for a queen" (258). Aud is especially covetous of Thorgunna's "cloak of the rare scarlet laid upon with silver, beautiful beyond belief," "a silver brooch of basket work that was wrought as fine

as any shell,” and clothes “of all the colours of the day, and fire, and precious gems” (258). The story follows the development of Aud’s envy and desire. Thorgunna refuses to sell her belongings and warns Aud away from them. Yet Aud thinks she can influence Thorgunna to sell her the finery, and invites her to live with them since the stranger has no family nearby. Thorgunna accepts Aud’s invitation to live in her family home with her husband, Finnward Keelfarer, son Eyolf, and daughter Asdis. Aware of Aud’s intentions, Thorgunna tells Aud that she will work for her keep, noting that none who have given her shelter have ever suffered from her staying with them. Thorgunna’s work and behavior implies preternatural associations:

Inside the house and out she wrought like three, and all that she put her hand to was well done. When she milked, the cows yielded beyond custom; when she made hay, it was always dry weather; when she took her turn at the cooking, the folk licked their spoons. Her manners when she pleased were outside imitation, like one who had sat with kings in their high buildings. It seemed she was pious too, and the day never passed but she was in church there praying. (260).

However, Thorgunna is also a woman of contradictions for, despite these exemplary characteristics, “she was of few words, and never one about her kin and fortunes. Gloom sat on her brow, and she was ill to cross” (260-261). When Aud finally yields to temptation and steals her brooch, Thorgunna dies, leaving Finnward to carry out her dying wishes, which include burning the bed linens that Aud had coveted, bestowing the other finery on Asdis, and burying her in the distant Christian churchyard. However, Aud bullies her husband to keep Thorgunna’s belongings, and trouble ensues, including the

death of Finnward and then Aud. The curse is lifted only when the children burn Thorgunna's belongings.

Despite the story's difference in setting from "The Bottle Imp" and "The Isle of Voices," "The Waif Woman" represents Stevenson's continued experimentation with *märchen*. Although the story deals with similar themes addressed in the other two tales, this retelling of an Icelandic saga departs from "The Bottle Imp" and "The Isle of Voices" in that it does not directly explore the larger implications of the effects of British colonization working in tandem with the mission to Christianize native populations. However, Stevenson's interest in Scottish history and the Norse and British colonization of Scottish lands suggest explanations for his preoccupation with the sagas and Norse history, especially as they intersect with his interests in British colonization of Polynesia. "The Waif Woman," like its intended companion pieces, explores what happens when Christianity is superimposed on a pagan native culture. Like "The Bottle Imp" and "The Isle of Voices," "The Waif Woman" features characters who are vain and greedy and who suffer due to their human failings. While Keawe of "Bottle Imp" and Keola of "Isle of Voices," are redeemed after suffering harm due to their own shortcomings, Aud of "The Waif Woman" dies directly as a result of her greed and self-centered failure to follow the wishes of a Christian who is also a sorceress, reflecting Stevenson's preoccupation with moral ambiguity and cultural mixing. Like Kalamake of "Isle of Voices," Thorgunna of "Waif Woman" represents the dual nature of human character, exhibiting behavior of both witch and saint.

"The Waif Woman" is Stevenson's adaptation of an episode from an Icelandic saga originally written in Old Norse, which had been recently translated by William

Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon and published in 1892.¹ Stevenson's original subtitle for his tale, "A Cue from a Saga," denotes his inspiration for the story, taken from a tale in the second volume of *The Saga Library*, containing *The Eyrbyggja Saga* (or *The Story of the Ere-Dwellers*). Several sources document the connection between Morris's story and Stevenson's tale. First, in November of 1891, Stevenson asked Edward L. Burlingame, editor at *Scribner's Magazine*, to send him his copy of Morris and Magnússon's *The Saga Library* (*Letters, Vol. 7* 189). Burlingame was a friend and business associate who more than a few times sent boxes of requested books from the British Isles to Stevenson at his home in Samoa. The letter also dates the writing of the tale at sometime before December of 1892, based on the November 1891 date of the request letter to Burlingame and the 1892 publication date of the *Eyrbyggja Saga*. Furthermore, Stevenson mailed both "The Waif Woman" and "The Isle of Voices" to Colvin in the same post at the beginning of December 1892. This reckoning would place the writing of "The Waif Woman" at around the same time that Stevenson was writing "The Isle of Voices," both being written as companion pieces to "The Bottle Imp" (*Letters, Vol. 7* 436).

Stevenson outlined his intentions to Sidney Colvin on more than one occasion in their regular postal correspondence, stating that he planned to create companion pieces to "The Bottle Imp" to include in a collection of *märchen* that he was "slowly to elaborate"

¹ Karl Anderson (356) argues that the second volume of *The Saga Library* that contained *The Eyrbyggja Saga* was published in 1891 based on a Morris letter dated September of that year acknowledging a copy of the book from the publisher. Anderson further argues for an 1891 publication date by citing a review of volume two which appeared on October 24, 1891, in *The Saturday Review* (356). The publication date in the book, however, is 1892, and both of Anderson's examples can be explained by the practice of sending advance copies for the author and reviewers. Stevenson almost certainly did not receive the book before 1892.

