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"Because I don't want to be a pirate"

A Contextual Study of the Representation of Long John Silver in *Treasure Island* and *Black Sails*

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Introduction

> They paint the world full of shadows and then tell their children to stay close to the light. Their light. Their reasons, their judgments. Because in the darkness, there be dragons. But it isn't true. We can prove that it isn't true. In the dark, there is discovery, there is possibility, there is freedom.[1]

The quote is extracted from the final dialogue between Captain Flint and Long John Silver, in the last episode of *Black Sails,* and was in many ways the reason for my choice to write about the series with a contextual approach. Being in possession of the knowledge about what takes place in *Treasure Island,* the writers of the screenplay Robert Levine and John Steinberg utilize the moment and the discourse of the dialogue, when Captain Flint warns his friend about giving up on their war against the civilized world. It seems that Flint already knows how history, based on "their reasons" and "their judgement", will dominate the narrative and demonize the pirates, turning them into villains, even monsters. In the imperialistic context of *Treasure Island,* the author Robert Louis Stevenson seems to have done exactly what Flint prophesies. It is also worth noting that Silver is the only one of the two who is present in both works and plays a major role in both narratives. This made the choice it easier when of whom deciding to analyse and compare in the two representations. The aim of this thesis will be to investigate in what ways the iconic pirate Long John Silver is presented in two significantly different works, exemplifying how *proximation*[2] has been carried out in the appropriation, as well as to look at how social context plays in, and which norms and rules the author and filmmakers appear to have in mind. The thesis will consist of three main sections which will look at what has remained the same in the appropriation, what has undergone proximation or a modernization, and last what has been added by the filmmakers in order to make the series more suitable to today's social context. Deciding to produce the series as a prequel to a literary classic, with a fixed destination at one end, the duo Levine and Steinberg granted themselves plenty of room to operate in when creating a backstory for the fictional legends in *Treasure Island*. Despite John Silver's backstory before the events of the series remain unkown, the four seasons of *Black Sails* paint a rather intricate and complex picture of the character. The second section will attempt to unravel the character and concept that is Silver, seen in a comparative study

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[1] Levine & Steinberg 2017: (4/10)
[2] Sanders 2016: 23

between the two texts, emphasizing his transformation from a green and somewhat innocent young man to a fully-fledged and self-proclaimed villain of the literary canon.[3]

Long John Silver has existed for quite some time, turning 135 years this year if only counting the time from his birth into the literary world. If we are to look at the age of the pirate, he would have twice surpassed the expected life span of a *bowhead whale*, well over three centuries. Over this course of time, Robert Louis Stevenson's novel has been read by countless generations and has generated a desire for adventure for many a youngster, urging them to follow in the footsteps of Jim Hawkins facing the iconic figure at sea and on distant tropical shores. Numerous adaptations have been made, including more than fifty film- and TV adaptations, along with some twenty major stage adaptations, several computer games and masses of radio shows and audio recordings.[4] The amount of adaptations made underlines the popularity of the pirate franchise, which includes a silent film from 1918 (US), a television show from 1955 (Australia), an *anime* from 1971 (Japan), a version with *The Muppets* from 1996 (US) and the object of attention in this thesis, the STARZ TV-series called *Black Sails* from 2014 to 2017 (US). It is in this flurry of adaptations and appropriations that we find Long John Silver, the one-legged buccaneer, wielding a crutch and cutlass, wearing a plumed tricorne hat and with his faithful parrot companion perched safely upon his shoulder. A description which is rather close to a remarkable amount of the images generated when typing the letters "pirate" into the world's most prominent search engines, suggesting that the character created by Stevenson is still influencing our notion of what a pirate is. Indeed, in the 2010 *Collins Classics* edition of *Treasure Island,* the novel is presented as having given birth to the 19th century pirate cliché, with Silver as the utmost iconic character.[5] This being said, one ought to keep in mind that each of the reinterpretations mentioned above may be the first encounter with a text, or in this case a character, generating a collective interpretation of works of fiction across time and generations. Furthermore, works which tend to be perceived as originals are remarkably often remakes of even older texts.[6] In other words, it is not the original alone that has the effect of establishing a relationship with a fictional universe and its fictional characters. The viewers of *Black Sails* may not have any knowledge of or references to Stevenson's work, and might see the sereis as an original story with no relation to other literary texts. What effects

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[3] Stevenson 1896
[4] Wikipedia: Treasure Island
[5] Stevenson 2010: v
[6] Sanders 2016: 4

the awareness that it is an appropriation of another work might have on the audience will be highlighted in more detail towards the end of thesis.

