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Convenient Death and Imperial Implications in R.L. Stevenson's 'The Suicide Club'

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In his 1891 *Essays in Little*, Andrew Lang, friend and literary peer of Stevenson's, wrote of the *New Arabian Nights* (1882) that it offered 'a new kind of romanticism—Oriental, freakish, like the work of a changeling'.[1] Stevenson, 'in the fogs and horrors of London', Lang writes, 'plays at being an Arabian tale-teller', one who ensures that his 'romance always goes hand in hand with reality'.[2] Stevenson's romances bring the exotic fringes of empire home to domestic London in subversive ways, leading scholars like Linda Dryden to note how Stevenson's gothic complicates the fact that 'fissures were being noticed in the foundations of the Empire and leading imperial commentators were worried that "racial degeneracy" [among other things] would further threaten the Empire and destabilize a perceived social equilibrium at home'.[3] Lang's favorable review, in other words, reaches into the substance of Stevenson's short story cycle 'The Suicide Club' to its macabre heart, where the familiar and unfamiliar collide, as they do later in Dr. Jekyll's person, to unsettle a British readership's sense of itself. Serialized between June and October of 1878 in *London Magazine*, these stories, all popular successes, address multiple *fin-de-siècle* anxieties about the perceived decline in British cultural hegemony, racial purity, masculine identity, and imperial stability. Among these anxieties is the apparent convenience of death in this late-Victorian/early-Modernist landscape.

Recent scholarship has questioned the extent to which Stevenson's romanticism does, in fact, reflect reality. Lang mentions Stevenson's depiction of 'fairy London', a place recognizable to Lisa Honaker, who considers *New Arabian Nights* to be an 'archetypal folk or fairy tale, which, with its exotic locales, royal characters, and magical plots and accessories, functions as much in opposition to domestic realism as the adventure fiction for which [Stevenson] is best

known'.[4] Robert Irvine conversely argues that 'critics have long recognized that, far from floating free of the categories that structure social existence… romance narrative has a powerful way of reproducing and reinforcing them…[and] adventure stories often use their remote or exotic settings to confirm the naturalness of social hierarchy, precisely because that naturalness was far from obvious at home'.[5] Barry Menikoff even views Stevenson's London as 'a mirror of late Victorian England, a dark world, in some ways a schizophrenic world', where the confused mass of a modern, cosmopolitan humanity collides.[6]

Many agree, in other words, that Stevenson's gothic romances reach questions of social importance, including the role of technology in the quotidian of life and death. As Mark Morrisson demonstrates, the 'experiences of loss and vulnerability in a rapidly changing world were balanced by palpable excitement about a future in which the imagination's wildest flights of fancy might be realizable—for good or perhaps for ill. Whether causing apocalyptic dread or inspiring futuristic excitement, this modernization was technological and scientific'.[7] This was Stevenson's world, one in which he could consider railway travel and telegraphy in the same technological discussion as assisted suicide, or in the case of these stories, murder. Stevenson's world repositioned itself for modernity. Stephen Kern goes so far as to claim that 'technological innovations including telephone, wireless telegraph, x-ray, cinema, bicycle, automobile, and airplane established the material foundation for this reorientation…The result was a transformation of the dimensions of life and thought'.[8] Though not all of these developments occurred in Stevenson's lifetime, the wave of technological advancement was swelling by the late-nineteenth century, ready to break into the twentieth. Indeed, Stevenson demonstrates his recognition and understanding of technology's broad reach, for example in 'The Suicide Club', where he plays out a war whose purpose is to maintain British hegemony through a modernist

technological preoccupation with perfecting the means of killing in an economy of making die to let live. The outcomes are devastating as the disease of the suicide club are replaced by a foreign infection of death and extralegal retributive channels.

I consider here Stevenson's stories in the decades leading up to WWI through the biopolitical theories of such thinkers as Giorgio Agamben, Achille Mbembé, and Warren Montag. Their theories on sovereignty, 'necropolitics', and 'necroeconomics' shed light on the technological and arguably biopolitical thrust of these stories. Little has been written on this short-story cycle; no one has commented on technology's place in making death a modern convenience and the interconnected biopolitical implications for empire and sovereignty represented and exercised by Florizel and the club's president in their different deadly games. Richard Dury, Duncan Milne, and Barry Menikoff have commented on the structural and generic aspects of Stevenson's work, while others like Brian Wall, Sally Shuttleworth, Stephan Karschay, Dona Fore, and Julia Reid, respectively, have described Stevenson's relation to scientific and social questions of his time.[9] If the gothic romance, as Stephen Arata argues, does speak to the perception of *fin-de-siècle* national, biological, and aesthetic decline with its 'anxieties including, but not limited to the retrenchment of empire, the spread of urban slums, the growth of "criminal" classes, the proliferation of "deviant" sexualities, the rise of decadent art, and even the demise of the three-decker novel', then a more flexible interpretative lens is necessary for these stories.[10] Stevenson may have anticipated the killing-fields of the first half of the new century, having seen in his lifetime the Crimean War, the First Boer War, the Indian Rebellion, the Anglo-Zulu War and others. As a traveler and ex-pat in the South Pacific, he certainly knew the various technologies and power structures of the colonial spaces that defined and maintained the Empire.

