Ancient, wild, indigenous: Stevenson’s bagpipe nation

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‘As the heather and the thistle to the Scotsman, so are the pibrochs, reels, strathspeys, marches, which only his bagpipe can perform to his entire liking.’

Is there an object more quintessentially Scottish than a set of Great Highland bagpipes? In shops up and down Scotland’s high streets and within its airports and railway stations, shelves are laden with tins of shortbread, fudge, and tea bearing the image of a handsome, kilted male piper, often standing atop a windswept crag. Likewise, it is rare to spend a summer day in Scotland – from Edinburgh to Ullapool – without coming across pipers (singly or formed up into bands) regaling the crowds with bonnie tunes. In the recent past, too, the pipes have taken on a sterner political role in Scotland, with both sides in the 2014 independence campaign harnessing their energy to inspire support for opposed visions of the country’s future.

Robert Louis Stevenson seems to have shared something of this notion of the intimate relationship between bagpipes and Scottishness. A prime example appears in his California travelogue *The Silverado Squatters* (1882). When Scots are abroad ‘in some far country’, Stevenson writes, they put aside the ‘local patriotisms and prejudices’ that keep Scots at each other’s throats back home. The reason for this brotherhood in foreign lands is, Stevenson avers, because ‘somewhere, deep down in the heart of each one of us, something yearns for the old land, and the old kindly people’.2 This claim appears in a chapter entitled ‘The Scot Abroad’, wherein, in addition to contemplating the ‘inscrutable’ mystery of expatriates’ longing for ‘that grey country, with its
rainy, sea-beat archipelago’, Stevenson recounts meeting four fellow Scots: two are quiet, serious men; the third, a ‘filthy, ragged’ Dickensian house-breaker; and the last, a fellow who stands out because ‘there never was any one more Scottish in this wide world’:

He could sing and dance – and drink, I presume; and he played the pipes with vigour and success. All the Scots in Sacramento became infatuated with him, and spent their spare time and money driving him about in an open cab, between drinks, while he blew himself scarlet at the pipes.⁵

Many of the stereotypical ingredients of Scottish identity are embodied in this most-Scottish of individuals: singing, dancing, drinking, and piping. For the expatriate Scots community in Sacramento, the latter activity served as a particularly weighty reminder of their faraway homeland, as they and their ‘vigorous’ piper racketed along through the streets of the California capital. This carnivalesque reunion was not to endure, however, for after the piper ‘had borrowed money from every one, he and his pipes suddenly disappeared’.

There is the possibility that bagpipes here and elsewhere in Stevenson’s oeuvre are merely scenic ornamentation. Henry James seems to point us in that direction when he wrote of the young Stevenson:

How must it not have beckoned on the imagination to pass and repass, on the way to school, under the Castle rock, conscious acutely, yet familiarly, of the grey citadel on the summit lighted up with the tartans and bagpipes of Highland regiments! Mr. Stevenson’s mind, from an early age, was furnished with the concrete Highlander, who must have had much of the effect that we nowadays call decorative.⁶
As so often with Stevenson, however, objects, identities, and associations that appear to be transparent – merely ‘decorative’ – become, on closer examination, intriguingly complex. That is certainly the case, I suggest, in Stevenson’s most sustained representation of bagpipes and piping: the musical battle between Alan Breck Stewart and Robin Oig Macgregor in chapter 25 of his 1886 adventure novel *Kidnapped*. Not coincidentally, this novel is also one of the pre-eminent texts by Stevenson that critics mine for insights into attitudes – by the author and, to a lesser extent, his culture at large – towards Scottish national identity. For Claire Harman, ‘the relationship between the volatile, charismatic Alan Breck Stewart and his cautious companion David [Balfour]’ is a ‘way of separating and analysing the two different kinds of Scottishness in Stevenson himself’. The ‘disunity of Scotland is lamented throughout’ Harman argues, and the ‘vision of Scotland that the book projects is essentially tragic’.7 Similarly, Maureen Martin has recently contended that ‘the problem of the national identity of Scotland as a whole is at the heart of the novel’. Stevenson interrogates Scotland’s identity, Martin explains, by counterpoising the Highlands’ ‘wild primal masculinity’ and the urban, feminised masculinity of the Lowlands – a binary that, she notes, is both emphasised as well as disrupted.8