It is not only *Black Sails* and other works within the field of adaptation which are based on lending and borrowing from other works or other modes of literature. Daresay, authors tend to read literature in order to get inspiration, and like most readers they are influenced by what they read.[7] Robert Louis Stevenson is said to have conceded carrying out some alternative form of piracy, when getting the inspiration for the novel. Apparently, Stevenson borrowed the parrot from Daniel Defoe, hijacked the stockade from Frederick Marryat, stole the skeleton from Edgar Allan Poe and almost all the rest he generated from the somewhat fictitious accounts of real pirates of the Golden Age of Piracy, written by authors under the pseudonym of a Captain Charles Johnson, later to be revealed as Daniel Defoe, and published as a work called *A General History of the Pyrates* in 1724.[89] One does not have to read a lot in the eighteenth-century book in order to find similarities in terms of plot and events to what Levine and Steinberg has produced in their series, filling the gaps of Stevenson's novel. As a matter of fact, the book by Defoe is said be one of the most important sources of knowledge to the lifestyle and deeds of the seafaring thieves of its time, thus making it a natural object of study. One example in the book which is mentioned focuses on the deeds of the historical pirate John Rackham, an actual and infamous pirate and Woodes Rogers, well-known war hero of his time, has been appointed governor and has arrived on the Island of Providence with the king's pardon.[10] This event is essential to the plot in *Black Sails* in the two last seasons, where Woodes Rogers takes up the role of the main antagonist, attempting to shut down the ongoing pirates enterprise.[11] This thesis will therefore also explore how someone's hero is someone else's demon, based on the social context and on how the creator of a text (including film and series) manages to create bonds between a character and its audience.

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[7] Jauss 1981: 62
[8] Cohen 2013: 154
[9] Defoe 1724
[10] Defoe 1724: 150
[11] Levine & Steinberg 2016/2017

Appropriation, *Proximation* and *Social Context*

Before proceeding further, we ought to define three concepts which creates the backbone for the thesis. *Appropriation, proximation* and *social context* are all terms anchored within the field of film and adaptation studies and are all interlinked, which will be made clear in this part of the thesis. In her book, *Adaptation and Appropriation,* Julie Sanders discusses how appropriation as a subcategory of adaptation differs from the more established term. Sanders's definition builds upon the term already presented by Deborah Cartmell, describing it as a less direct variant of adaptation, moving "away from the informing text into a wholly new cultural product and domain." She continues: "But, certainly appropriations tend to have a more complicated, intricate and sometimes embedded relationship to their intertexts than a straightforward film version of a canonical or well-known text would suggest."[12] (Both adaptation and appropriation will be used interchangeably throughout the text, as it varies to what degree one has to be specific.). *Black Sails* falls into the subcategory appropriation as the relationship to *Treasure Island* is more intricate and complicated, than a straightforward film version. This relationship will be investigated further as the thesis progresses.

The second concept, proximation, which is also defined in Sanders's book, is built on Gerard Genette's term and revolves around what is done when creating an adaptation in order to make it more relevant for new audiences.[13] A new audience is often situated in a different temporal, cultural and social context, in comparison to that of the source text, making it crucial for the filmmaker to update or modernize in order to keep the adaptation relatable. However, balancing the proximation without overstepping what is seen as acceptable, in terms of fidelity to source text may be a challenge for the ones making the adaptations. In spite of the concern of fidelity being, to an extent, outdated and old-fashioned, an audience tend to have certain connotations to what is not to be tampered with. In what ways Levine and Steinberg have been proximating will be discussed in more detail further on in the text, exemplified through aspects such as violence, masculinity and physical handicap.

For the purpose of defining the last concept, we leave Sanders and move over to other scholarly works, concerning context. In Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan's *Literary Theory: An Anthology,* the term *context* is defined as: "The surrounding or environment in which something exists and

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[12] Sanders 2016: 35, 36
[13] Sanders 2016: 23, 215

which usually is required in order for it to be complete or to be understood fully. Often applied to literary works whose historical surrounding is important".[14] *Black Sails*, existing in a different context, as a series and an appropriation which has undergone proximation, appeals to an alternate type of audience than what the author of *Treasure Island* did in the early 1880's. With this in mind, it is important to underline something significant, namely that *Black Sails* has to fill an entirely different set of criteria compared to that of Stevenson's young adult fiction. I would suggest that a more mature audience is in need of a more complex set of characters, as well as a more mature theme, in order to be entertained. The complexity of Silver in the series will be further investigated in the upcoming chapters.

In the introduction of his book *Engaging Cinema*, Bill Nichols states the following, which seems to sum up some of the basics for understanding the social context in films in general:

> The social context involves social and historical problems, conflicts, issues, and contradictions that provide a story's thematic focus. This level of a film is often referred to as its content, as opposed to its form, but the form itself has considerable bearing on how viewers experience and understand the content of a film (…) Questions that deal with the representation of men and women; the qualities of a hero, or antihero; the appeal of evil; the nature of community, of social belonging and exclusion; the treatment of ethnic minorities, and issues of prejudice and stereotyping; a film's political perspective, be it progressive or conservative – these questions all refer to the broader social context that surrounds any given film.[15]

In other words, Nichols underlines the impact a filmmaker has on the audience's perception of various social contexts. Entire generations may be influenced by blockbuster films or series of great success. In turn the choices of the filmmaker are highly influenced by the contemporary moment, both politically and socially. One of the key arguments of the thesis which is based on the arguments of Sanders is the following: "The *Black Sails* is no attempt to create a copy or a version of R. L. Stevenson's novel, but rather a shift over to a modern type of medium with new conventions creating a whole new cultural product.[16]" The new cultural product, which is part of Julie Sanders's definition of *appropriation*, is highly contextual and could be said to be dependent on the culture of the filmmaker. Nichols continues by suggesting that:

> The audience's view of any film world comes filtered through the social attitude, political perspective, and aesthetic sensibility of that world's maker. (…) Every encounter with a cinematic world is more like a guided tour, and every tour guide, or filmmaker, has her own perspective on the film world she displays for us. Viewers need not accept the filmmaker's perspective, but they cannot escape it either.[17]

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[14] Rivkin & Ryan 2017: 1585
[15] Nichols 2010: 14, 15
[16] Sanders 2016: 35
[17] Nichols 2010: 17

Put differently, what is emphasized here is the importance of the context of the works produced, and with them the discourses presented. What the creators of *Black Sails* have done in their adaptation, is anchored to the contemporary context of its origin. Similarly to what one today might read out of the context of late 19th century literature by reading *Treasure Island,* analysing *Black Sails* might help understand the zeitgeist of our time.