(*Vailima Letters*). However, due to agreements between Colvin and the publisher Cassell in 1892, “The Beach of Falesá” appeared in print with “The Bottle Imp,” a decision that troubled Stevenson (*Letters, Vol. 7* 436). Stevenson had insisted that his three *märchen* “each [had] a certain merit, and they fit in style,” unlike “The Beach of Falesá,” which was “the child of a quite different inspiration” (*Letters, Vol. 7* 436). On December 1, 1892, Stevenson replied to Colvin’s news concerning the publishing agreement by sending him the manuscripts of “The Isle of Voices” and “The Waif Woman,” the only other tales for his volume of *märchen* that Stevenson had managed to write up to that point. He further directed Colvin to include them in the Cassell book with the other stories, even asking him to emphasize the separation of the three *märchen* from “The Beach of Falesá” by creating a “fresh false title: ISLAND NIGHTS’ ENTERTAINMENTS” (*Letters, Vol. 7* 436). “The Waif Woman: A Cue from a Saga” was to appear as the bookend to “The Bottle Imp: A Cue from an Old Melodrama” with “The Isle of Voices” sandwiched between (*Letters, Vol. 7* 436). Stevenson was eager to publish his book of fairy tales with the “Waif Woman” included and “The Beach of Falesá” denoted as a separate story.

However, “The Waif Woman” was never published with “The Bottle Imp” and “The Isle of Voices” in Stevenson’s lifetime, despite the fact that he was explicit about his intentions. Some suggest that Fanny Stevenson influenced the decision not to publish it. Stevenson wrote to Colvin on December 2, stating that “[his] wife protests against ‘The Waif Woman’” (*Letters, Vol. 7* 437).² Apparently, Fanny did not want to see “The

² Stevenson was in the habit of keeping a letter diary in which he would write dated notes for many days before finally sending them off together through the mail to Colvin.

Waif Woman” in print at all. Included with Stevenson’s letter to Colvin was an extensive letter from Fanny explaining her reservations about the story. Concerning Stevenson’s retelling of the Morris and Magnússon translation, Fanny says:

I object to it because it does not seem fair to take the best bit out of the other man’s book, and the few changes Louis has made, to my mind, do not improve the thing . . . Indeed I don’t want that Saga in Louis’s book. Please, if you disagree with me, read the real one before things are settled. The real one is more confused, not so well written (of course) yet all the same better; and I think it too cheap an affair to meddle with at best. (*Letters, Vol. 7* 437n8)

Whether or not Fanny influenced the publisher not to include the story is unknown.

However, scholars have raised interesting concerns about her attitude towards the story.

Fanny’s motives are unclear. She says that Stevenson’s adaptation contains better writing than its predecessor, yet those changes do not make the tale any better. Maybe Fanny’s problem was with the story itself. William Gray suggests that Fanny is implying plagiarism when she accuses Stevenson of “take[ing] the best bit out of the other man’s book,” a charge that Gray finds ironic considering that Fanny openly plagiarized a story from Stevenson’s cousin and became indignant when accused (“Incomplete Fairy Tales” 105). Fanny’s story “The Nixie,” a tale that she published in 1888 in *Scribner’s Magazine*, was inspired by and some say stolen from a story written by Stevenson’s cousin Katherine (“Friends and Correspondents”). W. E. Henley, Stevenson’s longtime friend and collaborator and the inspiration for Long John Silver, experienced a falling out with Stevenson over Fanny’s alleged use of Katherine’s story, a strain that continued until the author’s death. Fanny’s innuendos about plagiarism are also curious considering

that Stevenson was intentionally retelling an existing tale, engaging in the age-old practice of adaptation. Indeed, the same charge that Fanny made about “The Waif Woman” was later leveled against Stevenson about “The Bottle Imp.” The popular American press of the early twentieth century accused Stevenson of plagiarizing the tale based on the existence of previous versions of the story (Kirtley 69 n1). However, Stevenson’s subtitle suggestions to Colvin for “The Waif Woman” and “The Bottle Imp”—both beginning with “A Cue from a [_____]”—openly acknowledge the origins of and inspirations for the stories and establish the case that Stevenson is engaging in folklore adaptation. In fact, that was his primary aim.

Rather than plagiarism, Gray suggests that Fanny disliked “The Waif Woman” for other reasons. He argues that Fanny may have found the portrayal of the women, Aud and Thorgunna, objectionable and that she may have felt that Stevenson’s characterization of a manipulative wife hit too close to home (“Incomplete Fairy Tales” 106). Indeed, a constant strain existed between Stevenson’s wife and friends, many of them agreeing that she was too controlling. Others agree with Gray, including G. S. Hellman, who suggests that Fanny took issue with her husband’s portrayal of women in his retelling (Furnas 470). On the other hand, J. C. Furnas supports Fanny’s charge against “The Waif Woman,” finding it an “over-derivative” and “inferior work” (470). Many think that Colvin’s decision not to publish the story had nothing to do with Fanny’s wishes due to the frequent friction between them (“RLS’s Friends”). Whatever Fanny’s reasons may have been for wanting to keep the story out of print and whatever reasons may have motivated Colvin and the publisher, not only was “The Waif Woman” never published with its companion stories, but it was never published at all in Stevenson’s

lifetime. The tale saw its first publication posthumously in 1914 in *Scribner's Magazine* and later in a single-volume printing in 1916, which saw limited distribution (Swearingen 177). By that time, Stevenson's popularity was waning with the advance of the modernist movement, which may explain the obscurity of "The Waif Woman" among the reading public and literary critics (Dury).

Stevenson's decision to adapt an episode from an Icelandic saga included in Morris and Magnússon's *Saga Library* was due at least partially to Stevenson's admiration of William Morris's work. Scholars estimate that *The Eyrbyggja Saga* existed for an unknown period in oral form before it was written sometime in the late thirteenth century by an unknown author (Vésteinsson 42n42). Morris and Magnússon's translation was the "first complete English translation" of the saga, although it had previously been translated into Latin and, in 1814, Sir Walter Scott had published "Abstract of *Eyrbyggja Saga*" (Burns). The saga tells the epic tale of feuding clans living in Snowfellness in medieval Iceland. Snorri the priest figures prominently in the saga, reflecting the historical character's role as integral to establishing Christianity in Iceland. In a letter to his friend W. E. Henley dated as far back as November 1881—at least ten years prior to the writing of "The Waif Woman"—Stevenson praises Morris's 1876 translation of the *Volsunga Saga* (*The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs*), which he was then reading for the first time: "Morris's *Sigurd* is a great poem; that is so. I have cried aloud at this re-reading; he had fine stuff to go on, but he has touched it, in places, with the hand of a master" (*Letters, Vol. 3* 253). Not only does Stevenson express enthusiasm for Morris's work, but he also shows excitement about the sagas themselves, going on to say in his letter to Henley that "Yes. Regin and Fafnir are incredible fine.