There is much to agree with in such accounts, and the reading I am proposing builds on a shared sense that Scottishness is deeply at issue in Stevenson’s novel. When brought into the orbit of material history, however, an examination of bagpipes and piping in *Kidnapped* leads, instead, to an organic, indigenous heterogeneity that profoundly disturbs fixed, easily recognisable identities of nation and nationality. The sense of Scottishness as fluid and uncaptureable by conventional identity markers that I detect in Stevenson’s treatment of bagpipes and piping is glossed in a letter to J. M. Barrie, in which he chuckled at those readers of *Kidnapped* who ‘recognised in David and Alan a Saxon and a
Celt. [...] I deny there exists such a thing as a pure Saxon, and I think it more questionable if there be such a thing as a pure Celt’. A Stevensonian hallmark if ever there were one, rendering normative identities and identifications ‘questionable’ – dissenting from the fiction of racial purity – is, I hope to show, an intimate effect of his more-than-decorative pipes.

In 2008, one of the leading scholars of Scotland’s piping history, Hugh Cheape, published a wide-ranging study entitled *Bagpipes: A National Collection of a National Instrument*. The bagpipe, Cheape notes, ‘has become, with tartan, an icon of Scotland and a symbol of nationhood’. The documentary and material evidence I have examined underscores that this attribution of ‘national’ status for bagpipes – in the nineteenth century as well as today – is a constructed myth of unity that obscures a fascinating history of change and diversity, coinciding with what Jane Bennett theorises to be ‘the capacity of things […] not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own’. In my work, I have also grappled with Barry Menikoff’s argument that in *Kidnapped* (and its sequel, *Catriona* [also known as *David Balfour*]), Stevenson was concerned with depicting ‘the loss suffered by the indigenous culture’. While Menikoff’s inquiries focus on revealing ‘hidden texts’ – such as eighteenth-century histories and legal proceedings – within the two novels, my task has been to cast light on a different sort of indigeneity, a native material, craft, and musical tradition about which, quite possibly, Stevenson himself might have been only partially aware.

In order to grasp Stevenson’s deployment of bagpipes’ actant, ontological ability to denaturalise nation-based cultural and political identities, in this essay I read *Kidnapped* in connection with Donald MacDonald’s seminal preface to *A Collection of the Ancient Martial Music of Caledonia* (published ca 1819) and Stevenson’s own short essay ‘Pan’s Pipes.’ MacDonald was born
in 1776 and died in 1840, and Stevenson lived his entire life in the nineteenth century; yet, for both men, it is the mid eighteenth-century post-Culloden turmoil in Scottish society and culture that guides their treatments of indigenous pipes and piping.\textsuperscript{13}

**Scotland’s ancient martial music**

A Skye-born soldier, piper, and pipemaker, MacDonald prepared and published the first ‘serviceable collections’ of Highland bagpipe music. According to Cheape, MacDonald ‘may have been the first to describe the Great Highland Bagpipe as Scotland’s “national instrument”’.\textsuperscript{14} Appearing in 1819 or 1820, MacDonald’s initial volume is called *A Collection of Ancient Martial Music of Caledonia Called Piobaireachd*. This book is the oldest printed gathering of piobaireachd, a principal genre of pipe music (the Gaelic word *piobaireachd* is often Englished as *pibroch* – including by Stevenson – and translates simply as ‘piping’). In the past, as today, this kind of music is sometimes also known as *ceòl mòr* (large or great music); it is contrasted with *ceòl beag* (small or light music, such as reels and strathspeys). The most common types of piobaireachd are laments, salutes, and gatherings, and they typically contain a melodic groundwork called the *urlar* followed by several variations of increasing complexity. Some piobaireachds run 5 or 6 minutes, while others can take over 20. MacDonald’s *Ancient Martial Music* brings together 23 piobaireachd pieces (hundreds exist, and the form dates back at least to the sixteenth century).