The Durability of Silver: In Treasure Island and Black Sails

Reception theorist Hans Robert Jauss once urged the importance of rereading old literary texts. He also underlined that the quality of these texts could be seen to increase in the process.[18] I would argue that this also matters for the characters inhabiting these works. The constant remakes, adaptations and appropriations strengthens the legacy of the character Silver, cementing his already solid foothold in literature. Looking at the case of John Silver from a point of view similar to that of Gérard Genette, who talks about the revaluation of a character, there is a digression between the two works. As Long John Silver is more in focus in the series than what he is in the books, though at times somewhat on the fringes of the narrative, he receives a more attractive role in the target text.[19] Anyhow, *Black Sails* is by no means unique in its decision to give a character from a well-known literary work a more impactful voice of its own in a new setting. Some examples are the characters of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* who in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* and *Claudius and Gertrude* have been granted their own books.[20][21] A more contemporary example is the film about the yellow creatures called *minions* from Universal Animation Studios' *Despicable Me* and *Despicable Me 2,* who got their own film called *Minions* two years after their second appearance. [22][23][24] It should be clarified that the series by STARZ is not a show dedicated to Silver alone, but rather a gateway into his perspective on things. Nevertheless, seen in a consumerist perspective, the constant hunger for remakes of old classics could be said to be part of a supply and demand balance between the film industry and the audience. Silver's longevity as a canonical product would thus be a result of the cycle of consumerism.

In Frank E. Beaver's *Dictionary of Film Terms: The Aesthetic Companion to Film Art,* the term "prequel" is defined as a sequel predating the original film.[25] Clearly, R. L. Stevenson's *Treasure Island* is no film, nevertheless, *Black Sails* could be said to take on the role of a prequel. In its "preqeulization", in lack of better terminology, *Black Sails* could be said to be an honest attempt to create a faithful and trustworthy narrative for the canonical figures of the

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[18] Jauss 1981: 87
[19] Sanders 2016: 62
[20] Stoppard 2000
[21] Updike 2000
[22] Meledandri & Coffin 2010
[23] Meledandri & Coffin 2013
[24] Meledandri & Coffin 2015
[25] Beaver 2007: 191, 214

romanticized and historical world of pirates. Beaver also warns us about one of the dangers of producing a prequel, namely the casting. When creating prequels, the famous characters of the original is often depicted in its childhood or youth, demanding younger actors. From time to time, these have less experience and are unable to follow in the footsteps of the previous performer playing the role of a character. In his example, Beaver refers to the Star Wars-franchise, with the late 1990's, early 2000's prequels to the already much celebrated film trilogy.[26] It is a science-fiction franchise which still continues to generate new popular blockbusters, animated series, as well as computer games among other modes of entertainment. In *Black Sails* the situation is a bit different, as the series is based on an old canonical text which has already undergone multiple adaptations, thus perhaps making it more resilient to such criticism. Especially in reference to what Sanders suggested in regard to what is perceived to be the original work: What an audience perceives as the original, may not always be the initial work.

Treasure Island's Silver: The Final Product

> What I know is this: if there is sich a thing as a Author, I'm his favourite chara'ter. He does me fathoms better'n he does you — fathoms, he does. And he likes doing me. He keeps me on deck mostly all the time, crutch and all; and he leaves you measling in the hold, where nobody can't see you, nor wants to, and you may lay to that! If there is a Author, by thunder, but he's on my side, and you may lay to it! [27]

> - Long John Silver to Captain Smollett in *The Persons of the Tale*

To clarify, the Mr. Silver whom we encounter in the novel, is the final state, or destination for the Mr. Silver in *Black Sails.* Every alliance, betrayal, death, plot-twist or transformation that affects Silver in the series, appears to be done on the basis of creating a backstory for the well-known pirate in the well-known *Treasure Island.* The decision to look at *Treasure Island* before presenting *Black Sails* would only be natural since Long John Silver and the other pirates from Stevenson's universe first appeared the novel. However, while reading the book in full for the first time about a year ago, it was first and foremost the portrayal of Silver done by Luke Arnold which coloured my opinion of Silver in the book. It is common knowledge that first

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[26] Beaver 2007: 191
[27] Stevenson 1896

impressions are crucial when establishing relationships, a sense which is also relevant for fictional characters. I would argue that a reader-character relationship is similarly, based upon the very first encounter: A point in time, which usually eliminates, affirms or creates prejudices, often at the basis of the charisma of the character. Charisma is a keyword which functions as a hook to lure and eventually reel in the audience. John Silver is without doubt a charismatic figure in both novel and series, a feature which will be further discussed later on.