And moral!” Stevenson signs off with lines of verse inspired by the Norse saga preceded by the expression “*Vive les Norses*” (254). During the same time, in a letter to Edmund Gosse, another close friend, Stevenson closes with “Morris’s *Sigurd* is NO END” (255).³

It is not surprising, then, that Stevenson would be eager to read Morris’s Icelandic translations. In 1892, after obtaining a copy of Morris and Magnússon’s *Saga Library* from Burlingame, Stevenson once again became immersed in the work of one of his most admired writers and even wrote to Morris expressing his thoughts on the new work. In a letter dated February 1892, Stevenson pours out his appreciation, acknowledging Morris as “Master,” recognizing that “I [Stevenson] was long in your debt and deep in your debt for many poems that I shall never forget, and for *Sigurd* before all, and now you have plunged me beyond payment by the *Saga Library*” (*Letters*, Vol. 7 236). Stevenson remained a fan of both Morris and the Norse sagas.

However, Stevenson also voiced frustration with Morris’s translation. Tongue-in-cheek, he claims that his letter’s main purpose is to “bark at [Morris’s] heels” (*Letters*, Vol. 7 237) about the language he uses in the translation. Stevenson chides Morris about using the words *where* and *whereas* interchangeably:

For surely, Master, the tongue that we write, and that you have illustrated so nobly, is yet alive. She has her rights and laws, and is our mother, our queen, and our instrument. Now in that living tongue, *where* has one sense, *whereas* another. In “The Heathslaying Story”, [sic] p. 241, line 13, it bears one of its ordinary senses. Elsewhere and usually through the two volumes, which is all that has yet

³ Emphasis is Stevenson’s.

reached me of this entrancing publication, *whereas* is made to figure for *where*.

(*Letters, Vol. 7* 237)

Stevenson goes on in the next paragraph: “For the love of God, my dear and honoured Morris, use *where*, and let us know *whereas* we are, wherefore our gratitude shall grow, whereby you shall be the more honoured whenever men love clear language, whereas now, although we honour, we are troubled.” Although Stevenson wrote the letter, sources are unclear about whether or not he actually sent it to Morris. Colvin claimed that the letter was in Stevenson’s papers after his death; however, according to Booth and Mehew, the letter currently belongs to a collection of Morris’s papers (*Letters, Vol. 7* 236 n1). Possibly at some point someone sent the letter to Morris. However, whether it happened before or after Stevenson’s death and who mailed it remains a mystery. What is clear is that Stevenson both admired Morris’s work and took issue with some of his uses of language.

Stevenson’s appreciation of Morris’s work was not the only driving force for the author’s decision to adapt an Icelandic saga; connections between Scottish and Scandinavian culture likely contributed to his choice. The Norse colonized parts of northern Scotland, including Orkney, Caithness, and the Hebrides, in and around the ninth century (Mitchison 7). The colonial mission of the Norse in Scotland and with the British colonial project in both Scotland and Polynesia might have moved Stevenson to seek to explore a pre-English Scottish identity in Norse history and saga. The idea that Scottish identity had a pre-Christian, pre-English link to Norse tradition must have intrigued Stevenson. An important fact to note is that Stevenson wrote “The Waif Woman” when he was living in Samoa, and around the same time he also wrote “The Isle

of Voices.” Stevenson recognized that the British colonial mission in Polynesia threatened to permanently change traditional South Seas culture and identity, just as Scottish traditions and culture underwent changes due to the pressures of invasion and colonization. Study of the sagas allowed him to explore a potential pre-English, pre-colonial identity for Scottish tradition.

In “Some Fictions of Scandinavian Scotland,” Margaret Elphinstone highlights the historical, cultural, and literary connections between Scandinavia and Scotland, a link she recognizes was “embodied in Scottish literary texts from the twelfth century to the twenty-first” century (106). Elphinstone includes Stevenson among other Scottish writers such as Sir Walter Scott who were enchanted with the Norse sagas and the heroic history-legends recounted within them. Through “styles, motifs and tropes of medieval Scandinavian literature,” later Scottish writers created a “Norse meta-narrative of Scotland’s past” (105). Elphinstone recognizes the Norse saga as the precursor to the Scottish novel in content and narrative structure. She argues that the two genres are closely related and that the use of Norse saga by Scottish writers has created a new “Scottish-Scandinavian tradition . . . or at the very least a sub-genre” (107). Stevenson contributed to the tradition of Scottish-Scandinavian literature with “The Waif Woman.”