Achille Mbembé defines 'necropolitics' as that which is concerned with 'those figures of sovereignty whose central project is not the struggle for autonomy but *the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations* [his italics]'.[11] This employment of power, itself a kind of biopolitical control, is apparent to Mbembé and others in late-nineteenth and twentieth-century colonial/imperial and fascist regimes. Mbembé works from the theories of Giorgio Agamben, who himself picks up on Carl Schmitt's assertion that the sovereign is the one who decides on the state of exception or that which is, in Agamben's words, 'included [in politics] solely through an exclusion'.[12] The concentration camp is, in biopolitical discussions, often considered the state of exception *par excellence*, but Mbembé asks why the colony is not also considered a state of exception when 'in modern philosophical thought and European political practice and imaginary, the colony represents the site where sovereignty consists fundamentally in the exercise of a power outside of the law (*ab legibus solutus*) and where "peace" is more likely to take on the face of a "war without end"' (p. 23). In collecting the Empire and bringing it home to London, Stevenson conceptualizes a similar colonial space in depicting the lawlessness of London and the extralegal exigency of Florizel's character. As Prince of Bohemia, Florizel's sovereignty puts him beyond British law, as if he himself were colonizing Britain, and his pursuit of the club's president takes on the aspect of perpetual war, which Montag, as I will show below, might call letting/ making die so others may live, waged to maintain his sovereign control. There can be no peace while the club remains a subversive force and a threat to Florizel's sovereignty over British bodies.

Stevenson makes clear early that Prince Florizel and Geraldine exist in an undefined space outside of any national legal codes. They float between nations and cultures, transgressing borders, especially Geraldine who 'could adapt not only his face and bearing, but his voice and

almost his thoughts, to those of any rank, character, or nation'.[13] Geraldine's fluid identity, Stevenson notes, takes focus away from the less easily disguised Florizel, whose nobility is difficult to hide (and in fact reveals his identity at times), and allows them access to the scores of perverse and dangerous adventures that Florizel so enjoys. The reader is not made aware of the nature of these previous schemes but is told that the 'civil authorities were never taken into the secret of these adventures; the imperturbable courage of the one and the ready invention and chivalrous devotion of the other had brought them through a score of dangerous passes; and they grew in confidence as time went on' (p. 116). A code of chivalry, as a substitute for established law, defines this romantic space, opening London, the heart of the British Empire, up to the foreign, the exotic, the "Other" that creeps into the cultural body through the disease of the Suicide Club and Florizel's response to it. Crucially, the plot's resolution is dependent upon the actions of Lieutenant Brackenbury Rich, a representative of British India, who acts as second to Florizel in his duel with the president. Lieutenant Rich realizes on his return to London 'almost as a foreigner…in the capital of the country for which he had shed his blood', that the British 'talk of war…but this [London] is the great battlefield of mankind' (pp. 178-79). This battlefield is as Lang writes 'freakish' and ill-defined but, will nevertheless, be the space in which Florizel wages 'war'.

While Florizel's adventure concludes with the return of the Empire to London, it begins when he and Geraldine meet a 'ruined' young man set upon ending his life. Intent upon adventure, they convince the youth that they too are looking 'to put an end to the disparity' they feel, though for slightly different reasons than his own (p. 121). In this way, they are granted access to the club but not before learning of the general desire of its members. Whether he is to be taken seriously or not by the reader after his farcical cream tarts stunt, the young man

regardless gains the confidence of Florizel and Geraldine to whom he describes what is ostensibly the central theme of these stories—death as a modern convenience. He tells the two men of his, and others', ennui and their desire for a death free from the social stigmas of suicide:

> …this is the age of conveniences, and I have to tell you of the last perfection of the sort. We have affairs in different places; and hence railways were invented. Railways separated us infallibly from our friends; and so telegraphs were made that we might communicate speedily at great distances…Now, we know that life is only a stage to play the fool upon as long as the part amuses us. There was one more convenience lacking in modern comfort; a decent, easy way to quit the stage; the back stairs to liberty; or, as I said this moment, Death's private door. (p. 124)

Suicide becomes a question of convenience in this Victorian technological and social milieu. It is no surprise then, as Sarah Ames demonstrates, that real life suicide clubs emerged in Victorian London at this time, posing new and horrifying problems for its population who came to understand suicide 'to be related to "modern living"—the high levels of poverty and poor standard of living associated with industrialization'.[14] That suicide was in the minds of many is apparent in parliament's 1882 'Interment (*felo de se;* 'felon of himself') Act', which granted burial rights, previously not granted, to people who committed successful suicides.