Prompted by a ‘patriotic feeling’ and operating in the hope that readers will become acquainted with ‘the Strains that delighted and animated our Warlike Ancestors’, MacDonald makes several claims that have proven foundational to understanding the cultural ecology of the bagpipe and the piobaireachd genre ever since.\textsuperscript{15} For the nineteenth century, one of the most influential components of MacDonald’s preface was his figuring of anxiety over the potential extinction of a native musical tradition (and
the instrument on which it is played) following Culloden and the dissolution of traditional Highland society. MacDonald saw his role as preserving something truly ancient and fundamentally Scottish, a task he undertook, in part, by interviewing ‘those Patriarchs who had so proudly sounded them [i.e., the ‘ancient tunes’] at the time of the unfortunate “Rising”.’ This ‘wild instrument’ is, MacDonald claims, ‘perhaps, the only national instrument in Europe. Every other is peculiar to many countries, but the Bag-Pipe to Scotland alone’. Music historians have known for some time that bagpipes are, in fact, not unique to Scotland. The Great Highland version does seem to be a Scottish invention; however, the basic technology has taken many forms over the millennia and has been crafted and played in such far-flung places as Sicily, Galician, Bulgaria, Tunisia, and India. Even Geoffrey Chaucer’s fourteenth-century Miller played a set while trotting along to Canterbury. Apparently unaware of these deep international roots, MacDonald winds up his preface in full Ossianic/Romantic throttle, exclaiming:

Even Highlanders will allow that it is not the gentlest of instruments; but, when far from their mountain homes, what sounds, however melodious, could thrill round their heart like one burst of their own wild native Pipe? [...] But the Bag-Pipe is sacred to Scotland, and speaks a language which Scotsmen only feel. It talks to them of home, and of all the past; and brings before them, on the burning shores of India, the ‘heath-covered hills’ and oft frequented streams of Caledonia, the friends that are thinking of them, and the sweet-hearts and wives that are weeping for them there!

Maclaren’s pipes
One need not stretch too far to detect a trace of this piping-induced ‘thrill’ amongst Stevenson’s expat Sacramento Scots. In
Kidnapped, however, the bagpipes are played in Scotland itself, a place where one might expect them vigorously to reaffirm received identities. Yet, upon closer examination, that does not appear to be the case. A lamp that guides me in this direction is Fanny Osbourne Stevenson’s preface to the 1905 edition of Kidnapped, in which she notes that her husband’s conception for the story was of a boy ‘who should travel in Scotland as though it were a foreign country’. A Scot who journeys in a quasi-foreign land called Scotland: amongst all the many strange things David encounters in this disorienting land, the indigenous bagpipes he hears played by three Highlanders during one momentous night stand out for their structural placement in the narrative, their impact on the protagonist’s emotions, and their ability to denaturalise seemingly self-evident identities.

Like MacDonald’s Ancient Martial Music of Caledonia, Stevenson’s Kidnapped is a nineteenth-century response to the 1746 Battle of Culloden and the transformation of traditional Highland society in its aftermath. Set in 1751, the novel features the one starring role for bagpipes in Stevenson’s oeuvre: chapter 25 takes place entirely at the Braes of Balquhidder in rural Perthshire, and is Kidnapped’s final extended piece set in the Highlands. By this time in the tale, David is utterly exhausted, and over the course of a month he is nursed back to health in the sanctuary of one of Alan’s clan allies, Duncan Dhu Maclaren. This kind host, David recounts, ‘had a pair of pipes in his house and was much of a lover of music’.

But piping in Kidnapped is more than a twee interlude or decorative bit of ceilidh-making. What I propose is that the very materiality – what Bennett refers to as ‘thing-power’ – of the greased leather (likely sheepskin) bag, single and double reeds, and 10 to 14 pieces of wood (depending on whether there are two drones or three) that comprise a set of bagpipes produces far more than sound. In a scene that Menikoff points out was ‘wholly original’ to Stevenson and based on not a shred of historical evi-
dence, Maclaren’s pipes and the pieces played on them open a space for apprehending an indigenous Scottishness uninscribed by, and vibrantly troubling to, regional, clan, and sectarian identities. At the same time, they reposition the bagpipe and its music outside the nineteenth century’s increasingly tight association of the instrument with empire, militarism, and aesthetic–material uniformity.