Stevenson’s enthusiasm about the Norse-Scottish connection may have influenced the renaming of one of the main characters in his version of the saga. In the *Eyrbyggja Saga* chapters from which Stevenson takes his story, a section of Morris and Magnússon’s translation entitled “Of Thorgunna, and How She Came to Frodis-water,” the main characters are “Thurid the goodwife of Frodis-water,” married to Thorod, and Thorgunna, the waif woman of the title, “a South-island woman” new to Frodis Water

(Morris and Magnússon 136). Stevenson allows Thorgunna to keep her name but renames Thorod, “the goodman of that house,” calling him “Finnward Keelfarer” (“The Waif Woman” 256). The most compelling part of Stevenson’s character reshaping is the renaming of Thurid, Finnward’s willful wife. In his version of the story, Stevenson renames her Aud the Light-Minded. The goodwife’s new name calls to mind a character found in another section of Morris and Magnússon’s translation: Aud the Deep-Minded (270). In fact, Aud is a figure from Norse history mentioned in other sagas as well as the *Eyrbyggja*. History knows Aud the Deep-Minded as the daughter of Ketil Flatnose, who had conquered and ruled over the Hebrides Islands. With his fellow settlers, Ketil Flatnose extended the Norse reach into other areas of northern Scotland such as Caithness and even into Ireland (Mitchison 7). Ketil’s daughter Aud the Deep-Minded was known as a devout Christian, and after becoming a widow, she relocated her family to Iceland around the year 895 (Hood 17). By all accounts, Aud was a strong, capable, and independent woman trekking across the sea without a husband to a new, unfamiliar land to resettle her family. The appellation *Deep-Minded* reflects the character of this historical figure. The suggestion is reasonable that Stevenson, in realizing the Scottish connection or at the very least being familiar with Aud the Deep-Minded from other sections of the saga, may have appropriated her name, without associated character traits, for the Aud in his story, who he designated as *Light-Minded*. This subversion of the character’s name and traits allows Stevenson to employ a well-known legendary figure’s name while adapting her character to play out his story of moral transgression. Perhaps he intended to inspire others to read the sagas and find in them the account of the historic Aud.

Stevenson's adaptation of the saga reflects his love of folktale and his ongoing experiment in *märchen*. Like most Scottish writers adapting and dealing with sagas, Stevenson retained the voice of Norse sagas: "terse, dispassionate and immediate, with idiosyncratic narrative devices that strike a chord in the mind of any reader familiar with the sagas" (Elphinstone 108). However, Stevenson's method of saga adaptation relies heavily on folkloristic elements, "read[ing] much like a modern Icelandic folk tale" (109). Most significantly, in "The Waif Woman," Stevenson shifts the focus from the saga's preoccupation with heroic figures to the concern of the folk. Although Aud the Light-Minded is the wife of the ruling chief of the land, "The Waif Woman" centers on the common concerns of Aud in managing household affairs. In Morris and Magnússon's translation of the saga, the hero figure Kiartan and the priest Snorri become integral to the plotline, stepping in to put an end to Thorgunna's curse. Stevenson, however, eliminates these heroic males from his story altogether, which provides "The Waif Woman" with a quality that identifies it with folklore, differing from the epic nature of saga in its focus on Aud's life as a jealous, grasping housewife.

While in Morris and Magnússon's translation the curse of Thorgunna affects the entire community, in Stevenson's story the conflict remains a household matter. In the saga translation, blood rains down in Frodis Water, which leads to Thorgunna's mortal sickness. The men carrying her corpse to the church see her ghost walking and waiting on them, and not long afterwards they bury her. When they return home, the "Moon of the Weird came in there evening after evening," after which a wise man pronounces that "the deaths of men will follow thereafter" (Morris and Magnússon 145). Afterwards, the entire community becomes afflicted with the same disease that killed Thorgunna, and many

begin to die. Other odd omens begin to appear, signaling the communal nature of the curse and the sins that caused it.

Although Stevenson reserves these troubles for Aud and Finnward's house alone, others witness Thorgunna's sorcery during the journey to bury her in the churchyard. Her origins are a mystery. She is not clearly from the South Islands of Iceland like the Thorgunna of Morris and Magnússon's story (Morris and Magnússon 136). Although Stevenson's Thorgunna has come to Snowfellness on a "ship . . . from the South Isles" ("Waif Woman" 256), she consistently refuses to give an account of her people or her kin. When pressed, she says, "I count kin with none [. . .] my kin is of the greatest, but I have not been always lucky, so I say the less" (259). Thorgunna also appears vigorous and able-bodied, yet some people suspect that "she [is] sixty," others that "she [is] but forty," and all consider her "ill to deal with and not more than ordinary canny" (257). Her age and origins are a mystery, and everything she works at seems to prosper beyond ordinary means, echoing the mystic and magic of the old sagas and emphasizing the ambiguity surrounding the identity of Thorgunna.

Stevenson's Thorgunna also seems to be unusually associated with her brooch, a large, beautiful jewel fit for royalty. The story does not directly state it, but implies that the brooch may be some sort of talisman for Thorgunna. It is silver, "wrought as fine as any shell and [. . .] broad as the face of the full moon" ("Waif Woman" 258), recalling Morris and Magnússon's "Moon of Weird," which brings the curse on the community (Morris and Magnússon 145).⁴ Certain events associated with the brooch suggest that

⁴ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, *weird* has several meanings. Here, Morris and Magnússon use the word to refer to "fate; destiny" ("Weird," def. 1a).

Thorgunna's power is tied to it. Although she seems old and is a large woman, when Thorgunna wears the brooch in the hall at night, she has the appeal of a young, beautiful woman, "so that the young men forgot the word [. . .] as to the woman's age, and their looks followed her all night" ("The Waif Woman" 261). The brooch's magic becomes apparent when Aud, overcome with jealousy and envy, sneaks into Thorgunna's bedroom to steal the brooch while Thorgunna sleeps. As Aud takes the item, she looks at Thorgunna, who, while asleep, "talked the while to herself, and her lips moved" and "the open eyes of her stared in the eyes of Aud" (262). Stevenson may be referring here to the "evil eye," a Scottish and European folk belief that "presumed a capacity of certain people to blight other humans (especially the young) and their household processes, beasts, and crops by a look" (Hutton 59).

