ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON’S “TREASURE ISLAND” AS AN ADVENTURE NOVEL

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ABSTRACT

Published first in 1881, Stevenson's novel Treasure Island goes beyond its time and genre. The narrative of the story with its various situations directly talks to the reader about the moral values that need to be nurtured in a growing child. Treasure Island is not a book with a message. It is an adventure tale. Yet like some other adventure tales, Stevenson's classic novel is the story of a quest. The story records a series of incidents that brings about personality changes in the life of Jim Hawkins. Treasure Island is a gripping adventure story. It records the physical voyage and emotional development of the protagonist, Jim Hawkins. He grows from an irresponsible, immature lad to a mature, sociable youth. The voyage transforms Jim. The theme of adventure/quest is seen throughout the story. From the beginning itself, the novel introduces the theme of adventure. Treasure Island has a variety of ingredients common to quest stories.

KEYWORDS: adventure story, courage, foreshadowing, poetic justice, responsibility.

INTRODUCTION

Robert Louis Stevenson (13 November 1850 – 3 December 1894) was a Scottish novelist, poet, essayist and travel writer. Through his works, he has contributed several classics to the world of children's literature. His best-known books include Treasure Island, Kidnapped, and Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. He was the son of an engineer. He studied engineering and then law at the University of Edinburgh. Since childhood, Stevenson liked literature. Eventually, he took up writing seriously and soon became one of the first ranks of contemporary writers by the excellence of his style. Treasure Island (1883) is his first major success. It tells the tale of piracy, buried treasure and adventure.
Stevenson's novel Treasure Island goes beyond its time and genre. Treasure Island was once described as a "boys' book". It was originally titled as, "The Sea Cook: A Story for Boys". Stevenson himself said in designing the idea of the story that, "It was to be a story for boys; no need of psychology or fine writing". However, it appeals not to boys alone but to anyone who likes exciting, believable, non-stop action and colorful characters in a foreign setting. The narrative of the story with its various situations directly talks to the reader about the moral values that need to be nurtured in a growing child.

Treasure Island is an exciting adventure story, filled with morals that need to be nurtured in a growing child. The author narrates these through the protagonist, Jim Hawkins, who is an immature, naturally curious and adventurous young boy. The book opens in a seaside inn named Admiral Benbow Inn, where the protagonist, Jim Hawkins is writing down his experience about his voyage to Treasure Island.

Part I consists of the first six chapters. It narrates the story from the first danger with the arrival of the captain. There is a series of strange occurrences at the inn. They include his mysterious behavior, arrival of the Black Dog, fight between the captain and the Black Dog, the captain’s illness, his father’s death, visit of Old Pew, sudden death of the captain, attack by the pirates, Jim’s bravery and his presence of mind to the moment when the main characters decide to sail to Treasure Island in search of treasure. Part I also shows how Jim Hawkins is forced to grow up rapidly and begin to chart his own course in life. The transformation in the character of Jim begins with the first part only.

The first chapter wastes no time in introducing the element of suspense and danger that characterizes the novel as a whole. Jim's life at the Admiral Benbow inn is uneventful until the captain arrives. However, from then on, there are hints that more dangerous things are about to happen. On the very first page, for example, it is learnt that the captain has a scar on his cheek caused by a saber cut. This suggests the violent life he has led. The element of danger is also conveyed by the frightening stories the captain tells. Interest and suspense increase when it becomes clear that the captain wishes to avoid any seamen that pass by the inn. His particular interest in the seaman with one leg also creates suspense. This is, of course, a foreshadowing of the appearance of Long John Silver, and the thought of such a man gives Jim nightmares. More interest is created by Jim's mention of the big box that the captain keeps upstairs, that no one has seen open. It makes the reader wonder what is in it. Stevenson's technique, here, is a model of how to tell a good story and make the reader want to keep turning the pages.

In chapters II and III, the menacing appearance of Black Dog and the blind man, as well as the death of Jim's father, add to the feeling that life for Jim Hawkins will never be the same again. This leads to the beginning of transformation in the character of Jim. Jim is soon forced to make his own way in life. The death of his father leaves him without the guidance of an older man. Soon he meets many other men, representing a variety of beliefs, professions and ethical values.

But in Chapter III, it is clear that Jim is still a child. When the captain dies, the first thing he does is a call to his mother and burst into tears. When they go for help in Chapter IV, it is Jim's mother who does the talking. Nevertheless, later in that chapter, Jim takes charge when his mother faints.
In Chapter V, Jim shows his sense of responsibility when he tells Mr. Dance that he would like to convey to safety the packet he saved from the captain's chest. This action leads to Jim's meeting with the squire and his opportunity to go on the first great adventure of his life. From being a young boy living with his parents he has become a person with responsibilities of his own.

