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CLASSICS



ROBERT LOUIS
STEVENSON

Treasure Island

TREASURE ISLAND

Robert Louis Stevenson

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CLASSICS

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Robert Louis Stevenson asserts the moral right to be
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History of Collins

In 1819, Millworker William Collins from Glasgow, Scotland, set up a company for printing and publishing pamphlets, sermons, hymn books and prayer books. That company was Collins and was to mark the birth of HarperCollins Publishers as we know it today. The long tradition of Collins dictionary publishing can be traced back to the first dictionary William published in 1824, *Greek and English Lexicon*. Indeed, from 1840 onwards, he began to produce illustrated dictionaries and even obtained a licence to print and publish the Bible.

Soon after, William published the first Collins novel, *Ready Reckoner*, however it was the time of the Long Depression, where harvests were poor, prices were high, potato crops had failed and violence was erupting in Europe. As a result, many factories across the country were forced to close down and William chose to retire in 1846, partly due to the hardships he was facing.

Aged 30, William's son, William II took over the business. A keen humanitarian with a warm heart and a generous spirit, William II was truly 'Victorian' in his outlook. He introduced new, up-to-date steam presses and published affordable editions of Shakespeare's works and *Pilgrim's Progress*, making them available to the masses for the first time. A new demand for educational books meant that success came with the publication of travel books, scientific books, encyclopaedias and dictionaries. This demand to be educated led to the later publication of atlases and Collins also held the monopoly on scripture writing at the time.

In the 1860s Collins began to expand and diversify and the idea of 'books for the millions' was developed. Affordable editions of classical literature were published and in 1903 Collins introduced 10 titles in their Collins Handy Illustrated Pocket Novels. These proved so popular that a few years later this had increased to an output of 50 volumes, selling nearly half a

million in their year of publication. In the same year, The Everyman's Library was also instituted, with the idea of publishing an affordable library of the most important classical works, biographies, religious and philosophical treatments, plays, poems, travel and adventure. This series eclipsed all competition at the time and the introduction of paperback books in the 1950s helped to open that market and marked a high point in the industry.

HarperCollins is and has always been a champion of the classics and the current Collins Classics series follows in this tradition – publishing classical literature that is affordable and available to all. Beautifully packaged, highly collectible and intended to be reread and enjoyed at every opportunity.

Life & Times

About the Author

Robert Louis Stevenson could be described as a career novelist. That is to say, he fashioned himself as a story teller and wrote as much as he humanly could for his rather short life, which ended aged 44. He wrote a dozen novels and a number of collections of short stories. Stevenson is best known for two books that fall into entirely different genres: *Treasure Island* (1883) and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). The former was his first novel and the one that put him on the literary map at the age of 33. Stevenson was beset by ill health, so writing became an escape while convalescing. In this instance he took himself away to the high seas to a world filled with lawless pirates, intent on finding buried treasure.

His Works

The clichéd image of the fictional 19th-century pirate was born with *Treasure Island*. Stevenson put together a collection of pirate characteristics in Long John Silver and his crewmen, which have become standards used in many other pirate stories since. However, Stevenson's pirates were not charismatic and engaging rogues or anti-heroes. They were seagoing outlaws and villains, driven by selfishness and greed, and readily willing to kill.

Parallels have been drawn between Long John Silver and Robin Hood, but the former has no loyalty in his band of men and is not motivated by a desire to help anyone. On the contrary, he only uses the other pirates for his own ends and turns his back when he no longer needs their protection.

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde is entirely different. *Treasure Island* is essentially a boy's adventure story, while this novel investigates the disturbing psychology behind split personality disorder, or schizophrenia. In Victorian times, there was an inevitable religious overtone to the interpretation of psychological conditions, so

Stevenson saw the dual personality of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde as a conflict between the good and evil sides of the personality. The implication being that we all suffer a similar conflict, but this case was heightened and amplified by Dr Jekyll imbibing a drug potion. In fact, there is such a pronounced change in personality that Dr Jekyll alters in appearance and posture when he metamorphoses into Mr Hyde.

It seems likely that the drug potion used by Dr Jekyll is representative of opium, which was taken in opium dens in London in the late Victorian era. At first the potion enables him to switch from one persona, or alter ego to the other at will. However, the dosage is increased until he can no longer control the situation and Mr Hyde becomes all consuming. In effect, the subconscious animal mind overpowers the conscious human mind, because his primal needs and desires are allowed to develop and grow.

This is evidently also an expression of the feelings of suppression that Stevenson felt in Victorian society. There was such a pressing requirement to behave in a certain way, which denied acknowledgement of the baser instincts, that Dr Jekyll was the personification of this frustration in Stevenson and other Victorian men. Dr Jekyll is compelled to transform into Mr Hyde so that he can do things that polite society would have normally found scandalous.

In the end, the inner turmoil is too much for Dr Jekyll. He feels more human as Mr Hyde, yet society views him as being more human as Dr Jekyll. Aware that his desire to remain as Mr Hyde forever will conflict with the values of society, he ends things so that others do not have to witness his indulgence.

The book evidently struck a chord with Victorian society, judging by its success and by its lasting impact. We now use the term 'a Jekyll and Hyde character' to describe someone with unpredictable behaviour or violent mood swings. In addition, the concept of character transformation has been borrowed many times over in fiction.