Chapter 25 opens with some important scene-setting. The Braes of Balquidder was a dangerous, indeterminate place: ‘No great clan held rule there; it was filled and disputed by small septs, and broken remnants, and what they call “chiefless folks”, driven into the wild country about the springs of Forth and Teith by the advance of the Campbells’ (p. 177). As readers, we expect nothing but further pain and suffering in this seemingly forsaken land. Yet, it is amongst these human fragments that David and Alan find shelter and healing. It is here – in this threatening, politically damaged ‘wild’ territory – that Stevenson surprises his readers with a harmonious vision of personal and political reconciliation. And it is the music of indigenous bagpipes – indeed, the experience of playing the instrument and hearing Scotland’s ancient music – that helps to bring temporary peace to the novel’s wayfarers, resolve old inter-clan disputes, and foreshadow the eventual happy resolution of David’s adventures (and, to a lesser extent, Alan’s).

‘There was but one thing happened worth narrating’, recounts David. On a certain afternoon near the end of their recuperation in Balquhidder, Robin Oig Macgregor, ‘one of the sons of the notorious Rob Roy’, stopped by Duncan Dhu’s home (p. 178). An enemy of both the Stewarts and the Maclarens, Robin had, nevertheless, braved unwelcome in ‘the house of his blood enemies’ (p. 179) in order to meet David, whom he believed was a kinsman of a man who had fixed his brother’s leg, which had been broken while battling government troops in 1745. Disgusted by David’s complete lack of familial knowledge – ‘I knew no more
of my descent than any cadger’s dog’ (p. 179) – Robin ‘turned his back upon [David] without a sign of salutation’ and made for the door (p. 180). At that very moment, however, just as Robin was about to cross the threshold, Alan stepped inside, ‘and the two drew back and looked at each other like strange dogs’ (p. 180). As Robin and Alan pivoted on the brink of murdering each other with their swords, Duncan Dhu proposed another plan: “Here are my pipes, and here are you two gentlemen who are baith acclaimed pipers. It’s an auld disupute which one of ye’s the best. Here will be a braw chance to settle it” (p. 181). The adversaries agreed, and so ‘Duncan Dhu made haste to bring out the pair of pipes that was his principal possession’ (p. 181).

In the ensuing competition, Robin pipes first, followed by Alan. David reports, ‘I had been pleased with Robin’s playing, Alan’s ravished me’ (p. 182). As it turned out, however, Robin – who boasts that “I can pipe like a Macrimmon” (p. 181), referring to one of the great piping dynasties of pre-modern Scotland – had not yet demonstrated the full extent of his art. Alan admitted himself beaten and ‘made as if to rise’.

But Robin only held out his hand as if to ask for silence, and struck into the slow measure of a pibroch. It was a fine piece of music in itself, and nobly played; but it seems besides it was a piece peculiar to the Appin Stewarts and a chief favourite with Alan. The first notes were scarce out, before there came a change in his face; when the time quickened, he seemed to grown restless in his seat; and long before that piece was at an end, the last signs of his anger died from him, and he had no thought but for the music. (pp. 182-83)

The effect of Robin’s playing is like magic. Alan, a man depicted as emotionally volatile throughout most of Kidnapped, is drawn into a trance-like state devoid of all hostility. Indeed, Stevenson
writes that ‘his anger died from him’, almost as though he were on the brink of being born into a new life characterised, instead, by peace.

In addition to its ‘decorative’ storytelling role, this scene presents a profound challenge to and dissolution of conventional personal and political identities. To begin, a young Lowlander is ‘ravished’ by music generated by older Highlanders playing ancient music – both light music as well as piobaireachd – on his host’s ‘principal possession’ (clearly an ancient and treasured set). Here, too, as Menikoff notes, Stevenson fashions a musical performance that paints a compassionate portrait of Robin Oig (a fierce outlaw ultimately hanged for his criminal acts) and of a ‘peaceful resolution of an intractable hereditary feud’ through Robin’s magnanimous gesture of performing a piobaireachd tune ‘peculiar’ to Alan’s clan.22

In response to his adversary’s marvellous piping, Alan says, “Robin Oig [...] ye are a great piper. I am not fit to blow in the same kingdom with ye. Body of me! Ye have mair music in your sporran than I have in my head!” (p. 182). With this uncharacteristic declaration of humility, ‘the quarrel was made up’, and for the rest of the night Mrs Maclaren’s ‘broshe was going and the pipes changing hands; and the day had come pretty bright, and the three men were none the better for what they had been taking, before Robin as much as thought upon the road’. Implied in this scene of festive amity is that even Duncan Dhu – the host to whom Robin would not even doff his bonnet when he arrived at his home – took part in the night’s playing of tunes and drinking of brose. This inclusion of Duncan is a stunning act of harmony when one considers that it was Robin who had murdered in cold blood his host’s kinsman James Maclaren not long before, an event described by David as ‘a quarrel never satisfied’ (p. 179).