The brooch apparently has the power to prolong Thorgunna's life. Aud notices after taking the brooch that Thorgunna seems older: "her years returned to her in slumber, for her face was grey and her brow knotted" ("The Waif Woman" 262). Immediately after Aud's theft, Thorgunna sickens and dies. Finnward describes Thorgunna's sickness and death in archaic language that highlights the connections to the old stories:

Thorgunna's "weird has come to her," her fate or destiny has arrived (263). To be sure, we do not know enough about Stevenson's Thorgunna to have any real sense of her pre-

Stevenson also employs the term to communicate the concept of fate, but, in addition, he implies other meanings of *weird* throughout "Waif Woman." According to the *OED*, the word can also refer to "magical power [or] enchantment" ("Weird," def. 1b) and can be used to refer to "a witch or wizard, a soothsayer" who is "supposed to have the power to foresee and to control future events" ("Weird," def. 2b). This connotation of *weird* further complicates Thorgunna's identity and associates her with the uncanny.

story or her fate. Rather, the focus is as it has been on Aud's fate as a result of her actions regarding Thorgunna.

In his adaptation, Stevenson retains one supernatural element basic to many folklore traditions including Nordic folklore: ghosts with material bodies. In Iceland, ghosts were a central feature of folklore, but "the peculiarity of Scandinavian and Icelandic ghosts lies in the fact that they are corporeal" (Chadwick 50). In Icelandic folklore, the walking dead possess bodies and are capable of movement, work, and speech. These ghosts are "generally mischievous, and greatly to be feared" (50). Stevenson's waif woman Thorgunna, like the character of the same name in Morris and Magnússon's translation, reappears after her death in a physical body, providing food for the hungry men transporting her corpse to the church where she wants to be buried. Her presence in Stevenson's story serves to shame the host who refuses to provide meat for the weary travelers who faithfully bear Thorgunna's body and to put fear into the hearts of all who see her ("Waif Woman" 267). She also represents a type of Christ as she resurrects bodily and feeds those under her care. As associated with both ghost and resurrected helper, Thorgunna's nature and identity remain ambiguous.

The curse of Morris and Magnússon's Thorgunna wreaks havoc on the entire community of Frodis Water resulting in the deaths of hundreds. Stevenson's Thorgunna exacts revenge only for Aud's pettiness and Finnward's faithlessness by causing their deaths. Although Finnward attempts to fulfill Thorgunna's dying requests, Aud bullies him into refraining from burning the bed linens, denying Thorgunna's last wishes. After spending a restless night in Thorgunna's sheets, Finnward goes to sea and drowns. Asdis attempts to warn her mother to burn all of Thorgunna's things and be done with the curse,

but Aud will not listen. In a terrifying and disturbing scene, Asdis looks on while her mother Aud lies dying:

There lay Aud in her fine clothes, and there by her side on the bed the big dead wife Thorgunna squatted on her hams. No sound was heard, but it seemed by the movement of her mouth as if Thorgunna sang, and she waved her arms as if singing.

“God be good to us!” cried Asdis, “she is dead.”

“Dead,” said the dead wife.

“Is the weird passed?” cried Asdis.

“When the sin is done the weird is dreed,” said Thorgunna, and with that she was not.⁵ (“Waif Woman” 275)

Once Aud and Finnward pay for their offenses, Thorgunna’s purpose is accomplished. Stevenson’s stories often reflect his observation that the innocent necessarily pay for the excesses of others. In “Waif Woman,” however, only Finnward and Aud pay for their guilt. Although Finnward is characterized as being bullied by Aud, nonetheless, he must suffer for his failure to carry out Thorgunna’s dying requests and his lack of resolve that leads him to give in to his wife’s greed. In Stevenson’s Polynesian stories, leprosy symbolizes this inevitability, reflecting ancient beliefs in communal sin and retribution by vengeful gods. Stevenson’s departure from this trope in “Waif Woman” reflects a more

⁵ According to the *OED*, to “dree one’s weird” (“Weird,” def. 3a) is to suffer a predestined fate, and the term *weird* in this context also connotes that the fate was “inflicted by supernatural power, esp[ecially] by way of retribution” (“Weird,” def. 3c). This association with the supernatural further confirms Thorgunna’s otherworldly associations.

modern view that reserves suffering for the sinful, while it also retains the magical elements of the story's origins.

This treatment reflects the story's departure from the original "violent, heroic world" of the saga in order to tell a folk tale that also documents the meeting of old pagan and new Christian beliefs, referencing stories that have threatened to become extinct. Elphinstone claims that this transfer of focus expresses a tale of the "domestic intrigues and jealousies of saga women" (109). Contrary to what Elphinstone and perhaps Fanny suggest, I would argue that Stevenson's story is not simply a study in the petty emotions of strong, jealous, controlling women and weak men. Rather, Stevenson frames his retelling as *märchen* in order to examine the human condition along with capturing old, disappearing traditions. The conflict of the human psyche with outside forces compelled Stevenson's attention when he first encountered Morris and Magnússon's *Eyrbyggja Saga*. At the time he was reading the translation and working on "The Waif Woman," the Stevensons had already moved into the Vailima estate in Apia, Samoa, the home they acquired in 1890 ("Timeline"). Stevenson was immersed in the struggles and issues of the Polynesian people. He saw their native way of life slowly deteriorating, being effaced by the colonial forces and the accompanying influx of ideas foreign to native Polynesian culture. The idea of nontraditional ideas and people invading a culture and exerting extraordinary influence on it was in the author's mind when he first encountered Morris and Magnússon's sagas, as were his observations regarding how Christianity and native beliefs and practices collided.

Morris and Magnússon's translation of the particular section of the *Eyrbyggja Saga* that Stevenson chose for his adaptation begins with the coming of Christianity and

the total dominance of the religion over old customs. Stevenson's version of "The Waif Woman" begins in the section of the saga that takes place after the "coming . . . of Christianity" ("Waif Woman" 256). That section of Morris and Magnússon's translation states that the events took place "the same summer that Christ's faith was made law in Iceland" (Morris and Magnússon 109). In his version of the tale, Stevenson likewise locates the story in terms of "the year of the coming there of Christianity" ("Waif Woman" 256). His story particularly examines the melding of Christian and pagan beliefs that occurs with such historic change not in terms of national or cultural identities of a people, as a saga would, but in the lives of individual members of that society, represented by Aud and Finnward.