Since the point of view of the book is mainly set from that of the protagonist Jim Hawkins, the young and courageous lad who is drawn into the problematic affairs of the pirates, we encounter Silver as an unknown and mysterious danger through the eyes of a boy. In the chapters 16, 17, and 18 Doctor Livesey is the narrator, as Jim has snuck away in an attempt to take the pirates by surprise. The inclusion of more than one narrator, results in various focalizers and what Genette calls a *variable internal focalization*.[28] The relentless trust in Hawkins despite his disappearance is revealed already in the second paragraph, when the doctor explains the situation. In Hawkins's absence, Livesey seems to be the most reliable source, as many of their fellow crewmen prove unreliable and, or are in lack of heroism, covering in fear and unable to act rationally.[29] The *perspective* and the *voice* could be seen as two sides of the narrator's point of view, as the one who sees and the one who speaks is the same person most of the time.[30] Leaving out the name of the one-legged creature, suspense is created when Jim is told by the rum-soaked and highly paranoid pirate, Billy Bones, to look out for Silver. The novel thereby opens with elements from the Gothic-genre. Indirectly speaking to the reader, Bones warns us of Silver already on the fifth page in the novel.[31] When Hawkins finally meets a one-legged man, he is blinded by his charm and stature, and ignores the warnings from the late Billy.

Before Jim meets Silver, he reads a letter from Trelawney. Here, Silver is presented with full name and a minor backstory, which sets the standard of what he is capable of when it comes to forging his own truth. This is how Mr Silver is described by a naïve Trelawney in his letter to Doctor Livesey:

> I was standing on the dock, when, by the merest accident, I fell in talk with him. I found he was an old sailor, kept a public-house, knew all the seafaring men in Bristol, had lost his health ashore, and wanted a good berth as cook to get to sea again. He had hobbled down there that morning, he said, to get a smell of the salt. I was monstrously touched—so would you have been—and, out of pure pity, I engaged him

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[28] Genette 1980: 189
[29] Stevenson 2010: 103, 114
[30] Hawthorn 2013: 122, 123
[31] Stevenson 2010: 5

on the spot to be ship's cook. Long John Silver, he is called, and has lost a leg; but that I regarded as a recommendation, since he lost it in his country's service, under the immortal Hawke. [32]

As we learn from this passage, Mr. Silver uses his silver tongue to sweet-talk and establish trust in order to divert and avert any suspicion regarding his enlistment to the crew, basing his relationship with the somewhat narrowminded and hot-headed squire Trelawney, as well as with the reader, on a lie. This is also what happens in the *Black Sails* series, which will be highlighted later on in the thesis. Further on in the book, Jim the narrator describes Silver as follows:

> As I was waiting, a man came out of a side room, and at a glance I was sure he must be Long John. His left leg was cut off close by the hip, and under the left shoulder he carried a crutch, which he managed with wonderful dexterity, hopping about upon it like a bird. He was very tall and strong, with a face as big as a ham—plain and pale, but intelligent and smiling. Indeed, he seemed in the most cheerful spirits, whistling as he moved about among the tables, with a merry word or a slap on the shoulder for the more favoured of his guests.
>
> Now, to tell you the truth, from the very first mention of Long John in Squire Trelawney's letter I had taken a fear in my mind that he might prove to be the very onelegged sailor whom I had watched for so long at the old Benbow. But one look at the man before me was enough. I had seen the captain, and Black Dog, and the blind man, Pew, and I thought I knew what a buccaneer was like—a very different creature, according to me, from this clean and pleasant-tempered landlord.[33]

By drawing this conclusion, Hawkins in many ways disarms Silver as a possible threat and calms the uneasy mood created at the beginning in the novel by Mr. Bones. This seems to be a narrative technique used by Stevenson to create dynamic progress in the plot, leading the reader into a false sense of security, making the exposure of his scheme even more intense and startling. Presenting himself as an admirable underdog, Silver automatically gains the sympathy of the reader, awakening emotions of compassion, charm being a major key to his success. However, our young protagonist Jim Hawkins discovers Silver's true intentions when hiding in a barrel and eavesdropping on Silver and his right-hand man Israel Hands conspiring to take control over the ship.[34] At this point Silver becomes the villain of the story by placing himself on the opposite side from Hawkins. This moments thus represents a major turning point of the plot. A divide between good and evil is established, with Jim and John represent each side in the tug of war. Their sides are made crystal clear as the story progresses on Skeleton Island, and the deadly race for Flint's buried treasure continues. Comparing the novel to *Black*

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[32] Stevenson 2010: 45
[33] Stevenson 2010: 50
[34] Stevenson 2010: 67-72

Sails, it would seem that such clear divides tend to be clouded in the modern TV-series, with few characters being reduced to merely good or evil. In the same way that the protagonists are able to perform evil deeds, the antagonists are able to do good.

According to literary scholar Lisa Honaker, Stevenson's boys' fiction novel is part of a restoration of the Victorian romance and served to spread the imperial ideology to a young generation: "This fiction made the empire attractive to its readership and described those aspects of character—of manhood—needed to serve it."[35] Humphrey Carpenter, on the other hand argues for Mr. Silver being the true hero in Stevenson's novel despite his role as the bad guy. Due to his intelligence, calmness in the face of failure and adaptability, Silver is both heroic and a representative of the perfect politician.[36] This being said, he seems to become more irrational, as the plot thickens letting his hunger for the gold blind him and interfere with is generally calm and calculated being. Despite his flashes of anger, he is without doubt the most reasonable and level-headed in his company of villains, where the average pirate is presented as dim-witted and slow, not being able to make decisions of their own, mere cogs in a machinery.