The reference to Shakespeare's 'life's a stage' metaphor above even harkens to the emergence of the modern, placing suicide into the long tradition of technological developments born out of the Renaissance. Tracing a modern trajectory and the invention of technologies that both solve old problems and create new ones, the paragraph suggests that suicide as convenience, the 'backstairs to liberty', or 'Death's' private door', might pose new unanticipated problems

(Stevenson, p. 124). Indeed, new problems arise by the time Stevenson is writing these characters into existence so much so that, as Howard Kushner claims, in Victorian London 'the incidence of suicide developed into a barometer of social health'.[15] Stevenson, through his characters, responded to this cultural phenomenon in ways that spoke to philosophical and religious tracts on suicide during this time. Kushner historicizes a society's preoccupation with death, allowing one to locate Stevenson among the many who navigated the perceived increase in suicides and its implications for the modern psyche.

Mbembé, rather, is more forward looking in his consideration of the relation of suicide, technology, and modernity. He argues that the mass genocides of the twentieth century are only an extenuation of this technologizing process, a process identified by Morrisson and Kern above. In fact, Kern and Morrisson are with Mbembé in considering one of the unforeseen problems of creating more efficient deaths, this systematized production of dead bodies, to be the inevitable employment of killing machines in the racial, national, and class-based pogroms of the twentieth century as well as the earlier colonial projects of the late-nineteenth century. Mbembé writes,

> …the gas chambers and the ovens were the culmination of a long process of dehumanizing and industrializing death, one of the original features of which was to integrate instrumental rationality with the productive and administrative rationality of the modern Western world (the factory, the bureaucracy, the prison, the army). Having become mechanized, serialized execution was transformed into a purely technical, impersonal, silent, and rapid procedure. This development was aided in part by racist stereotypes and the flourishing of a class-based racism that, in translating the social conflicts of the industrial world in racial terms, ended up

> comparing the working classes and 'stateless people' of the industrial world to the "savages" of the colonial world. (p. 18)

In a similar way, the suicide club embodies a peculiar paradox between the logical extension of a technological age's curiosity with streamlining death, either at home or abroad, for the sake of the stability of nation and empire, and its being an indicator of the social ails of that nation and its imperial periphery. Stevenson questions whether making death convenient would solve the social problems that suicide was both revealing and creating anew in his lifetime.

This variety of social problems is made apparent in these stories when Florizel and Geraldine begin to inquire into the reasons these men have for attending the club. Some, they find, seek the 'immunities of the tomb' to evade retribution for the societal wrongs they have committed, one is visiting having come to understand the implications for Darwin's theories and finding that he 'could not bear…to be descended from an ape', another named Malthus is 'not, properly speaking, a suicide at all' but an 'honourary member' who pays an advanced rate for certain immunities from the game; others are in attendance for unidentified reasons (Stevenson, pp. 133-35). All share one thing in common despite their various motives. They are all, as the narrator indicates, 'people in the prime of youth, with every show of intelligence and sensibility in their appearance, but with little promise of strength or the quality that makes success' (p. 132). The slipperiness of the term 'success' is not lost on Stevenson. Here it appears associated with wealth and class mobility. For example, the eponymous young man has spent all he owns, but of course the forty pounds it takes to enter the club—after all, 'a man cannot even die without money'—all because he has failed, for monetary and class reasons, to win the hand of the woman he loves (p. 122). Money, class, and convenience are called into question here, implying that suicide is a rich man's leisure sport.

Moreover, the lucrative nature of the club is explicit and is infused with the language of enterprise and entrepreneurship. Stevenson purposefully frames the Club within this economic, arguably capitalist, discourse. We know that the president requires a forty-pound entrance fee for each visit, and that admittance to the party does not guarantee one a part in the game. Too, Malthus reveals that the president 'never plays. He shuffles and deals for the club, and makes the necessary arrangements…is the very soul of ingenuity. For three years he has pursued in London his *useful* and, I think I may add, his artistic *calling*; and not so much as a whisper of suspicion has been once aroused [my italics]' (pp. 135-36). Malthus goes on to say that he considers the president to be 'inspired' and a perfect admixture of art and vocation. He also confirms the existence of a morbid economy driven by the exchange of cash for death, or cash for dead bodies. Thus, convenience entails certain economic connotations, none the least of which being a traditional example of supply and demand, that perverts the law or functions at its fringes. After discovering the full extent to the club's schemes, Florizel condemns the fact that he has taken an oath, itself significant in relation to the law, and resolves to remain himself outside of lawful channels; nevertheless, he calls this economy a 'wholesale trade in murder to be continued with profit and impunity' (p. 140) That profit appears immense while there remain individuals willing to pay for their own extinction.

