

Robert Louis Stevenson – new book

A new book revealing Robert Louis Stevenson's struggle to reconcile his darker side with the repressive climate of Victorian Edinburgh has been launched online. *Lamplit, Vicious Fairy Land* details the double life the Scottish author led in the capital – a city whose obsession with religion and respectability was matched only by the drink and prostitution problems lurking beneath its surface.

The biography, by journalist Jeremy Hodges, is being serialised on www.robert-louis-stevenson.org – the world's most comprehensive online Stevenson resource, hosted by Edinburgh Napier University's Centre for Literature and Writing (CLAW).

Early chapters reveal for the first time the brothels and shebeens where Stevenson spent much of his time when his parents fondly imagined he was attending university lectures. "The girls whose company he enjoyed were the same 'fallen women' his father, a respected engineer, was trying to save at the Edinburgh Magdalene Asylum," said Hodges.

"His uncle David, meanwhile, supported the Scottish National Association for the Suppression of Licentiousness in its campaign against vice, including the banning of nude models at the city's School of Art."

Despite proposing marriage to at least two young ladies, both of whom rejected him, Stevenson remained uneasy, says Hodges, with the middle-class girls invited to his parents' dinner parties.

“He felt more at home with the girls in the bars and brothels, yet marrying one of them was out of the question.

“It was only after escaping from Edinburgh to France that he found love among the artists in the Forest of Fontainebleau, where he met the American woman who would divorce her faithless husband to marry him.”

Stevenson’s own books were initially serialised in magazines, building interest as a prelude to book publication. Now Hodges hopes to secure a book deal by serialising his own work online, chapter by chapter, over the next year. He said: “The golden rule for a successful serial, as Charles Dickens once put it, is “Make ’em laugh, make ’em cry... make ’em wait”. In Stevenson’s life there was much laughter and quite a few tears, bearing in mind his numerous brushes with death before his untimely demise at 44. And that’s what I’ve done my best to bring alive for the reader.”

The Robert Louis Stevenson Website was developed by a team of Edinburgh Napier academics in collaboration with colleagues at Edinburgh and Stirling Universities, and has become an internationally renowned resource since its launch last year.

Professor Linda Dryden, creator and owner of the RLS Website, said Hodges would benefit from the thousands of hits the site receives every month:-“We are delighted to be publishing Jeremy’s book. It is an engaging and moving account of Stevenson’s life in Edinburgh and it is a real coup for us to have this opportunity.”