Towards the end of the novel Hawkins contemplates on the pirates through his narration, when eventually encountering the long-sought mountain of treasure. At the end of the novel, he appears to be more unforgiving and less impressed by Silver and his fellow culprits:

> (…) I beheld great heaps of coin and quadrilaterals built of bars of gold. That was Flint's treasure that we had come so far to seek and that had cost already the lives of seventeen men from the Hispaniola. How many it had cost in the amassing, what blood and sorrow, what good ships scuttled on the deep, what brave men walking the plank blindfold, what shot of cannon, what shame and lies and cruelty, perhaps no man alive could tell. Yet there were still three upon that island—Silver, and old Morgan, and Ben Gunn— who had each taken his share in these crimes, as each had hoped in vain to share in the reward.[37]

This paragraph illustrates how Jim has built up immunity towards the charisma of Silver over the course of the novel. As the readers see the plot through the eyes of the young adventurer, they, in turn, are affected by his resistance. By calling them criminals and announcing their defeat in their attempt to secure the wealth, which he denounces as the source to a lot of death

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[35] Honaker 2004: 28
[36] Carpenter 2012 (1986)
[37] Stevenson 2010: 218, 219

and torment, Jim claims victory. Despite the fact that Silver steals away with a small amount of the treasure, he has still lost his captaincy, almost all of his fellow crooks, and the race for the gold. In the process Silver is also defeated by the headstrong and courageous Jim Hawkins, who represents the imperial values. These values will be further discussed in the upcoming chapters.

Silver in *Black Sails* - The Transformation

> Because I don't want to be a pirate, I'm not interested in the life, I'm not interested in the fighting, I'm not interested in the ships. Don't care much for the sea while we are on the subject. But being a pirate on this crew just a little while longer offers me an opportunity I don't think I'll find anywhere else on this earth: one big prize. And with it, freedom, from water, from Randall, from hunger, from wages,..from you. [38]
>
> -   Silver to Flint

The writers and directors of the pirate series dedicate large amounts of screen time to Long John Silver. However, he is not the sole focalizer as he shares the role of being the protagonist with several of his fellow pirates. According to what Genette writes in *Narrative Discourse,* the narrative in *Black Sails* falls into the same category of *internal focalization* with a *variable,* as the focus is shifting between the various characters.[39] This makes room for several protagonists and deuteragonists, and consequently discourses which gives the series a broader perspective.

Lacking physical strength, skill in combat and naval experience, the opportunistic young man gradually develops into a fictional legend of canonical stature, in order to fill the boots of his alternate self in the novel. His transcendency is not only the result of his own drive and ingenuity, but also the actions of Billy Bones. Billy, whom in many ways was the architect behind it all, proves unable to handle Silver and seeks to destroy him at the end. The transformation of Mr. Silver could be seen as a climb towards the top, where each wrung of the ladder symbolizes an obstacle to grasp and overcome. His development is presented in a complicated and intricate timeline, which therefore ought to be explained in detail. To witness Silver's rise to power, to experience how he in many ways changes from antihero to a reasonable figure to whom the audience might relate, is a process which might generate a sense

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[38] Chernuchin 2015 (2/2)
[39] Genette 1980: 189

of satisfaction in the audience. As we will learn further on, the significance of his role in the plot of the series increases exponentially, peaking in the final season. Silver's development in the show resembles that of a *bildungsroman*.[40] His character can be said to have been shaped, both physically and mentally by the characters and events that has taken place in the series.

Silver-tongued Silver's Storyline: Compressed Edition

John Silver is introduced in the series as a crewman on a merchant ship which is raided by his future family, the *Walrus* crew led by Captain Flint. Silver steals a page from his former captain's log containing the location of a Spanish treasure galleon (*Urca de Lima*), which becomes his ticket into the pirate narrative. He is brought to Nassau where much of the plot of the series takes place. Failing to sell the page for a great deal of money, the two most respected pirate captains Vane and Flint attempt to take it from him. He memorizes the page before throwing it into a bonfire and becomes necessary to Flint and the *Walrus* crew, who set sail to find the gold. They find the ship wrecked on a beach, but are bested in battle against a Spanish warship defending it, and fail to retrieve the gold. This defeat is the final straw for the crew who commit mutiny in response to the tyrannical and ruthless rule of their captain. According to the crew, both Silver and Flint are to blame for their failure.[41]

The second season revolves around Flint and his attempts to both introduce pirate self-rule to the island of New Providence, as well as getting his hands on the treasure. Silver plays a crucial role in swaying the crew in Flint's favour, as he believes Flint to be the key to securing the treasure. They succeed in restoring Flint's captaincy and the two become friends. Silver learns a lot about Flint's past: his lover Thomas Hamilton, and how their tragic love story is the fuel to Flint's hatred towards the civilized world. After a peaceful and civilized effort to liberate Nassau from the British fails, resulting in an even more insane and vengeful Flint, a crippled Silver, the town Charlestown in flames and a war against civilization. The gold which gets secured by Jack Rackham is no longer the main focus of the protagonists. Silver becomes a voice of reason to the despair and madness raging within Flint. However, these roles change to some extent when Silver is mutilated. [42]

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[40] Hawthorn 2013: 226
[41] Levine & Steinberg 2014
[42] Levine & Steinberg 2015