This night of inter-clan Scottish music and fellowship is a tantalising way for Stevenson to draw to a close David’s adventures on what he calls ‘the wrong side of the Highland Line’ (p. 183).
This scene, which Theodore Watts-Dunton in an early review of *Kidnapped* said ‘ranked with the finest humorous scenes of Scott’, speaks, I suggest, to a thick seam of normative-identity disturbance in the novel and Stevenson’s imagination offered by indigenous materiality. To grasp that point, however, it is helpful first to consider other and foreign matter.

**Imperial wood**

On MacDonald (and many others’) account, bagpipes tell us something elemental – primordial, even – about the identity of Scotland’s people. Teetering his *Kidnapped* characters on the liminal south-eastern edge of the Highlands, Stevenson channels much of that same ancient, sacred, and wild spirit. But a question I have not heard asked before is what instruments do we think are being played and what do we think we are hearing when we read of this ravishing encounter amongst the Braes of Balquhidder? And, when we consider the materiality and sounds of the pipes in *Kidnapped*, what might be their immaterial properties and metaphorical resonances within Stevenson’s novel and wider Scottish culture?

The single-droned set of bagpipes (fancifully played by a pig) carved into stone on the fourteenth-century Melrose Abbey is one famous and vivid piece of evidence that Scottish bagpipes have not always appeared in their familiar present form. However, the three-droned (two tenors and a bass) instrument known widely as the Great Highland bagpipe – which, Cheape explains, ‘did not exist before about 1780’, but had already been adopted as the ‘archetype’ bagpipe in the first quarter of the nineteenth century – is the instrument that most often springs to mind in discussions of Scottish piping. From the evidence at hand, it appears that this is the basic (‘standardised,’ Cheape labels it) technology and form that Stevenson’s readers likely also envisioned. Evidence for what some of Stevenson’s early readers imagined – at least visually – with regard to Maclaren’s pipes arises in
the very different illustrations added to early twentieth-century editions of *Kidnapped*. While W. B. Hole depicted Robin Oig standing and playing a set of Great Highland pipes, N. C. Wyeth showed him seated and playing what appear to be half-size Highland pipes (sometimes called reel pipes).  

Like the three-drone Great Highland set I play today, beginning from about the late eighteenth-century bagpipes were increasingly fabricated by professional, urban pipe-making firms using the exotic materials of the expanding British Empire – starting with cocus wood ebony from the West Indies, through ebony of India, to the now near-ubiquitous African blackwood. In addition to the pressures of imperial trade and economics, this shift was fuelled by the competitions set in motion by the Highland Society of London in 1781 and the ease of turning dense, tight-grained tropical woods on a lathe.

An important fourth influence was the increasing incorporation of pipers into the British Army. Pipers had been included in the military as far back as the seventeenth century, and the first evidence for Gaelic-speaking regimental Highland pipers occurs with the raising of the Independent Companies in 1725. Following the Seven Years War (1756–63), the role of the military piper took on a more formal position, replacing, for instance, the traditional fifers in grenadier companies. On the brink of hostilities with Russia, the War Office’s 1854 authorisation of one pipe major and five pipers for each regiment did much to solidify the martial connection for the modern era. Since then, Highland regiments and piping have gone, barring a few exceptions, hand in glove. An anonymous article in an 1893 issue of *Chambers’s Journal*, for instance, calls the Highland bagpipe ‘an instrument especially adapted for military uses’. In fact, Stevenson’s 1887 ballad ‘Ticonderoga,’ set at the time of the Seven Years War, gets in on this act, proclaiming:
Where flew King George’s ensign
The plaided soldiers went:
They drew the sword in Germany,
In Flanders pitched the tent.
The bells of foreign cities
Rang far across the plain:
They passed the happy Rhine,
They drank the rapid Main.
Through Asiatic jungles
The Tartans filed their way,
And the neighing of the war-pipes
Struck terror in Cathay.34