Warren Montag's idea of a 'necroeconomics' is particularly useful in reading these economic elements of the suicide club. What he calls an 'oeconomy of nature' that 'marks the junction of the political and the economic' can be readily mapped over the club's practices.[16] The club's cynical nature, in other words, comes into focus through his reworking of Adam Smith's economic theories. Montag maintains that 'if societies, by virtue of the oeconomy of nature, must exercise, and not merely possess, the right to kill, the market, understood as the very form

of human universality as life, must necessarily, at certain precise moments, "let die"' (p. 204). Naming his character Malthus, Stevenson demonstrates an understanding of the implications for Malthusian theories for population growth and resource depletion. These theories are not unrelated to the kind of 'oeconomy of nature' that Montag is referring to above in which many will necessarily die, must be 'let to die', so that others may live. This, Montag calls 'necro-economics'.

Montag notably pivots to the role of the state/ sovereign in guaranteeing the maintenance of this economy, whose aim is producing and sustaining life through making die when individuals do not have the strength to let themselves perish:

> The market reduces and rations life; it not only allows death, it demands that death be allowed by the sovereign power, as well as by those who suffer it. In other words it demands and requires that the latter allow themselves to die…underneath the appearance of a system whose intricate harmony might be appreciated as a kind of austere and awful beauty, a self-regulating system, not the ideal perhaps, but the best of all possible systems, is the demand that some must allow themselves to die. This of course raises the possibility that those so called upon will refuse this demand—that is, that they will refuse to allow themselves to die. It is at this point that the state, which might appear to have no other relation to the market than one of contemplative acquiescence, is called into action; those who refuse to allow themselves to die must be compelled by force to do so. (pp. 210-11)

Malthus, the character, may consider the club's own system to be the 'absolute of poignancy' and a masterpiece of human ingenuity (Stevenson, p.137). If he had the term 'necro-economics',

he might also consider it to be an accurate description of this club's monetary aims, in which members 'kill each other' and 'the trouble of suicide is removed in that way' (p. 137). Little of the trouble is actually resolved, especially when Malthus' death is impending. As Geraldine says, Malthus seems 'rather unwilling to die than otherwise', which becomes a problem when his card is drawn, and he is selected for death. Thus, enters the sovereign. The club and its president exercise the role of the sovereign or state in this economy, when others refuse or have troubles letting themselves die. Through proxy, the club kills under the auspices of this necro-economic system, as the young man with the cream tarts soon discovers. He is selected to kill Malthus, though 'he had not come there to kill, but to be killed' (p. 139). Making death a modern convenience, like a train ride or a telegraph, creates multiple ethical and philosophical as well as economic problems, not the least of which being suicide's imbrication into this economy of producing dead bodies so that others may live.

For the success of this economy, the individual must, in some ways be reduced to his/her most biological properties. The person must become a body, and nothing more to become a commodity in this necro-economic system. Stephan Karschay describes this manifold process as being threefold—the detection of the threating body, its othering, and the normalization of reified categories of the "Other"—and he, like Mbembé, sees this process in theories of 'degeneration' that fueled race-based genocides of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century.[17] In other words, the trade in abject/othered bodies is not particularly surprising for the nineteenth century. Stevenson, however, poses a slightly different question to those of the economy of slavery, the Marxian dialectic of labor and production, or even the trade in bodies for medical purposes. His is not what Silvia Federici calls the 'sense of dissociation from the body, which becomes reified, reduced to an object with which the person ceases to be

immediately identified' in the bourgeois and capitalist 'battle against the body'.[18] These bodies, for Stevenson, do not become incorporated as commodities or as agents in the production of labor; their sole purpose is to be dead bodies. Stevenson explores the idea of an economy whose sole purpose is the production of death. Key to that economy is the defamiliarization and objectification of the body and the mechanism that produces these bodies through the exercise of sovereign power.

Florizel, in waging 'war' against the club's president, who must die but refuses to do so, is made to assert his sovereignty. He naturally needs servile bodies to manipulate in order to exercise and maintain that authority. While exacting his revenge outside of the law—as Geraldine again reminds him at the end of story one, 'our oath forbids us any recourse to law; and discretion would forbid it equally if the oath were loosened'—Florizel must kill the president even if it means creating and employing dead bodies (Stevenson, p. 147). He begins to assert his authority by offering the men of the club whom he has captured and imprisoned reprieve from their self-sentencing. 'Foolish and wicked men', he says to them, 'as many of you as have been driven into this strait by the lack of fortune shall receive employment and remuneration from my officers. Those of you who suffer under a sense of guilt must have recourse to a higher and more generous Potentate that I' (p. 147). Florizel exercises judgement over their guilt, deeming them innocent and worthy of continued existence. He lets them live, removing the chance of the original game from the equation. Florizel demands, on the other hand, that the president must die, consolidating judge and jury under his purview as sovereign while also reifying his sovereignty as divine appointment. He is second only to God, if not God himself. In doing so, he creates the necessary atmosphere in which, by the beginning of story two, what is apparently

barbaric in the club's behavior has been adopted in a more brutal necro-economic game played by Florizel himself.