In the third season former war-hero Woodes Rogers becomes the main antagonist in the story and the embodiment of civilization as he sets out to restore the British rule in Nassau. The introduction of Rogers and his men has a unifying effect on the pirates, and the old rivalry between Flint, Rackham and Vane, among others, is set aside.[43] A rather incidental alliance between the pirates and the maroons comes to life and proves to be of paramount importance for beating the British, and stopping them from securing control over their colonies. Silver and a woman named Madi, the daughter of the Queen of the maroons fall in love and their companionship becomes the glue that holds the alliance together. Flint and the infamous pirate Blackbeard lead the pirates to victory both on land and at sea, vanquishing the Red Coats. In order to keep the pirates faithful to the cause, Billy Bones, the former crewmember on the Wailrus creates the legend Long John Silver. By spreading the word of a new pirate king, Billy incites a widespread rebellion and a will to fight against the colonial power. Silver's name and reputation becomes of equal magnitude to that of Flint's, which becomes the source of conflict in the final season.[44]

At the end of the third season, the pirates and maroons have united against civilization, and the prospect of their success looks promising. However, the fourth starts off catastrophically. Despite the grave defeat on Maroon Island, governor Woodes Rogers has not been idle while holding Nassau. When the pirate fleet closes in on the harbour and the fort, they sail into Rogers' trap and their imminent destruction. Blackbeard's ship is one the few ships to make it out of the bay. In the chaos Silver is caught by some debris and dragged down into the depths and is believed to have perished when the pirates and Madi regroup on the beach. This is, the first of many cracks in the Pirate-Maroon Alliance.[45] Silver has to choose between his friend Billy Bones, and Flint and Madi, leading to a most tragic fate for Mr. Bones. After being betrayed by Silver, Bones ends up helping Rogers in his quest to bring down the alliance.

The gold, which once was in the hands of Rackham, has been exchanged into pearls and gems and is stashed in a single chest. The treasure (the very same from *Treasure Island*) becomes the leverage, when Rogers has managed to capture Madi and is willing trade the maroon leader for fortune. Prior to the transaction, which is to take place in a bay on Skeleton Island, Silver and Rackham have agreed to remove Flint, who sneaks off into the jungle and buries the

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[43] Levine & Steinberg 2016
[44] Levine & Steinberg 2016
[45] Levine 2017 (4/1)

treasure. Rogers blows up the *Walrus*, and Rackham arrives just in time to save the survivors of its crew, including Silver and Flint. In one final effort to bring down Rogers, the pirates led by Flint board his ship, succeed in incapacitating Billy, capturing Rogers and releasing Madi. In the final dialogue between Silver and Flint, the former convinces the latter to quit his never-ending quest for vengeance and Flint leaves the life as a pirate behind in order to be reunited with his beloved Thomas at a labour camp in Savannah. Madi and Silver end up staying together, while Rackham and his companions carry on with piracy. The filmmakers Levine and Steinberg has set the destination of the series in close proximity to the events of *Treasure Island*, bridging the two works.

Treasure Island and *Black Sails*: What is fixed?

In this section of the thesis, the focus will be on highlighting and comparing important elements within both the source text and the appropriation by raising the question: What similarities are found between *Black Sails* and *Treasure Island?* In order to answer this question, one has to be selective and concrete, as there are numerous parallels to be drawn between the two works. Limiting the focus to a few aspects, including Long John Silver, could be seen as one way of concentrating the focal point, making the process more viable. I will commence with the charismatic traits of the character, before moving on to his looks and his relationship to the other characters.

Serving the Fans: Pirates and Treasure in the Caribbean

In their series, the filmmaker duo Levine and Steinberg chose to keep the setting, theme and some of the pirates from Stevenson's universe, aspects which to a certain degree may be seen as important elements that concretizes the connection between the hypertext, the appropriation and the hypotext, the novel.[46] Despite being an appropriation, which often expresses a greater sense of liberty, it may be important for the filmmakers to preserve some of the essence which is found in the novel.

In terms of fanservice, the filmmakers will have had to take certain elements into consideration when expanding the backstory of characters from canonical works. Jakob Lothe mentions that the relationship the creators of adaptation have to the hypertext varies.[47] Arguably, Levine and Steinberg would have done significant research on *Treasure Island* in order to be able to satisfy the expectations of the viewers, thus performing a type of "fan service". Johnathan E. Steinberg himself directed the final episode of the series, which might indicate that he wanted to be sure to conclude his series in a manner which underlines its role as a prequel. Although the term fan service originates from the Japanese cartoon comics (manga) and series (anime), it is transferable to western modern television series. According to Bart Beaty, the word has been used to explain how highly sexualized content has been included in Japanese pop culture, as a way of pleasing the audience and giving them what they desire. For instance, big breasted

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[46] Sanders 2016: 8
[47] Lothe 2000: 88

animated young girls in daring outfits are frequently central in this type of entertainment. In the western comparison to anime and mange culture, the world of the superhero-franchise dominated by *DC Comics* and *Marvel* we find similar features. The male figures, with their superpowers and magnificent muscles and their female counterparts with their stylish tight costumes and fighter attitude, have become immensely popular.[48]

