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 **The Sea-Dream: *Peter Pan and Treasure Island***

Kathleen Blake

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**In lieu of** an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

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*Kathleen Blake (bio)*

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According to Robert Louis Stevenson's "A Gossip on Romance," romances

"may be nourished with the realities of life, but their true mark is to satisfy the nameless longings of the reader, and to obey the ideal laws of the daydream. The right kind of thing should fall out in the right kind of place; the right kind of thing should follow; and not only the characters talk aptly and think naturally, but all the circumstances in the tale answer one to another like notes in music."<sup>1</sup>

*Treasure Island* (1883) is the fulfillment of the "sea-dreams" of its boy hero, Jim Hawkins, who broods over the treasure map before he even leaves England (*TI*, p. 49),<sup>2</sup> and of the sea-dreams of generations of boys like him, who knew what was the right thing to go with what, what should follow, what answered. There was a shape to the ideal, or a limited number of shapes. Stevenson says, "For my part, I like a story to begin with an old wayside inn where, 'toward the close of the year 17——,' several gentlemen in three-cocked hats were playing bowls. A friend of mine preferred the Malabar coast in a storm, with a ship beating to windward, and a scowling fellow of Herculean proportions striding along the beach."<sup>3</sup> In the verse addressed "To the Hesitating Purchaser" of *Treasure Island*, Stevenson names his models—Cooper, Ballantyne, and Kingston—promising the reader "the old romance, retold / Exactly in the ancient way." He had his followers too. The romance received another inspired casting. But whereas *Treasure Island* is the dream, *Peter Pan* (1911) is about dreaming, and waking.<sup>4</sup>

The dream, the music, the game, as Stevenson also calls it, had been available to boys since *Crusoe*, whose classic outlines define a tradition of juvenile literature, the Robinsonnade. *Robinson Crusoe* was published in 1719 and has never been out of print. It entered early into a career of adaptation, channeling towards the specifically juvenile in Johann Wyss's *Swiss Family Robinson* (English translation, 1814), which then itself prolifically spawned. Frederick Marryat's *Masterman Ready* (1841), James Fenimore Cooper's *The Crater* (1847), R. M. Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* (1853), Jules Verne's *Their Island Home or The Later Adventures [End Page 165] of the Swiss Family Robinson* (1900) are only the most famous among many, which also include *The Island Home* (1851), *Canadian Crusoes* (1852),

*Arctic Crusoe* (1854), *The Desert Home or English Family Robinson* (1858), two separate *Rival Crusoes* (1826, 1878), and many another account, as in W. H. G. Kingston's book *Shipwrecks and Disasters at Sea* (1873).<sup>5</sup> The hunger for stories of the South Seas and their lonely islands extended, yet insatiate, into the last third of the nineteenth century. It was shared by Robert Louis Stevenson, who at fifteen stopped Ballantyne in the street to express his admiration, and by J. M. Barrie, who wrote an introduction to *The Coral Island* in 1913 which began: "To be born is to be wrecked on an island" and for whom "R.L.S." were the sweetest initials in contemporary literature.<sup>6</sup>

The appetite was stimulated by novelties such as Ballantyne's *The Dog Crusoe* (1861), where the formula expands to render Crusoe a dog and to accommodate "redskins" and the prairies of the Far West. The prize of novelty must rest with W. Clark Russell's *The Frozen Pirate* (1887). Though an admixture of pirates is nothing new—Crusoe himself fought with mutineers—it is unusual for the island to be an iceberg. The castaway finds upon it a frozen pirate ship and frozen pirates. One of the pirates thaws to tell the tale of the pirate treasure, which opens the way to many a chilling adventure.

Stevenson has kind words for Russell's *A Sailor's Sweetheart* (1880): Russell excels in setting and incident and stops there. His books presumably belong to the category of the "amoral" in literature, of which Stevenson approves and which had been steadily gaining ground in the sea-adventure school. If Crusoe's shrewd practicality lay deeper than his...

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