

IMAGINARY BLOOMSBURY: DYNAMITE AND PETER PAN

In 1964 a Working Women's College opened at 20 O. ...

Professional Development Institute ...

encountered another guest, Frances Sitwell, a lady separated from her husband. ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~

obscure, although Mr Sitwell was described as 'a man of unfortunate temperament and uncongenial habits' - whatever light that may dimly shed.<sup>4</sup> Mrs Sitwell, the estranged wife, was considered a lady of fascinating charm although this is not obvious on even assessment. ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~

crisis, and she was called Madonna, presumably to transfer her from lover to mother, if not exactly saint, and distance her from 'masculine combustions' let alone 'carnal congress'. From cold, windy, autumnal Edinburgh in 1875 he wrote to her that 'I hope the trees of Queen Square

all day long before the hospital. It has always been a habit of his to be there every day.

their sick brother at the window. <sup>13</sup>

This is a copy of the Hospital Case History of the patient, dated 11/11/1918.

Pancras Station.

*The Dynamiter*, 'Price One Shilling', was published in April 1885 and the next episode in the story of Stevenson's Queen Square came later that year, with a letter from James Payne, a popular novelist and literary editor, who passed on to Stevenson the humorous protest of Payne's daughter, the wife of the editor of *The Times*, that Stevenson had made fictitious use of her factual house in Queen Square, No. 16, which was indeed, like Desborough's house in *The Dynamiter*, 'next door to the Children's Hospital', which occupied Nos. 17, 18 and 19.<sup>18</sup> Stevenson's reply to Payne took up and reworked this joke about the interaction of real and imaginary Bloomsbury. 'I beg to explain', he wrote:

how it it came about that I took her house. The hospital was a point in my tale; but there is a house on each side. Now the true house is the one before the hospital: is that No. 11? [No: it's No. 16.] If not, what do you complain of? If it is, how can I help what is true? Everything in the *Dynamiter* is not true; but the story of the Brown Box is, in almost every particular; I lay my hand on my heart, and swear to it. It took place in that house in 1884; and if your daughter was in that house at the time, all I can say is she must have kept very bad society. But I see you coming. Perhaps your daughter's house has not a balcony at the back? I cannot answer for that; I only know that side of Queen Square from  
 the pavement and the back side of the house of Desborough's house in Queen Square.

*Dynamiter?* In passing we may note that Stevenson's first question, about the balcony or terrace at the back of No. 16, cannot easily be answered by a walk in the Square, round the corner from where I live. That house at No. 16, and those at Nos. 20, and at No. 2, Bournemouth Park, are no

more, no more in reality, that is.

In March 1885, while Stevenson was in Bournemouth negotiating the publication of *The Dynamiter* and then correcting its proofs, another Scotsman arrived at St Pancras Station. In Gray's Inn Road he bought a copy of the *St. James's Gazette* containing a piece he had written, which he read several times (he says) over a breakfast he bought in the same road, before walking

square it was on the corner of was Queen Square, but the street he lived in ran into Brunswick Square, not Queen Square, so perhaps, translating a street oven into a sausage shop, we may imagine the Darling house on the Brunswick Square corner of Grenville Street - perhaps, if we want imaginary Bloomsbury to be true. What is striking, in any case, is the two windows in supposedly real and imaginary Bloomsbury, in Barrie's memoirs and his play, one looking out onto a 'blank wall' and the other opening the way to Peter Pan - and Neverland.

The two Scotsmen never met - in Bloomsbury or anywhere - but Stevenson in Samoa corresponded with Barrie, by then in his house, which is still there, at the north of Kensington Gardens, where he wrote *Peter Pan*. Repeatedly, humorously, Stevenson made the call to Barrie to 'Come to Vailima', the name of his house (meaning five streams or waters, 'vai').<sup>23</sup> Again in July 1894 he continued the invitation, a friendly, familiar running joke: 'I tell you frankly, you had better come soon.'<sup>24</sup> When it was too late, Barrie wrote in memoriam:

<sup>1</sup> See Godfrey H. Hamilton, *Queen Square: Its Neighbourhood and Its Institutions* (London, 1926), 52.

<sup>2</sup> Stevenson, draft, quoted in Hamilton, op. cit., 53. This passage was not included in the less picturesque piece in *The Academy*, 10 October, 1874, p. 406.

<sup>3</sup> See Hamilton, op. cit., 79-81.

<sup>5</sup> Lady Colvin, 'My First Meeting with R.L.S.', in *I Can Remember Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. Rosaline Mason (Edinburgh and London, 1922), 87, 88.

<sup>6</sup> Stevenson, *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehw (New Haven and London, 1994-5), I, 457.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 29.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 457.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 457.