A Contribution to Literature

Like many Victorian novelists, Robert Louis Stevenson was highly regarded by his contemporaries and writers of other generations. It

is easy now to forget that English literature had to start somewhere and that those who 'invented' the novel had no precedent.

For Stevenson the novel was only a century or so old and there was still plenty of room to try new approaches to the narrative form. To be successful was to be pioneering, which meant that one had to be innovative and visionary in outlook, as well as being able to weave together a compelling story.

By and large Victorian novelists tended to be loyal to their chosen genre. Once they found their niche they stuck to the same formula, so it was quite unusual for a writer to attempt to write in more than one genre, but Stevenson managed with consummate ease. Had he lived beyond his 44 years then he may have continued his ascent as an original thinker and become one of, if not *the*, greatest writer of all time. As it was, he managed to make his permanent mark on the register of classic novelists and claim his place in the story of English literature.

Stevenson ended his life on the island of Upolu, Samoa, in the South Pacific Ocean. He had sailed extensively among the Pacific Islands and made Upolu his own 'treasure island' in 1890. He bought an estate on the island with the proceeds of his book sales and lived there happily for four years until he was struck down by a seizure. It was probably a stroke (cerebral haemorrhage) caused by an embolism.

His health had been compromised in 1879 when Stevenson took a long journey by sea and rail from Europe to California. He chose to travel second class, which was 'roughing it' in those days. By the time he arrived at his destination he was at death's door. It seems that he never fully recovered from these self-imposed hardships. Stevenson was, surprisingly, viewed as something of a failure by his family. He had been expected to become a successful engineer, but rejected convention and expectation in pursuit of his writing. Although he was successful as a writer in his own lifetime his naturally Bohemian and unorthodox behaviour made him feel marginalized by Victorian society. This could explain why he felt more at home in far flung places, where he was free from the parameters of Victorian etiquette and expectation. Before he started to travel,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

he found his escape in visiting places of ill repute and iniquity where the underclass would not judge him and where he met more interesting people on the fringes of society.

TREASURE ISLAND

To

S. L. O.,

*An American gentleman,
in accordance with whose classic taste the following
narrative has been designed,
it is now, in return for numerous delightful hours,
and with the kindest wishes,
dedicated by his affectionate friend,*

THE AUTHOR

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PART ONE

The Old Buccaneer

CHAPTER 1

The Old Sea Dog at the 'Admiral Benbow'

Squire Trelawney, Dr Livesey, and the rest of these gentlemen having asked me to write down the whole particulars about Treasure Island, from the beginning to the end, keeping nothing back but the bearings of the island, and that only because there is still treasure not yet lifted, I take up my pen in the year of grace 17—, and go back to the time when my father kept the 'Admiral Benbow' inn, and the brown old seaman, with the sabre cut, first took up his lodging under our roof.

I remember him as if it were yesterday, as he came plodding to the inn door, his sea-chest following behind him in a hand-barrow; a tall, strong, heavy, nut-brown man; his tarry pigtail falling over the shoulders of his soiled blue coat; his hands ragged and scarred, with black, broken nails; and the sabre cut across one cheek, a dirty, livid white. I remember him looking round the cove and whistling to himself as he did so, and then breaking out in that old sea-song that he sang so often afterwards:

*'Fifteen men on the dead man's chest –
Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!'*

in the high, old tottering voice that seemed to have been tuned and broken at the capstan bars. Then he rapped on the door with a bit

of stick like a handspike that he carried, and when my father appeared, called roughly for a glass of rum. This, when it was brought to him, he drank slowly, like a connoisseur, lingering on the taste, and still looking about him at the cliffs and up at our signboard.

‘This is a handy cove,’ says he, at length; ‘and a pleasant sitty-ated grog-shop. Much company, mate?’

My father told him no, very little company, the more was the pity.

‘Well, then,’ said he, ‘this is the berth for me. Here you, matey,’ he cried to the man who trundled the barrow; ‘bring up alongside and help up my chest. I’ll stay here a bit,’ he continued. ‘I’m a plain man; rum and bacon and eggs is what I want, and that head up there for to watch ships off. What you mought call me? You mought call me captain. Oh, I see what you’re at – there’; and he threw down three or four gold pieces on the threshold. ‘You can tell me when I’ve worked through that,’ says he, looking as fierce as a commander.

And, indeed, bad as his clothes were, and coarsely as he spoke, he had none of the appearance of a man who sailed before the mast; but seemed like a mate or skipper, accustomed to be obeyed or to strike. The man who came with the barrow told us the mail had set him down the morning before at the ‘Royal George’; that he had inquired what inns there were along the coast, and hearing ours well spoken of, I suppose, and described as lonely, had chosen it from the others for his place of residence. And that was all we could learn of our guest.

He was a very silent man by custom. All day he hung round the cove, or upon the cliffs, with a brass telescope; all evening he sat in a corner of the parlour next the fire, and drank rum and water very strong. Mostly he would not speak when spoken to; only look up sudden and fierce, and blow through his nose like a fog-horn; and we and the people who came about our house soon learned to let him be. Every day, when he came back from his stroll, he would ask if any seafaring men had gone by along the road. At first we thought it was the want of company of his own kind that made him