

Island Dreams



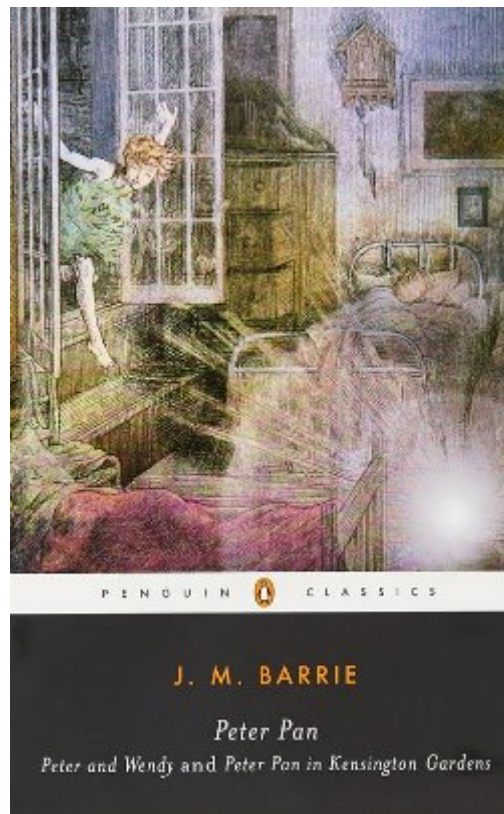
Illustration by N.C. Wyeth for Daniel Defoe's "Robinson Crusoe"

"Robinson Crusoe" was published on 25 April 1719... Island stories provide dreamy locales to rehearse issues of control and chaos (from Parents' Choice)

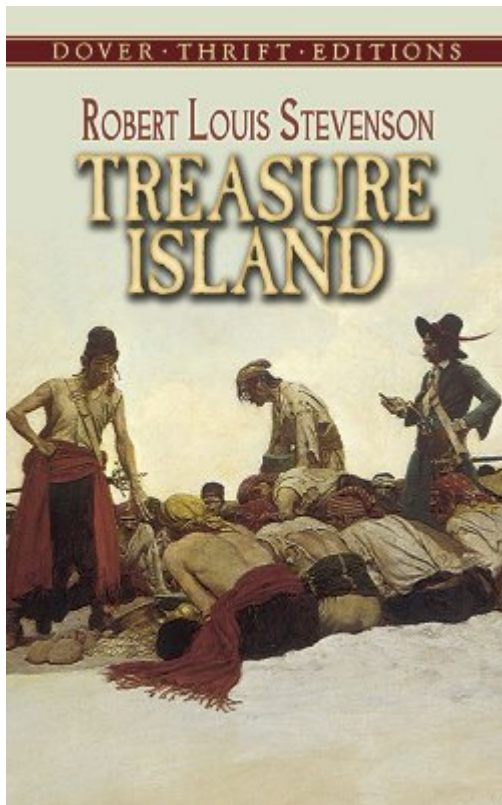
*I should like to rise and go
Where the golden apples grow;
Where below another sky
Parrot islands anchored lie
And, watched by cockatoos and goats,
Lonely Crusoes building boats.*

–R.L. Stevenson, *A Child's Garden of Verses*

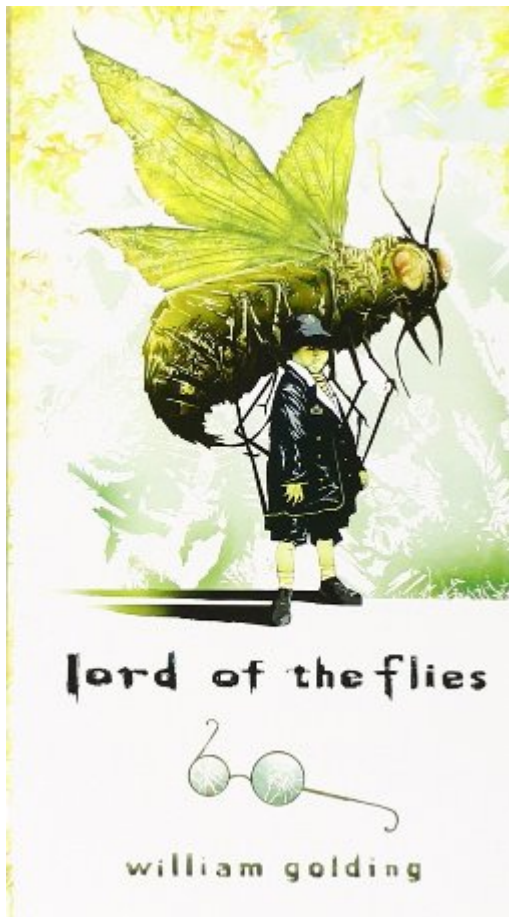
For adults in winter, daydreams about tropical islands seem to be associated with warmth; any travel agent can tell you that when toes are frozen and cold winds blow, Jamaica and Hawaii become especially desirable destinations. For the young, however, island dreaming is less seasonal and, it seems to me, particularly acute when they are grappling with issues of order and disorder, control and chaos.