The clash between cultures brought on by the comingling of Christianity with the old pagan Norse religion was a theme that many Scottish writers explored as they sought associations between Scotland and the Norse. Stevenson, much like his fellow Scottish authors, viewed those conflicts in terms of Scottish tradition that was lost with the coming of British colonization of their own country. Elphinstone argues that:

The coming of Christianity to Iceland, as recounted in the sagas, produces a starkly paradoxical culture, in which the mores of the new, legal religion and the old, internalized religion, work against one another to produce tensions not only in society, but in each individual psyche. [. . .] The saga writers are not concerned with such introspection, but for later Scottish novelists the conflict between Christian and pagan in the Norse world seems to reflect a psychological concern that remains relevant. (116)

Stevenson reframed this conflict again in light of South Seas culture, and it embodied both the Scottish nation's old traditions and the Polynesian situation, which continued to unfold more immediately around him. Norse custom and tradition gave way under the sway of missionary hegemony, much like Polynesian culture changed under colonial and Christian influence. The enforcement of Christianity in these pagan cultures also reminded Stevenson of the Catholic/Anglican/Presbyterian struggles that were part of Scotland's, and thus Stevenson's, identity.

Central to "The Waif Woman" is the struggle, as Badley notes, "rooted in the history of religion in the Nordic regions": the "tension between rival ethical systems—the pagan revenge imperative and Christian forgiveness" (19). In "The Waif Woman," this struggle plays itself out in the power that Stevenson ascribes to Christianity, the relationship between the main characters, Thorgunna and Aud, and the contradictions existing within each individual woman. Thorgunna's Christian orientation is expressed in her desire to be buried in the churchyard. However, she remains a sorceress, and her ethical orientation demands that she take revenge on the unrighteous. Aud is nominally Christian, yet is a thief, a bully, a liar, and all manner of qualities that violate Christian ethics. Neither woman forgives the other, so Christianity cannot be said to prevail in Stevenson's story. Thus, Stevenson represents Christianity as a system that continues to operate alongside pagan beliefs and traditions and does not feature an exemplary character who would suggest that either system was the more morally efficacious. Stevenson's version establishes this difference from Morris and Magnússon's translation in the way that Thorgunna's curse is lifted. In their translation, Kiartan, the heroic leader, attempts to stop the hauntings and curses in Frodis Water, seeking counsel from Snorri

the priest, who in turn sends another priest to perform Christian rites in Frodis Water, to “sing the hours there, and hallow water” and to hear confessions in order to prescribe penance and offer absolution from sin (Morris and Magnússon 151). Snorri the priest also commands that Thorgunna’s bedclothes be burned and recommends that other rites be performed to justify the sinners. Thorgunna’s curse lifts only as the priest performs Christian rites, a Catholic mass complete with holy water and hymn-singing, to rid the house and the community of any evil spirits (152). Kiartan and his men also call a *door-doom*, a form of Norse law that charges and sentences the offending dead (151). This exorcism of sorts also results in the healing of the offending wife, Thurid. In Morris and Magnússon’s translation, Christian powers overcome the curse and resolve the trouble. The old remedies of handling the dead who walk and even Norse law are only efficacious in restoring order in the context of the new Christian requirements.

In Stevenson’s version of the story, no help is sought or arrives in the form of Christian rite or exorcism to lift Thorgunna’s curse, and no Kiartan, the heroic leader, or Snorri the priest are available to save the day. In “The Waif Woman,” the plague on the house, which has caused the deaths of Finnward and Aud, is only resolved when the demands of the dead Thorgunna are met. The “weird of Thorgunna was [not] lifted from the house on Frodis Water” (“Waif Woman” 276) until Eyolf and Asdis,⁶ the children of Aud and Finnward, burn the woman’s belongings, exceeding Thorgunna’s demand that only called for burning the bed linens. Although Thorgunna identifies as a Christian, the

⁶ The children of Finnward and Aud do not appear in the episode of the saga adapted by Stevenson. Rather they are a creation of Stevenson for “The Waif Woman.” However, the characters Eyolf and Asdis appear elsewhere in the saga. Stevenson employs these characters to emphasize family life rather than the epic characters themselves.

lifting of her curse can only come through meeting her final wishes. Stevenson thus employs both a Christian context as well as the ancient practice of revenge common to pagan and pre-Christian cultures.

Just as these larger power systems are portrayed as morally ambiguous, as they are in “The Bottle Imp” and “The Isle of Voices,” Stevenson’s characters are not easily defined in precise terms of good and evil. Thorgunna and Aud both illustrate the concept of a “divided self” (Elphinstone 116). Thorgunna is a Christian, even a pious one who wishes to be buried in the churchyard Skalaholt, where a priest dwells who can perform last rites, thus fulfilling the dictates of her religion and “where [she] trust[s] to hear the mass-priests singing over [her] head so long as time endures” (“Waif Woman” 263). Even so, Thorgunna is also a seeker of revenge, eager to “pay [Aud] for” her “shallowness” (“The Waif Woman” 259). The exact nature of Thorgunna’s origins remain unknown even after her death, further complicating her identity: “From that day to this no man has learned her story or her people’s name; but be sure the one was stormy and the other great. She had come to that isle, a waif woman, on a ship; thence she flitted, and no more remained of her but her heavy chests [that contained her belongings] and her big body” (264). Although Thorgunna identifies as a Christian, she is also the witch figure who curses those who do not fulfill her last wishes, represented by the required burning of her sheets echoing later witch burnings by Christians. Badley characterizes witch burning as an attempt to reconcile pagan revenge and Christian forgiveness, both providing sacrificial offering and exacting appropriate revenge (19). The same apparent contradiction exists within Thorgunna, who is both the witch and the pious one. She is devout in her religion, obeying conventions of hospitality and generosity while she is

Aud's guest. Yet she seeks revenge through her curses. Even before her death, Thorgunna vows that she "will pay [Aud] for" her insincerity and manipulation of those around her (259). For Stevenson, Thorgunna exists as both pagan and Christian, representing the morally ambiguous characteristics of human nature that he has observed in stories of the past and in his own day.