In short, the opening of the novel introduces the major characters. The opening even foreshadows the coming events in the novel. Various themes of the novel like coming of the age of the hero, theme of quest, conflict between good and evil is also introduced. Thus, from the beginning only the novelist succeeds in grabbing the attention of the readers.

Treasure Island is not a book with a message. It is an adventure tale. Yet like some other adventure tales, Stevenson's classic novel is the story of a quest.

Treasure Island has a variety of ingredients common to adventure stories. They are as follows;

1. The hero is young and innocent in the beginning.
2. The circumstances make him take a difficult journey.
3. This journey is to a strange and dangerous place.
4. The hero is in search of something valuable.
5. On his way, he encounters one or more guardians as well as people that may try to keep him from gaining his object.
6. He has to pass many tests in order to achieve his target.
7. However, he does all that successfully.
8. The hero is forced to test his courage, intelligence, strength.
9. He even comes across previous seekers who failed the tests.
10. The successful hero passes each test.
11. In the process getting the treasure, he gains wisdom or self-knowledge.

Jim is the narrator of Treasure Island. He is the mastermind in its most important plot twists. Jim is clearly the central character in the novel. He is probably around twelve or thirteen years old. He is the quiet and obedient son of the owner of an inn near Bristol, England. With the passage of time, Jim’s character changes dramatically. He shows increasing cleverness, courage, maturity, and perspective. In the first chapter, Jim is an easily frightened boy who is closely associated with his home and family. He runs to his mother for protection when the old seaman Pew scares him. After the death of his father, his life changes. Jim starts to think for himself and takes initiative. Jim makes mistakes but he learns from them. This shows that that he is maturing.
He grows up quickly during the trip to the Treasure Island. He starts as the cabin boy but eventually names himself the new captain after he reclaims the ship from the pirates. Jim’s story is, therefore, not merely a fanciful adventure tale but also a narrative about growing up. The character of Jim is very inspiring one. He is not arrogant. His success makes him modest. He also takes full responsibility for his errors rather than finding excuses for them. He is honest and sincere.

Jim Hawkins’ quest for Flint's treasure fits the pattern of an adventure novel admirably. This is probably the reason Treasure Island is so popular. Thus, Treasure Island is an adventure tale meant for children. It is also the story of one boy’s coming of age. At the outset of the novel, Jim is a timid child, but by the end, he has matured incredibly. He has outwitted pirates, taken over a ship and saved innumerable lives.

Treasure Island maintains a strongly moral tone throughout. It is not, therefore, surprising that good triumphs and the good and bad characters receive the rewards they deserve. All the pirates, with the exception of Silver, meet a bad end. They either are killed or marooned on the island. The survivors who return to Bristol get their rewards, and use them as per their characters. Ben Gunn quickly wastes all the money he is given. He is contrasted with the good man Gray, who showed loyalty to the right cause and puts his share of the treasure to good use.

If good and bad receive their appropriate rewards, it is problematic of what to do with Silver. He is undoubtedly a "bad" character. He is a pirate and a murderer, a cruel man who seeks only his own advantage and will do anything to get what he wants. Yet he seems genuinely to like Jim Hawkins and protects him from the other pirates. This shows him in a much better light and softens the reader's judgment of him. He is not quite a lovable rogue so he can be given the punishment of hanging. However, Silver is not shown getting much profit so he is allowed to go free before the ship reaches Bristol. He is allowed to go with some very small part of the treasure that he manages to steal.

It can be said that poetic justice is observed in the novel. Good is rewarded whereas bad is punished. This is mainly because this is an adventure’s novel. Stevenson wanted to pass a good message for children.

The plot of Treasure Island is simple and follows a linear pattern. The writer uses first person narrative technique to narrate the story. The narrator is Jim Hawkins. Through him, Stevenson describes the troubles of the sea voyage to Treasure Island.

The story records a series of incidents that brings about personality changes in the life of Jim Hawkins. The change starts after an old seaman named Billy Bones comes to stay at his father’s Inn, the Admiral Benbow. Jim soon becomes a proud possessor of the original map to Treasure Island. Along with Dr. Livesey and Squire Trelawney, Jim undertakes the journey to the island with a proper crew comprising a Captain, cook, boatswain, coxswain and sailors. Jim overhears a conspiracy being planned while he is concealed in the apple barrel. Like the incident in the apple barrel, Jim is exposed to a series of exciting discoveries of people and places. This includes the incident of meeting Ben Gunn; his urge to first cut the Hispaniola free
and then to capture it. His hopeless state in the sea; his fight with Israel Hands and his capture in the enemy’s camp.

Many techniques have been used by the author to develop the adventurous plot. They are as follows:

- **THE ELEMENT OF MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE IN THE NOVEL**

  The tone of the novel from the beginning is mysterious and dark. Jim's father is weak and the reader soon receives the news of his death. Billy Bones is looking for someone, the unknown contents of the treasure chest, all adds to the mystery surrounding the novel. The setting adds to the mood. The place is also a secluded inn. It is cut off from hope of human intervention or human guidance.