However we might balk at Stevenson’s verb ‘neighing’ to describe the sound of the pipes, his portrait of the scope of Highland regiments’ imperial duties set to the martial sounds of the pipes is spot on.35 Meanwhile, over on the civilian side, many people in the United Kingdom and its former colonies are likely familiar with pipe bands marching down high streets, avenues, and boulevards to help celebrate various public festivals. Emerging in the late nineteenth century, such groups were, in fact, modelled on the ‘military band with pipers and a corps of drums’. Like the military model on which they are based, the ‘art’ of such bands lays in ‘unison’ playing, ‘so that a line-up of twelve or more pipers [is] trained and tuned to sound as one’.36

**Indigenous vibrations**
But this regimented political and acoustic oneness masks a diversity rooted in an earlier, highly local materiality. Peering back to the mid-eighteenth century and before presents the possibility of other pipes at play in Duncan Dhu’s home. Perhaps Stevenson gives us a slight clue to follow here when he has David refer twice in chapter 25 to Duncan Dhu’s ‘pair of pipes’ (pp. 178, 181). The adjective ‘pair’ was a not uncommon way to refer to a set
of bagpipes\textsuperscript{37}, but there is the possibility Stevenson’s use of that word tacitly signifies a set that, as was common until the early nineteenth century, possessed two rather than three drones.

In any event, whether comprising one, two, or three drones, contrary to the standardised imperial model the sundry individual eighteenth-century pipes MacDonald and Stevenson imagined both sprang out of Scotland’s native soil. The \textit{Ancient Martial Music of Caledonia} and \textit{Kidnapped} hearken back to a pre-imperial culture and piping tradition that was expressed through indigenous matter. Before there were British Empire pipes, there were Scottish pipes – that is to say, pipes turned by individual makers from hard native woods, including hornbeam, holly, apple, laburnum, and boxwood.\textsuperscript{38} The displacement of Scotland’s geographically dispersed, frequently rural, independent pipe-makers and their native woods is a story of imperial economics and the British military’s growing need for pipers and pipes, as well as an emergent – soon to be dominant – aesthetic desire for a unified tone and pitch to accompany highly trained and coordinated fighting units marching off to global conquest.

In \textit{Kidnapped}’s tacit figuring of indigenous matter and art, I posit a link to Stevenson’s own stated literary desire in \textit{Underwoods} (1887) – his collection of 38 poems in English and 16 in Scots – to ‘have my hour as a native Maker, and be read by my own countryfolk in our dying language: an ambition surely of the heart than of the head’.\textsuperscript{39} In the same prefatory note, Stevenson says, ‘I confess that [Robert] Burns has always sounded in my ear like something partly foreign. And indeed I am from the Lothians myself; it is there I heard the language spoken about my childhood; and it is in the drawling Lothian voice that I repeat it to myself’.\textsuperscript{40} Not unlike the voices of humans and many other animals, the sounds of a bagpipe arise from the interaction of warm, moist air originating in the lungs and then propelled through pipes and vibrating across tongues (of reeds). The result of this elementary physics, the sounds we hear are directly affected by
the materials out of which stocks, drones, chanters, and reeds are turned and carved. Contrasting earlier, pre-1780 bagpipes with the ‘new’ Great Highland bagpipe, Cheape observes that the ‘surviving material evidence shows that pre-existing instruments were unlike this in every way’. He goes on to surmise that ‘the new instrument must have made a new sound, probably subtly different in degree and timbre’.41 So, again, what do we imagine we see and hear when we consider MacDonald and Stevenson’s old, local, indigenous instruments – those ‘precious’ pre-modern indigenous pipes kept safe in Duncan Dhu’s humble Balquhidder home, but so unlike the militarised Highland regiment pipes Stevenson, his readers, and even his expat Sacramento Scots would have known best?