Aud the Light-Minded and Thorgunna, then, reflect Stevenson's vision of the dual quality of human nature and the contradictions that exist within individuals and cultures. By adapting epic characters from Icelandic saga engaged in constructing Iceland's national story and identity, Stevenson creates individual characters engaged in daily life during a historic period of medieval Iceland, adopting the *märchen* genre in order to create an engaging folk story that chronicles an almost lost tradition and that explores human morality through an entertaining, engaging folktale of magic and vengeance. The story thus fits both in genre and theme with his Polynesian tales, which were inspired by Stevenson's interest in how national culture and identity are forged through historic processes of invasion and colonization. Even though the setting differs in time and place, "The Waif Woman" echoes this interest, belonging, as Stevenson claimed to his publisher, with "The Bottle Imp" and "The Isle of Voices."

CONCLUSION

This study has argued that Robert Louis Stevenson's intention in writing "The Bottle Imp," "The Isle of Voices," and "The Waif Woman" was to create *märchen*. His letters to publishers and literary representatives make his wishes clear that these three stories belonged together in one book entitled *Island Nights' Entertainments*. According to Stevenson, the stories were alike in terms of genre and style, and he wrote them with specific purposes in mind. Stevenson crafted "The Bottle Imp" first, an adaptation of previously existing tales. Shortly thereafter, he wrote two other companion pieces: "The Isle of Voices," an original tale inspired by Hawaiian folklore, and "The Waif Woman," an adaptation of an Icelandic saga. Due to publishing decisions, Stevenson's volume of *märchen* never materialized, and these three tales have never been published together.

All three stories should be considered *märchen* due to the cultural work the author attempts through the subversion and adaptation of generic elements and motifs of previous tales. Utilizing *märchen* allowed Stevenson the opportunity to record the cultural moment. While "The Isle of Voices" is an original tale and "The Bottle Imp" and "The Waif Woman" are both adaptations, all three tales include folkloristic tropes and, in the case of the two retellings, motifs from previous versions of the tales. The significance of examining these tales as *märchen* rather than categorizing them as another genre consists in the flexibility of *märchen* to be shaped to suit the author's particular needs, which in Stevenson's case is entertaining his readers while also recording vanishing folkways. The magical and supernatural elements inherent in fairy tales were easily adapted to recording traditional Polynesian belief systems. His *marchen* capture complex

cultural moments by employing elements of folktales and legends, and the adaptation of generic motifs of folktales provide moral and social critique of cultures in transition.

Stevenson's *märchen* reflect his deep concerns about his adopted home, Samoa, and the South Seas culture in general. Stevenson viewed colonialism as an inherently destructive system, a stance that is elucidated in his letter writing campaign in the British press in which he scathingly criticized the abuses of colonial representatives in the region. He viewed Christianity as a system that ideally should provide help and dispense mercy, a perspective that is clearly outlined in many of his writings exposing what he viewed as the hypocrisy of Victorian society. However, Stevenson's experiences in Polynesia suggested to him that both systems, like the people who constructed and administered them, were capable of both good and evil, providing both help and harm, and the three stories examined in this study represent those contradictions and ambiguities. With "The Bottle Imp" and "The Isle of Voices," Stevenson critiques colonialism and Christianity as they threatened Polynesian culture while at the same time commenting on the moral ambiguity of all humanity. With "The Waif Woman," Stevenson adapted an Icelandic saga into a domestic story that reflects the conflicts between traditional Norse pagan beliefs and Christianity. As in his Polynesian tales, the story documents a vanishing traditional culture threatened by new ideas. At issue in these stories is the need for individuals to learn to negotiate traditional beliefs that conflict with new practices that perfectly reflect neither old nor new systems, thus resulting in morally and practically confusing circumstances that are life- and culture-threatening.

Stevenson identified with the Polynesian cause not only because he developed an interest and love for the South Seas cultures but also due to connections he found

between the colonial situation in Polynesia and that of his own Scottish heritage.

Scotland, a land consistently ravaged by invading forces, remained dear to him even as he took up residence in Samoa later in his life. In the Polynesian struggle, he recognized parallel historic Scottish struggles against waves of invaders, and in the not too distant past, the attempted destruction of traditional Scots culture and religion by the conquering forces of English colonialization. Stevenson especially despised the hypocrisy of the Christian missionary project, which largely worked in conjunction with colonial efforts, often a force of harm rather than help. His stories thus feature religious beliefs and practices, both old and new, both as fantasy elements, but more importantly, as a means of fictionally representing clashing systems of moral and ethical belief and practice.

Rather than the constraints of more realistic genres, the *märchen* genre afforded Stevenson the ability to examine and critique these forces, utilizing magical and supernatural elements, in far more complicated terms, paralleling generic and historic complexity.