  At the end of Chapter X, Stevenson reveals his frequent technique of ending a chapter on a note of suspense and anticipation. From his place in the apple barrel, Jim has just realized that Silver is leaning against the barrel. Soon he realizes that the lives of all the honest men aboard depend upon him alone. There the chapter ends. Anyone who has read that much would tempt to continue further. This technique of ending on a "cliff-hanger" may be related to the fact that Treasure Island was originally published in serial form. Thus, it was important to end each episode in a way that would make readers eager for the next installment.

- **NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE IN THE NOVEL**

  Significantly, the first chapter sets the background for many of the stylistic elements that Robert Louis Stevenson later explores in Treasure Island. First, Stevenson's narrative style is notable. The first paragraph is a good example of Stevenson's narrative technique. Its first sentence plunges the reader directly into the action. The reader learns that the story is to be told by one of the participants in an adventure. The adventure is about buried treasure, some of which still remains on the island where it was concealed.

    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.

**CHAPTER 1: THE OLD SEA-DOG AT THE ADMIRAL BENBOW**

The adventurers are gentlemen who hope to benefit from their discovery. Their enemies in the hunt are pirates. By the end of the first chapter, all the elements of the subsequent action are established. Stevenson's narrative technique is significant because of the first person narrative. In this book, the majority of action is to be seen through the eyes of a small boy, innocent and childlike.
TECHNIQUE OF FOREShADOWING

Robert Louis Stevenson is a master of using foreshadowing in order to increase the suspense of the novel. Several clues are dropped to indicate the reader that treachery is ahead of the adventure seekers. Readers can infer that Flint's desperate crew has realized that Trelawney has the treasure map, since the squire has not kept it secret. In addition, readers can guess that the sailor with one leg, Long John Silver, is probably the same one-legged seaman that Billy Bones worried about.

Another foreshadowing element is added to the plot when Trelawney informs the others that Long John Silver probably wants to sign on as a cook to get away from his wife "of color." This comment can also be viewed as a sign that Long John Silver is actually a pirate. In those days, pirates often had their headquarters in the islands of the Caribbean, which had a large black population and often married the women of the islands.

To increase the suspense, Stevenson uses foreshadowing. This is again seen in Smolletts' apprehension about the crew and the fitness of the pirates. He says that the crew is too soft and that too many people know about the location of the treasure. This foreshadowing creates suspense.

CHANGE IN THE NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

In a break from the rest of the novel, when Jim leaves the ship with the pirates, Dr Livesey narrates the story. This shift was necessary in order to ensure that a first-hand account can be told of the events that Jim was not a witness to, because he was on land.

It is also interesting to contrast the two different narration techniques. First, Jim's technique allows the reader to gain much more insight into the feelings and emotions that he feels. On the other hand, Livesey’s account is very factual and contains plenty of detail. His narration does not let the reader know what he is thinking or feeling. A good example of this is Livesey response when he believes that Jim has been killed. The only thing that he does is report that "Jim Hawkins is dead" and then simply moves on.

The plot develops systematic with the protagonist and his experiences. To bring completeness to the plot, the author brings in the doctor to narrate his experiences with the crew and the pirates when Jim is stranded on the island.

An interesting point to note is that when the number of characters is increasing and the plot is getting complex, Bill dies of heart attack, leaving us with ample amount of questions like who is the blind man. Why did he visit Bill? What was the business that took place between the dead and the blind man? What was the paper that the blind man gave to the Captain?

The climax of the story is Jim’s capture in the enemy’s camp and Silver’s downfall as the Captain of the pirates when it is learnt that the treasure has already been unearthed. The pace and power of the plot does not slacken even in the last chapter, when the Captain decides to maroon the three pirates on the island. Silver’s escape from the Hispaniola in the finishing paragraphs of
the book keep the reader constantly glued to the pages of Treasure Island. Thus, we may conclude that the serialized nature of the book does not lessen its interest-value in any way. In fact, it allows suspense to be maintained. That is the main strength of Treasure Island.

In short,

- Initial Situation: Hawkins joins Squire Trelawney and Doctor Livesey in the coastal town of Bristol to prepare for their treasure hunt.

- Conflict: Captain Smollett warns Squire Trelawney that something is wrong with the crew.

- Complication: Jim overhears Long John Silver explaining his evil plan to Dick Johnson and Israel Hands.

- Climax: Squire Trelawney and Captain Smollett ambush Israel Hands and five other sailors on board the Hispaniola; open war breaks out against the pirates.

- Suspense: Jim goes off to steal the Hispaniola from the pirates while Doctor Livesey and the rest remain on the island to deal directly with Long John Silver.

- Denouement: Jim Hawkins and Long John Silver find the empty treasure pit; Doctor Livesey and his men arrive to save the day.

- Conclusion: The Hispaniola leaves Treasure Island.

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