**Ecstasies of the goat-footed piper**

For a glimpse of what this ancient woody matter might all mean, I will draw to a close with a short consideration of remarks Stevenson made in a little essay, originally published in 1878, called ‘Pan’s Pipes’. In this piece, Stevenson extols the pleasures of periodically shedding the ‘respectable citizen’ identities that ‘flee life’s pleasures and responsibilities and keep, with upright hat, upon the midway of custom’.42 Instead, the author recommends opening ourselves to Pan’s strange music:

> Science writes of the world as if with the cold finger of a starfish; it is all true; but what is it when compared to the reality of which it discourses? Where hearts beat high in April, and death strikes, and hills totter in the earthquake, and there is a glamour over all the objects of sight, and a thrill in all noises for the ear, and Romance herself has made her dwelling among men? So we come back to the old myth, and hear the goat-footed piper making the music which is itself the charm and terror of things.43
This goat-footed piper, Stevenson writes, ‘trolls out a stave of ecstasy’ that he connects to an ‘uncouth, outlandish strain throughout the web of the world’.44 In this encomium to Pan’s charming and terrifying piping, I am reminded of Sir John Graham Dalyell’s observation, in his survey of Scotland’s musical traditions, that ‘The sylvan divinity, Pan, who can be identified with Satan of Scotish [sic.] superstitions, is said to appear like his prototype as a performer on the bagpipe’.45 In Stevenson’s imagination, while clearly not Satanic, the bagpipe and those who played it – including the outlaws Robin Oig and Alan, as well as the roaming, roguish Scot who ‘blew himself scarlet’ way out in California – certainly shared ancient, quasi-mythic roots powerfully at odds with the ‘midway of custom’ in its myriad forms. In Kidnapped, Stevenson provocatively rescues the bagpipe from what David Murray identifies as the ‘essentially martial connotation’ it acquired from the fifteenth through the nineteenth century.46 As Ticonderoga shows, Stevenson was well aware of the bagpipe’s military history. He might, indeed, have known that the instrument was a staple of the Jacobite army.47 Perhaps even Alan, who had fought in the 1745-46 conflict, had sounded his pipes in battle. But Stevenson never tells us that. Instead, in Kidnapped Alan sheds his soldier persona, playing the pipes through the night within a homely domestic space.

By attending to actant materiality – to thing-power – Bennett says her goal is to ‘try, impossibly, to name the moment of independence (from subjectivity) possessed by things’. In order to do so, she turns away from ‘the language of epistemology to that of ontology’ in order to grasp ‘an active, earthy, not-quite-human capaciousness (vibrant matter).’48 How perfectly that aim suits the vibrational acoustics of a being half-mortal, half-divine, and how true it is to the indigenous pipes that, in Kidnapped, leave a young, rational Lowlander ‘ravished’, and an ancient clan feud, at least for one night, dissolved.

Returning to my overarching topic of the complexities of
Scottishness, my quest with all this bagpipe matter has been to open a channel to the ‘uncouth’ and ‘outlandish’ in Stevenson’s Kidnapped and Scottish culture more generally. Indigenous pipes and their ancient ecstasies: perhaps, through these, with Stevenson as our guide, we catch a glimpse or hear a few notes of the ‘charm and terror of things’ that subverts supposed orthodoxies of people, place, and nation. In a part of Scotland ‘filled and disputed by small septs’ and inhabited by ‘broken remnants’, peace and unity – albeit on a very small scale – come about through ancient music played upon a deeply valued, carefully kept pre-modern instrument crafted from native wood. ‘It would go against my heart to haggle a man that can blow the pipes as you can!’ Alan declares to his former arch-enemy Robin (p. 183). For Alan to go with his heart entails setting aside old, deeply rooted, seemingly insoluble internecine feuds, remaking himself from an intractable bitter enemy into a fellow Scotsman. For Stevenson to present this surprising eruption of concord as the ‘one thing [...] worth narrating’ in David’s long sojourn in the Braes of Balquhidder strongly suggests a vision that locates in Scotland’s indigenous cultural traditions forces that do not arrest time and change but, rather, that are capable of inspiring a future society flexible and confident enough to encompass diverse histories, families, religions, and regions. David concludes chapter 25 by observing that the strange events he narrated in that section of his book were ‘in a manner history’ (p. 183). History, these words seem to suggest, comprises not just pitched battles and bloodthirsty murders, but the slighter, homelier, surprisingly peaceful events that happen in isolated, out-of-the-way parts of the world to people who are neither kings, princes, dukes, or generals. Perhaps that is the kind of local, indigenous history out of which Scotland’s future might be forged.
NOTES