In the topsy-turvy of Parisian Carnival, this crossover occurs. What appears to at first be Florizel's altruistic employment of sovereignty is here revealed to be just another maniacal game played with the lives of others. Stevenson questions whether the club's president's sovereignty or Florizel's is the more legitimate when both engage in similar processes of producing dead bodies. Florizel stacks the deck, as it were, revealing what appears to be the logical extension of making death a modern convenience. He possesses and trades objectified bodies in a ghoulish economy only after the body has been made lifeless, de-individualized, and 'othered'. The poor American, Silas Q. Scuddamore, finds himself an agent in this economy after attending a masked ball, where he is tempted into a suspicious liaison with an equally suspicious and thoroughly exotic woman, Madam Zéphyrine. When he goes to meet her on the appointed time of night for their rendezvous, he finds her nowhere to be found. Returning home, he finds instead a corpse in his bed. This is followed by a knock at the door and the arrival of Dr. Noel, who proceeds through his medical training to instruct Scuddamore on the proper disposal of the body.

The suspense of the plot here is dependent on Dr. Noel's misrecognition of the corpse, made possible through his medical dehumanization of the cadaver. Scuddamore with 'flushed face and beating heart', a direct counterpoint to the dead body, is soon told by the doctor to relate what happened in detail. Noel tells him not to worry and asks him whether he thinks the 'dead flesh on the pillow can alter in any degree the sympathy with which you have inspired me?' (pp. 161-62). Adopting the doctor's dehumanizing language, Scuddamore notably refers to the 'object in my bed: not to be explained, not to be disposed of, not to be regarded without horror' (p. 163). This assures the unanimity of the body until its identity is revealed at the end of the

story. The doctor responds to Scuddamore with a seemingly untimely exhibition of his philosophy on dead bodies which serves to further dehumanize the victim and solidify its place in Florizel's game. 'Horror', he asks:

> No, when this sort of clock has run down, it is no more to me than an ingenious piece of mechanism, to be investigated with the bistery. When blood is once cold and stagnant, it is no longer flesh which we desire in our lovers and respect in our friends. The grace, the attraction, the terror, have all gone from it with the animating spirit. Accustom yourself to look upon it with composure; for if my scheme is practicable you will have to live in constant proximity to that which now so greatly horrifies you. (p. 163)

Once again, death as modern convenience is situated in relation to the mechanical and the technological. This technological coding announces what Scuddamore soon learns: Dr. Noel's scheme is in fact Florizel's scheme, one which must produce as efficiently as possible the non-descript/non-identifiable corpses even at the cost of collateral damage. In some ways it is irrelevant whose body is lying in Scuddamore's bed, and there is no indication until later in the story that if it were the president's body and not Geraldine's brother's body that Florizel's game would be over. Dr. Noel goes on several more times to refer to the 'corpse' and the 'human body', never once considering its importance outside of its role in the larger scheme to undo the suicide club's president.

Here legality once again becomes an issue, not only because of Scuddamore's serendipitous involvement with the club, which could lead to his conviction for murder, but because of his continued involvement in transporting the body back to England in his Saratoga trunk. Noel remarks of the Saratoga trunk 'whether it was for the convenience of the slave trade,

or to obviate the results of too ready an employment of the bowie-knife, I cannot bring myself to decide. But one thing I see plainly—the object of such a box is to contain a human body' (p. 164). The economics remain consistent in the reference to slavery and its transnational impact. Claiming the privileges of a traveling sovereign, the 'baggage of so considerable a person as the Prince is, as a matter of courtesy, passed without examination by the officers of Custom' (p. 166). The case and dead body transgress the borders between the Continent and England freely under Florizel's sovereign authority. This porous border becomes metaphor for the boundaries between living/dead, diseased/healthy, British/ 'Other'. Pamela Gilbert, for example, rightly connects reading practices with this porosity, describing the existence in Victorian England of 'two kinds of bodies definable as grotesque' the 'diseased body and the body of the prostitute—often one and the same. Both were defined chiefly by their permeability, and both became the objects of the gaze'.[19] Gilbert links these exotic, erotic, and dangerous bodies and their permeability to metaphors of the British social and political body, indicating that when talking about one, one was invoking the other. Stevenson is doing something similar here involving not only the American and Florizel in this transgressive act, one that threatens the stability of nation and empire, but also conscripting his readership in the process as well.