In “The Bottle Imp,” considered by Stevenson to be the “*piece de résistance*” of his volume of *märchen*, the author employs a cast of morally ambiguous characters that represent the contradictory nature of colonized Polynesian society (*Letters, Vol. 7* 436). Complicating moral categories, for instance, are white men, representing nonnative colonial forces, who interact with the protagonist in ways that interrogate the presumption that colonialism is strictly a force of destruction. Three white men, or *haoles*, provide pivotal roles in the beginning, middle, and end of the tale, driving the plot forward and establishing the ethical ambiguity of the tale. The first white man, an American, supplies the protagonist with the bottle, which becomes both means of wealth

and means of damnation. Although his intention is to rid himself of the bottle to save his soul from condemnation, in doing so he simultaneously bestows both blessing and curse on Keawe. The white man appearing toward the middle of the tale identifies as a Christian yet suspects Keawe's wife Kokua of being a witch and will not help her on a mission of mercy to save her husband. As a Christian, the man should presumably be able to discern good from evil intentions, yet he cannot in Kokua's case. Although the man is unsure of Kokua's motives in dealing with the bottle, he helps her anyway, further complicating his moral stance. Although Keawe the protagonist, along with his wife Kokua, presents a morally positive characteristic according to Stevenson in that he is willing to sacrifice himself for others, he also must learn to "take the good along with the evil," a refrain repeated throughout the tale (79), even as others come to harm so that his soul does not have to be condemned.

"The Isle of Voices" similarly complicates views of human morality and the situation in colonial Polynesia. Characters exhibiting both good and evil intentions are juxtaposed against a backdrop of colonialism. Stevenson represents these colonial and Christian institutions as contradictory in a practical sense, working both good and evil, for help and harm. In this tale, he exposes such contradictions through a number of doubles, both people and situations, working in opposition to one another but fundamentally operating on the same plane. For instance, the trading ship that saves the protagonist Keola is part of the colonial operation, yet "in some ways the ship was a good place" ("The Isle of Voices" 112). Indeed, among the crew, the colonial schooner features both the captain, "a good man," and the first mate, a rogue who continually abuses Keola (112). The colonial trading schooner saves him, yet, in the end, Keola must

escape, for “you can never be sure of them,” a refrain that echoes in all facets of this tale (113).

Keola’s family exhibits these same contradictory traits. Kalamake, his father-in-law, is both warlock and Christian, operating between the two systems, identifying with the colonial/Christian enterprise as a profiteer and with native traditional customs as prophet/seer. On the one hand, he helps Keola by supporting him and not forcing him to work. On the other hand, Kalamake kills whoever gets in his way, including an attempt on Keola’s life. Likewise, Keola’s wives operate in contradictory environments. Although complicated by their status as women who must be dependent on men in their cultural context, Keola’s wives are embedded in morally ambiguous situations, one the daughter of a sorcerer and the other the daughter of a cannibal tribe’s chief. However, Keola experiences salvation at the hands of both of these women, and both wives provide Keola with advice that save his life.

The most significantly ambiguous character is Keola himself. He operates as a conventional trickster character in the beginning. Stevenson subverts expectations associated with his status, however, when Kalamake thwarts Keola’s attempts at manipulation for gain. Keola also fails to meet expectations of an antihero; he does nothing to save himself or anyone else. Indeed, characters and circumstances carry Keola throughout the tale, and he does little to contribute to his own story. Through these subversions of the trickster and antihero tropes, Stevenson signifies the ambiguity of the colonial situation, which leaves no place for the native to construct his own narrative and no way to effect change over his circumstances.

Although “The Waif Woman” differs in setting and historical period from the other two tales, with it Stevenson continues to portray the conflicts that arise when traditional cultures are confronted with new practices. Stevenson complicates genre conventions when he transforms an epic saga into a domestic folktale. Rather than focusing on the heroes of Morris and Magnússon’s saga translation, Stevenson concentrates on the household struggles of Aud and her conflict with Thorgunna, an episode that occurs significantly “in the year of the coming there of Christianity” (“The Waif Woman” 256). Stevenson intentionally juxtaposes the old pagan Norse tradition with the newcomer, Christianity. Although both Aud and Thorgunna identify with the new religion, they represent contradictory values, the old clashing with the new. For instance, Thorgunna, like Kalamake, identifies as both witch and Christian. Whereas Kalamake’s fortune is the result of magic, the source of Thorgunna’s is unknown, although her power derives from a magic brooch, her talisman. Thorgunna participates in Christian practices in that she desires to be buried in the churchyard with a priest to officiate. However, she magically controls events throughout the story. Thorgunna’s reliance on a talisman contradicts her piety and raises doubts about how much she subscribes to Christian beliefs. The dead Thorgunna’s desire and power to seek vengeance on Aud’s household also calls into question her identification with Christian values. Thorgunna’s choice to seek revenge rather than to forgive belies her Christian piety, and the power she wields that allows her to return from the dead in bodily form implies her alliance with dark forces. In addition, Stevenson’s remedy for stopping Thorgunna’s curse is not Christian exorcism or ritual but is reminiscent of witch burning as Aud’s children burn all of Thorgunna’s possessions. Thorgunna, Aud, and even the

children must negotiate what it means to live in a Christianized world that has no answer to the struggles of the old world that remain.

In “The Bottle Imp,” “The Isle of Voices,” and “The Waif Woman,” Stevenson adapts existing tales, employs folkloristic tropes and motifs, and subverts generic conventions to intentionally create *märchen*, a genre that incorporates elements of magic and supernaturalism. While his tales read as entertaining stories of mystery and magic, they reflect Stevenson’s skillful reworking and creation of stories that capture powerful cultural moments that reflect the history of humankind as invasion and colonization create unstable cultures that must be negotiated in order to survive. Throughout his stories, Stevenson’s protagonists encounter moral ambiguities, in both circumstances and people, precipitated by the clash between traditional beliefs and new ideas, providing a commentary on modernity itself insofar as the modern world is illegible when approached simply through traditional assumptions and beliefs. Stevenson’s stories thus imply that ambiguity is necessarily the character of the modern experience in a rapidly changing world.

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