In *Black Sails*, the creators present setting, plot, and characters which could be said to serve the expectations and desires of the fan. In lack of a better word to explain the efforts of the filmmakers to satisfy the fans of Stevenson's work and its adaptations, through preserving elements and themes, I will attempt to use the term fanservice in a broader sense, transcending from its original meaning. In practice, this means that the term is used to exemplify how Levine and Steinberg has added, proximated or kept certain aspects in their appropriation. The themes of rumsoaked pirates, wooden ships, flintlock pistols, cutlasses and the eternal treasure-hunt, could be said to be the backbone of the series. However, on a more detailed and fan-based level, the traits, skills, personalities, and appearances of the pirates from Stevenson's universe need to surface in the *Black Sails*. To what extent these details matter, varies from viewer to viewer, based on their prior knowledge and interpretation of the source text. This is what in the semiotics is called the *signifier* and the *signified,* where the former refers to what actually is presented to the viewer, while the latter refers to the meaning which is supplied to it by the viewer.[49] To exemplify, we may look at the Silver as the one-legged pirate. The loss of his leg may not have any specific meaning or value to some viewers, but may prove crucial to others. The fans of the hard core, who are highly invested in the universe are usually considered the most difficult to appease, due to their concerns and demands regarding details. One approach to respect and consider the wishes of the fans, is by adding the infamous "Easter-eggs", which tend to trigger a sense of gratitude and satisfaction among the enthusiastic core.[50] In the Marvel universe, references or crossover characters may be such eggs. In *Black Sails* however, the removal of Silver's leg, introducing minor characters like Israel Hands, Ben Gunn, or adding the location of Skeleton Island may have had a similar effect. For the unknowing audience, these choices may appear and disappear without concern, but for the loyal fans these are often of monumental importance, and even decisive to whether adaptations and appropriations are worth watching.

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[48] Beaty 2016: 324
[49] Nichols 2010: 32, 34
[50] Hockrow 2014: 98

The examples of Easter-eggs above, are all what may be expected to find in the series, due to the important roles they play in the source text. However, there are cases of minor details which are not crucial for the plot in *Treasure Island,* yet which still have been granted a place in *Black Sails.* Such an example is the inclusion of the "black spot", which after being introduced by Stevenson in his novel has become part of the pirate lore of popular culture. It appears in *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest,*[51] as well as in *XXVIII,* the final episode in the third season of the pirate series.[52] *The Black Spot* is the title of the third chapter of novel, which contains the death of Billy Bones. According to the pirate superstition in Stevenson's universe, one is cursed or marked to die after having received a note with the black spot on it. Shortly after receiving the black spot, Mr. Bones dies when his heart stops. Whether it is Billy's extreme paranoia of Silver's or Flint's unavoidable vengeance, or his large consumption of rum which kills him, remains uncertain. However, it seems that his already strained heart cannot bear the burden of the black spot.[53] The twenty-ninth chapter of the novel is called *The Black Spot Again,* as one of the mutineers who start doubting Silver's plan gives the black spot to Silver.[54] This has not the same immediate effect as the previous spot sent to Billy. In *XXVIII* the black spot is sent to a Captain Throckmorton, as part of an ultimatum to free a captured Charles Vane. Throckmorton is found the next day hanging by the neck in the streets, and is the first victim of the bogeyman Long John Silver, created by Mr. Bones.[55] The inclusion of the black spot as an Easter-egg, could be seen as a way of appeasing the fans as well as a way of connecting the two works together. Since the filmmakers have decided to use Billy Bones as the mastermind behind the spot and the legend of Long John Silver, the irony when reading about the death of Billy in the novel becomes even more significant. Like Doctor Frankenstein who loses control of his creation, Bones has to suffer the consequences of his own brilliance.

Furthermore, it is important to mention that fanservice may also be expressed through proximation and the introduction of new material. An example of this may be the inclusion of the psychological aspect of Silver's loss of his leg, which presumably serves the more mature audience of the series. Another side of fanservice might be found closer to its original meaning, when the filmmakers have to include a whole new element such as sex. Both the proximation

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[51] Verbinski & Bruckheimer 2006
[52] Levine 2016 (3/10)
[53] Stevenson 2010: 16-21
[54] Stevenson 2010: 188
[55] Levine 2016 (3/10)

and the introduction of new aspects in *Black Sails* will be expressed in more detail later on in the thesis.

Silver-Tongued Silver: Hero or villain?

Mr. Silver's charisma is one of his most effective traits, and a crucial trump card in combination with his insightfulness. He is an example of how charismatic figures may be seen as both dangerous and wise, tyrannical and altruistic. Probably due to its significance in the novel, it is afeature which has been emphasized by the filmmakers and directors of the series. Luke Arnold, who plays the role of the trickster also affects viewers' perception of the character. Despite lacking the influential power of a well-known film star, Arnold's performance and appearance play a vital part of creating an emotional bond with the audience.[56] In the meritocracy of the film industry, gifted actors tend to weed out the ones without any particular talent. Some actors tend to be liked based on former performances, while others are less known, and rather select on the basis of that they correspond well with the ideas of the directors and the writers of the screenplay. Arnold being a little-known profile in the western film industry (perhaps, with the exclusion of fans of Australian television), falls into the second category, and is less likely to get job offers based on past achievements. Nevertheless, the face of Luke Arnold has become the face of Long John Silver to some, whether appreciating it or not.