3  Ibid.

4  Ibid., p. 212.

5  Ibid., p. 213.


12  Barry Menikoff, *Narrating Scotland: The Imagination of Robert Louis Stevenson* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), p. 3. Menikoff’s reading of Stevenson pivots on a contrast with what he calls Sir Walter Scott’s ‘roseate progressivism’ (p. 3). It should be noted that this view of Scott is by no means universally held by other scholars; in fact, recent work on Scott has emphasised the polyvocality and multiplicity of his figurations of Scottish post-Culloden history and society. On these persuasive strands of criticism, which actually overlap in some important ways with my own understanding of Stevenson, see, for instance, Andrew Lincoln, *Walter Scott and Modernity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007); and Caroline McCracken-Flesher, *Possible Scotlands: Walter Scott and The Story of Tomorrow* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
2005), whose readings place Scott ‘within the discourse of an ongoing national difficulty’ (p. 14), his texts presenting views of Scotland as ‘narrated, multiple, contentious, unfinished, erupting in the future through the anxious reader’ (p. 27). An illuminating analysis of _Kidnapped_ and _Catriona_ in the context of Scott’s fiction (especially _Rob Roy_) is Matthew Wickman’s _The Ruins of Experience: Scotland’s ‘Romantick’ Highlands and the Birth of the Modern Witness_ (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).


17 Drawing on the international collection of instruments housed at the University of Oxford’s Pitt Rivers Museum, Anthony Baines is still one of the best resources for understanding piping’s international roots and distribution; see his _Bagpipes_ , Occasional Papers on Technology, 9. Rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973). Noting that the bagpipe ‘was a late arrival in the Highlands, having spread from continental Europe during the late medieval period’, Keith Sanger sheds light on piping in Gaelic culture from the Middle Ages to the end of the sixteenth century (‘The Origins of Highland Piping’, _Piping Times_ , August 1989, 46-52). Cheape reasons that bagpipes might have ‘spread to Scotland and then into the Gàidhealtachd [Gaelic-speaking parts of the country] from France and the Low Countries and from


25 Ibid., pp. 136, 131.

26 Ibid., p. 134.

27 Hole’s illustration appears in *Kidnapped* (London: Cassell and Company, 1909), plate facing p. 264; and Wyeth’s is in *Kidnapped* (New York: Scribner’s, 1913), plate facing p. 238.


30 Keith Sanger, ‘One Piper or Two: Neil MacLean of the 84th Highlanders’, in *The Highland Bagpipe*, p. 128.

31 Ibid., p. 129.

32 Murray, *Music of the Scottish Regiments*, p. 121 (on the changing place and official status of pipers in Highland regiments, including


35 Wildly ‘neighing’ pipes share odd company with the physician in Stevenson’s Strange Case of Jekyll and Hyde, whom Mr Enfield says was ‘about as emotional as a bagpipe’ in Strange Case of Jekyll and Hyde, ed. by Katherine Linehan (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), p. 9.

36 Cheape, Bagpipes, p. 4.

37 See, for example, John Graham Dalyell, Musical Memoirs of Scotland with Historical Annotations and Numerous Illustrative Plates (Edinburgh: Thomas G. Stevenson, 1849), p. 121, where the author equates saying – in the ‘vernacular style’ – ‘three pair of bagpipes’ with ‘three pair of bellows’ and ‘three pair of scissors’ when referring to ‘three single articles’.


40 Ibid., p. xi.

41 Cheape, Bagpipes, p. 136.


43 Ibid., pp. 246–47. A similar rather fearsome, disorienting piping-Pan shows up again in Stevenson’s poem ‘Et Tu in Arcadia Vixisti’, written about five years before Kidnapped. In this text, the poem’s dedicatee (Stevenson’s cousin Bob) is said to have ‘seen / Immortal Pan dance secret in a glade’, the deity ‘breath[ing], / In his clutched
pipe, unformed and wizard strains. / Divine yet brutal’ (Robert Louis


45 Dalyell, Musical Memoirs of Scotland, p. 45.

46 David Murray, Music of the Scottish Regiments: Cogadh no Sith

47 Gary J. West, ‘Scottish Military Music’, in A Military History of
Scotland, ed. by Edward M. Spiers, Jeremy A. Craig, and Matthew J.

48 Bennett, Vibrant Matter, p. 3.