Neverland, in James Barrie's [Peter Pan](#), is an island. Neatly circumscribed and isolated, this Fantasy Island is more manageable than Real Life. Neverland is a simplified place, even a silly place: more Gilligan's than Rhode Island. Still, there are potential threats to this orderliness because, Barrie notes, the island is "nicely crammed" with chaotic forces: wild animals, Redskins, and pirates.



Rather than wild animals and Redskins, pirates are, of course, the dangerous forces of chaos and entropy in Robert Louis Stevenson's more realistic [*Treasure Island*](#). Still, before his sea voyage begins, when Jim Hawkins daydreams over the map of the island, what he imagines are the wild beasts and savages to be found there. Indeed, "Here Monsters Be" was the typical entry made by cartographers when describing the isles of Terra Incognita on the edges of their maps.

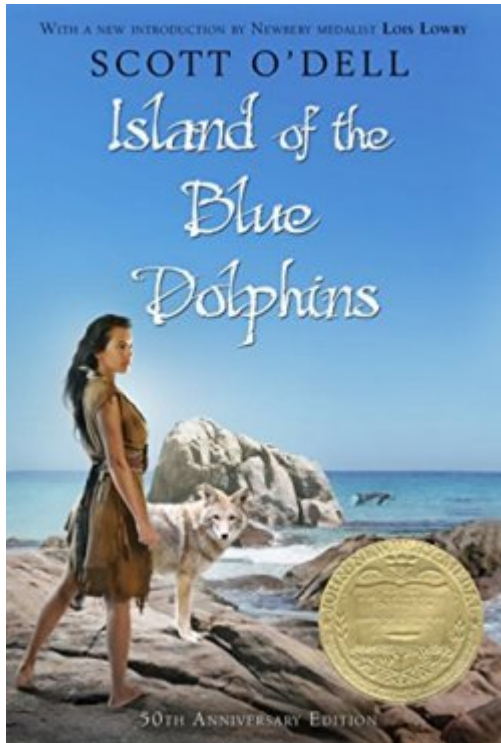


When it comes to islands, Jim Hawkins' daydreams are our own. As for "wild beasts," islands seem to be their refuge: whether we are talking about King Kong or the dinosaurs of *Jurassic Park*. And as for "savages," if cannibals are not to be found there, William Golding's [*Lord of the Flies*](#) shows that an island can change that, since Golding's English schoolboys soon degenerate into uncivilized and murderous savages there.

What is also noticeable about island dreams is that these forces of disorder (beasts and monsters, pirates and savages) often seem to appear in what is otherwise a pacific and often Pacific locale (South Sea islands, tropical and fruit-filled paradises, [*The Blue Lagoon*](#)). It's as if these stories picture that time when the chaos of adolescent rebellion is about to upset the otherwise golden period of childhood. Call this *Mutiny on the Bounty*—or, rather, mutiny in the midst of bounty.

So, the island's outlaws, its pirates and savages, might be seen as exaggerated figures for pending adolescent anarchy.

And the island's many beasts and monsters might be understood in terms of the film *Teen Wolf*: that story about a teen troubled by the scary hairiness of puberty (by animal tendencies and werewolf-like complexion problems) and played by the appropriately named actor Michael J. Fox.



Approaching adolescence, a youngster may sometimes feel all alone and very much like a shipwrecked castaway stranded on the beach of some new and foreign land. And so, for the young, during this period of their lives, there are reassuring stories of survivors who become rugged individuals on islands: Robinson Crusoe or Karana (the lone girl who inhabits Scott O'Dell's [*Island of the Blue Dolphins*](#)). And for pre-teens, there are also other island stories—[*Swiss Family Robinson*](#), for example, and Randall Jarrell's [*The Animal Family*](#)—where the important suggestion is made that family life must be entirely reinvented in these new circumstances.

Island books, to say this differently, make wonderful gifts for the young who are approaching the threshold of adolescence and who need the imaginative space that literature provides to rehearse issues of control and chaos in these more dreamy locales.

[Peter Pan](#). Ages: 9 – 12 yrs. By: J. M. Barrie. Penguin: \$8.49 (Paperback)

[Treasure Island](#). Ages: 9 – 12 yrs. By: Robert Louis Stevenson. Dover: \$4.00 (Paperback)

[Lord of the Flies](#). Ages: 9 – 12 yrs. By: William Golding. Perigree: \$9.95 (Paperback)

[Island of the Blue Dolphins](#). Ages: 9 – 12 yrs. By: Scott O'Dell. Houghton Mifflin: \$6.99 (Paperback)

[The Swiss Family Robinson](#). Ages: 9 – 12 yrs. By: Johann D. Wyss. Puffon: \$4.99 (Paperback)

[The Animal Family](#). Ages: 9 – 12 yrs. By: Randall Jarrell; Illustrated by Maurice Sendak. HarperCollins: \$17.99 (Hardback)

*Originally appeared in **Parents' Choice (February 2006)**. See also [Fantasylands](#).*