Britain's national integrity is called into question by the porosity of its borders, evoking the link between the social body and corrupt individual bodies. Gilbert would recognize Stevenson's play in her assertions about the corrupt body:

> When the grotesque body itself becomes the object of policing, rather than the symbol of liberatory potential, the transgressive act that remains is to seduce the reader by offering the body up to the gaze as an object without resistance, and

> then to remind the reader that s/he is implicated in the medium of exchange—that is, that s/he is 'touched' by the object in the process of objectifying it.[20]

The 'fatal boxful of dead flesh' becomes the logical extension of making death into a modern convenience, and the threat it poses is to British national and imperial integrity (Stevenson, p. 173). Transcontinental and transatlantic in import, the potential discovery of this dead body by authorities additionally can thwart Scuddamore's aspirations towards the American presidency and his place in the 'rolls of national glory' (p. 172). What is more, Florizel has infected the British body with the socially corrupting corpse produced by his and the club's game. After all, by story two, Florizel has through morbid curiosity and his established eccentricity decided to play the game and has dedicated himself to winning it at all costs.

The irony is that this game cannot be won, a reality that Florizel comes close to understanding by the end of story two when, upon discovering that the body is Geraldine's brother's, the 'poor clay that was lately a gallant and handsome youth', he questions what he has done. Half soliloquizing, half addressing Scuddamore, Florizel cries out, 'Ah Florizel! Florizel! When will you learn the discretion that suits mortal life, and be no longer dazzled with the image of power at your disposal? Power!...who is more powerless? I look upon this young man whom I have sacrificed, Mr. Scuddamore, and feel how small a thing it is to be a Prince' (p. 176). He does not learn discretion. Neither is there any indication that he truly believes his own assertion that to be a prince is a small thing. He is close to accepting responsibility for the death of his friend's brother and admitting his perverse role in this economy of death. Instead, he makes an abrupt shift in blame to the 'actual criminal', the 'criminal himself, the infamous President of the Suicide Club' (176). By story three, he has once again employed individuals in his game, showing that he has learned nothing from his prior missteps. His monomaniacal pursuit to ruin

the club has tempted his curiosity into playing a game with the lives of others. In fact, he has created his own club as a trap to ensnare the president, and has tasked coach drivers with finding men willing to play the game with him, a game that too turns into a battle of life and death.

Lieutenant Brackenbury Rich is just such a man, who recognizes 'with enthusiasm that [Florizel] was a sovereign for whom a brave man might thankfully lay down his life'; his very presence, 'every gesture, every intonation' speaks to his nobility and serves to enlist others to his cause (p. 194). Rich sees on his return to London that here 'is the great battlefield of mankind' and he, as a man who could make 'a mouthful of barbarian cavaliers', finds that it is natural his services are required in this new battle; he was quite bored without the thrill of a fight (p. 183). Despite a sardonic remark from one of the captain's picked up by Florizel's drivers, who insists that 'a gaming party is not the same thing as a regiment under fire', Florizel, at his own party and with the help of Lieutenant Rich, assembles a small army of officers and one doctor to follow him into battle against the president (p. 189). At this point, Florizel is deliberately exercising his sovereignty through the deployment of troops, the battle taking place in Rochester House on a canal off the Thames. His attempt to maintain his sovereign authority in this great-battlefield of mankind requires the deployment of servile bodies in war games played out in this 'magnificent residence', with its deer park like that owned by a 'nobleman or millionaire' (p. 191). In moving to this space, Florizel has also left the economy of death of the club to the noble maintenance of power through the employment of expendable bodies. The monetary essence is removed and with it a purer economy of creating death is achieved.

Florizel then can become less concerned with the president's death and more concerned again with his own responsibility in creating death and letting live. 'I am ashamed of my emotion' he says, 'I feel it a weakness unworthy of my station, but the continued existence of

that hound of hell had begun to play upon me like a disease, and his death has more refreshed me than a night of slumber. Look Geraldine …there is the blood of the man who killed your brother. It should be a welcome sight' (p. 199). The president's corpse is not so welcome a sight as it turns out, but not for the reasons of guilt or horror in Florizel's creating death. Florizel shifts responsibility, perhaps denying this feeling of guilt, instead referring multiple times in a span of two pages to 'God's almighty providence' and 'God defend the right' (p. 196). He comes only to reflect on how poorly he has gone about conducting his own game. Florizel is ashamed, it appears, because he *is* ashamed, an emotional response unbecoming of his station as Prince and sovereign. He is not ostensibly embarrassed that he has employed bodies to create a string of destruction in the process of alleviating his own hang-ups about the president's threating sovereignty—a sovereignty that would have remained out of sight and out of mind had Florizel not insisted upon adventure in the first place. He is embarrassed because he has not conducted himself as a Prince should in waging this 'war' of sovereignty, which he actively engaged.

The remainder of his reflection here is concerned with this code of conduct in exacting revenge on this his, in a sense, self-created enemy. He does not question that his enemy must be destroyed, in other words, but is preoccupied by the fact that his victory on the field was achieved by means unbecoming of a Prince:

> And yet…see how strangely we men are made! my revenge is not yet five minutes old, and already I am beginning to ask myself if even revenge be attainable on this precarious stage of life. The ill he did, who can undo it? The career in which he amassed a huge fortune (for the house itself in which he stayed belonged to him)—that career is now a part of the destiny of mankind forever; and I might weary myself making thrusts in carte until the crack of judgement,

> and Geraldine's brother would be none the less dead, and a thousand other innocent persons would none the less dishonoured and debauched! The existence of a man is so small a thing to take, so mighty a thing to employ! Alas…is there anything in life so disenchanting as attainment. (p. 199).

Attainment concludes this pseudo-lament, producing a problematic valence for his assertion that a 'man is so small a thing to take, so mighty thing to employ'. He quite literally means that men are an easy, albeit mighty, thing to control in his games. He does not dispute nor feel guilty about this fact. This passage indicates instead that Florizel has learned something from the club and the efficiency of modern death through the employment of technological advances. It evens suggests that he may wish to play similar games in the future to better effect with this lesson in mind. The greatest sadness he experiences is in the conclusion of that thrill he gets as a man 'not without a taste for ways of life more adventurous and eccentric than that to which he was destined by his birth' (p. 115). One can only assume that he will be looking for his next exploit as soon as he can, his next nation to colonize and his next people to subject.

Stevenson delivers. Florizel, in fact, finds adventure in "The Rajah's Diamond," the short story cycle that directly follows 'The Suicide Club' in *New Arabian Nights*. A precedence for these later stories is set by Florizel's interactions with the Club. In these earlier stories, the disease of the club and its president threatens Florizel's metaphorical sovereign bodily integrity. Florizel's own game, in turn, infects the London streets, and, more broadly, British society, undermining its national and imperial integrity by bringing the sovereign exercise of power, that which is perfected in the colonial periphery, home to London. He works outside of the law to create a space in London where, in Mbembé's theorization, peace resembles war without end. In this battle over sovereign right, Florizel has to make himself the victor even if it means wasting

the lives of others in the pursuit. In doing so, I argue, he embodies the kind of noble sovereignty exercised in imperial wars of the second half of the nineteenth-century and leading up to World War I.

Florizel's brand of sovereignty binds him to technological, scientific, imperial and ethical discussions of nation-state politics at the turn of the century. As Stephen Arata remarks, the three forms of *fin de siècle* decline—national, biological, aesthetic—broadly grouped under the category of 'degeneration' discourse—had 'often entailed one another, so that a discussion of any one of them led to consideration of the other two'.[21] All were implicated in national and imperial stability and were used as justifications for further wars to maintain that stability. By the turn of the century, the writing was on the wall for the British Empire and renewed attention was paid to finding the causes of national and imperial decline, as Karschay claims:

> In 1914, the outbreak of World War I occasioned a renewed upsurge of degeneration discourse with similar concerns about the 'fitness' of recruits that had preoccupied so many militarists at the time of Second Boer War. On the one hand, war propagandists styled the Prussian enemy as a degenerate and thus easily conquered; yet, on the other hand, the experience of such a large-scale conflict signaled for some commentators the unchaining of the beast in Man.[22]

Karschay suggests of 'degeneration' discourse what Stephen Jay Gould puts so well in *The Mismeasure of Man* that 'the paths to destruction are often indirect, but ideas can be agents as sure as guns and bombs'.[23] The technological developments of modernity perfected war through perfecting the means of killing and making death convenient and effective. These technologies made counteracting the perceived degeneration in racial, cultural, national, and imperial integrity possible in new and frightening ways. They made the war games of sovereigns around the globe

more efficient and catastrophic, provoking and compounding the destruction of WWI. Ideas backed by guns and bombs can cause untold extermination of human life as they did around the turn of the century and after; this is Stevenson's lesson, if he does, in fact, offer one.

Stevenson's Prince Florizel plays fast and loose with the lives of others because of a similar anxiety about the perceived decline of his own sovereign authority. More explicitly, Florizel mirrors and complicates in serious ways what Modris Eksteins shows is the British nation's urgency for entering the bloodiest war to the date: 'The British mission, whether in the wider world, the empire, or at home among her populace was principally one of extending the sense of civic virtue, of teaching both the foreigner and the uneducated Briton the rules of civilized social conduct, the rules for "playing the game"'.[24] Here is a Prince, a German no less, telling the British how to 'play a different game,' one where his sovereignty infiltrates and asserts itself over British law and culture. Florizel, in some ways, is the greatest hopes and the greatest fears of the British nation in that he follows to its end the technological perfection of death, the creation and employment of dead bodies in a program that began altruistically as a regenerative effort. In hindsight, Stevenson may appear clairvoyant even, as we consider the mass-killings of World War I, World War II and the concomitant decline of British global empire. On the other hand, having seen a half century of constant territorial and imperial disputes in the nineteenth century along with the technological advances therein, Stevenson could very well have put together the two in an accurate thought-experiment that just so happened to tragically come true in the first decades of the twentieth century. He warns about the exercise of sovereign power through the technological instrumentation of death. Fortunately, he did not live to see his warning ignored and his predictions come to pass.

[1] Andrew Lang, 'Mr. Stevenson's Works', *Essays in Little*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), p. 25. Google eBook.

[2] Ibid., p. 28.

[3] Linda Dryden, '"City of Dreadful Night": Stevenson's Gothic London', *The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles: Stevenson, Wilde and Wells*, ed. Linda Dryden, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 83.

[4] Lang, p. 28; Lisa Honaker, 'The Revisionary Role of Gender in R. L. Stevenson's *New Arabian Nights* and *Prince Otto*: Revolution in a "Poison Bad World"', *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920* 44.3 (2001), p. 299.

[5] Robert P. Irvine, 'Romance and Social Class', *The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. Penny Fielding, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2010), p. 27.

[6] Barry Menikoff, 'New Arabian Nights: Stevenson's Experiment in Fiction', *Nineteenth Century Literature* 45.3 (1990), p. 345.

[7] Mark Morrisson, *Modernism, Science, and Technology*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), p. 2.

[8] Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918: With a New Preface*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2003), pp. 1-2.

[9] Richard Dury, 'The Campness of the *New Arabian Nights*', *Journal of Stevenson Studies* 1 (2005), pp. 103-125 considers Stevenson's 'camp' over against late-Victorian decadence. Menikoff, rather, describes Stevenson's 'interest in fictional problems, both theoretical and technical' (340). Brian Wall, '"The Situation Was Apart from Ordinary Laws": Culpability and Insanity in the Urban Landscape of Robert Louis Stevenson's London', *Journal of Stevenson Studies* 12 (2015), pp. 147-169; Dana Fore, 'Snatching Identity: "Passing" and Disabled Monstrosity in Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde* and "The Body Snatcher"', *Journal of Stevenson Studies* 7 (2010), pp. 33-54; and Sally Shuttleworth, 'Childhood, Severed Heads, and the Uncanny: Freudian Precursors', *Victorian Studies* 58.1 (2015), pp. 84-110. All, respectively, look at disability, both mental and physical, and its social and legal implications for Stevenson. See, additionally, Stephan Karschay, *Degeneration, Normativity, and the Gothic at the Fin de Siècle*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) and Julia Reid, *Robert Louis Stevenson, Science, and the Fin de Siècle*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) for a further contextualization of Stevenson's scientific world view and his relation, as amateur scientist, to degeneration and evolutionary theories.

[10] Stephen Arata, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle: Identity and Empire*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2009), p. 2.

[11] Achille Mbembé, 'Necropolitics', *Public Culture* 15.1 (2003), p 14. , henceforth cited in text.

[12] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacre: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, (Stanford: Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics, 1998), p. 142.

[13] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'The Suicide Club', *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and Other Stories*, ed. George Stade, (New York: Barnes and Nobel Classics, 2003), p. 116, henceforth cited in text.

[14] Sarah Ames, '"The Suicide Club": Afterlives', *Journal of Stevenson Studies* 8 (2011), p. 144.

[15] Howard Kushner, 'Suicide, Gender, and the Fear of Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Medical and Social Thought', *Journal of Social History* 26.3 (1993), p. 461.

[16] Warren Montag, 'Necro-Economics: Adam Smith and Death in the Life of the Universal', *Biopolitics: A Reader,* eds. Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze, (Durham: Duke UP, 2013) pp. 204, henceforth cited in text. Montag demonstrates, the use of Smith's theories in biopolitical debates is not anachronistic. Montag shows that much like Marx, Smith has been in the Western imagination, whether implicit or not, ever since he was first published.

[17] Karschay, pp. 209-218.

[18] Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004) p. 135.

[19] Pamela Gilbert, *Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels.* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge UP, 2005), p. 17.

[20] Ibid, p. 18.

[21] Arata, p. 2.

[22] Karschay, p. 217.

[23] Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1980), p. 233.

[24] Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), p. 109.