In spite of his charismatic similarities, the differences between the ascending underdog in *Black Sails*, and the mutinous old buccaneer in *Treasure Island* are many and compelling. Even so, throughout his transition in the four seasons of *Black Sails* he eventually becomes a comparable figure to that of the novel. As the series progresses and comes closer to its conclusion, the different loose ends are sorted and woven together to a plot which creates a backdrop for the novel. With increasing amounts of hints and allusions in the last season, a potential rereading of the novel after watching through the series in its entirety would add new layers of meaning, supplying the reader with new input and ideas for interpretation. Through the change of roles, from antagonist to protagonist, Levine and Steinberg may have made a misunderstood Silver more likeable, letting the audience celebrate the witty and quick character.[57]

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[56] Nichols 2010: 270, 271
[57] Nichols 2010: 68

The One-Legged Creature

As argued in the introduction, visual appearance is highlighted as crucial for the iconic pirate. The characteristics of Silver alters over the course of *Black Sails,* drawing nearer to the figure created by Stevenson. Initially, the working title of the analysis of the first season was called the "Grinning Opportunist" which pretty much sums up Silver in that particular season. There is a change in the pirate's mood and countenance, from better to worse throughout the four seasons. This progressing entropy becomes more evident through the use close-up filming of Silver.[58] Comparing a close-up from one of the first episodes with one from the last episode, reveals a significant difference. One might suggest that the tough lifestyle of a pirate radically increases the aging process, like a child who has been thrown into the adult world much too soon, or a person who has suffered from years of drug addiction, leaving visible traces. Whether it is due to the trauma of losing his leg, having believed to have lost the love of his life, or the obsession of getting his hands on the treasure, or a combination of all three, proves difficult to determine. However, what seems indisputable is that Levine and Steinberg have decided to make use of the one-legged Silver's ragged look.

In the second season, during the events of the unsuccessful meeting between the ex-wife of Thomas Hamilton, Miranda Barlow, James 'Flint' McGraw and governor Peter Ashe in Charlestown, Charles Vane and his remorseless crew succeeds in hijacking the ship of the absent Captain Flint. Flint's men are all either killed or put in chains, except for Silver and a few others. Before Vane and his men manage to track down and capture the evasive buccaneers, Silver decides to sabotage the ship, buying some time for the captives and Flint. He succeeds in his mission, but is soon caught by Vane's men. Captain Vane's quartermaster interrogates him, smashing his leg with a large wooden mallet, in order to get the names of those likely to cooperate with their crew. Silver suffers the consequences of not giving up any of his men and receives their eternal gratitude and respect. Flint's crew rise up against their captors and reclaim the vessel, killing the torturers and saving Silver. His molested leg cannot be saved, however.[59] On the return of Vane and Flint, Silver is elected the new quartermaster of the crew and his position among the men is secured. Upon losing the leg, the boyish, witty and grinning Silver disappears. Being the victim of the vile acts of torture and trauma, the happiness of Mr. Silver is drained, and in its absence a darkness, not unlike captain Flint's, begins to take hold and

[58] Beaver 2007: 45
[59] Kane 2015 (2/9)

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fester.[60] Furthermore, the atrocities done to John Silver in this particular scene, could be seen as way for the filmmakers to justify and explain some of his villainous tendencies in *Treasure Island.* One might also say that the creators of the series needed such a terrible episode to play on the effects of pathos within the viewer. As the hero suffers in order to help his companions at the hands of evil men, the onlooker is filled with a sense of compassion and sympathy.[61]

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[60] Levine & Steinberg 2015 (2/10)
[61] Beaver 2007: 88

Treasure Island and *Black Sails*: What is Proximated?

Having already explained the concept of proximation, it is time to exemplify how *Black Sails* has undergone several updates and renewals in order to appeal to the modern and mature audience. This section is divided into four interdependent parts, all directing attention to how Silver and his fellow pirates are depicted in the two works. The first example concerns how the loss of Silver's leg affects him. Proceeding from the previous section, which concluded by arguing for why the removal of Silver's leg was important for the series, this chapter will commence by looking at the pirates from the perspective of emotions.

Emotions

Early in the third season, shortly after the Charlestown horrors, the *Walrus* is being shredded into pieces by a horrendous storm. Mr. Silver and his fellow crewmember named Bub are below deck, struggling to stop the flooding of the hull by plugging the cracks and holes. Amidst the chaos of intruding seawater and floating debris, Bub explains to Silver that he has earned their eternal gratitude and that they do not care about his handicap. Silver underlines how much he hates being seen as someone who needs help. The unfortunate Bub drowns in the arms of a devastated Silver, when they fail to stop the flow of water.[62] The scene underlines how Silver is terrified of being seen as weak and helpless. This is also made clear in the previous episode, when he ignores the physician's advice of using crutches in order to relieve some of the pain and pressure on his stump while wearing his prosthesis.[63] By letting the viewer witness an emotionally exposed Silver, a certain type of relationship is established. The effects of getting under the skin of the iconic pirate, makes him more human, thus easier to identify with. The decision to add such a layer to the pirate character, could be suggested to be part of the proximation performed in the prequel.

At the end of the third season John Silver has become 'Long' John Silver, a monstrosity in a ghost story composed by Billy Bones. Silver has until now been the right hand of Flint and second in command. In the seventh episode he rises beyond Flint when he follows the

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[62] Steinberg & Kane 2016 (3/2)
[63] Levine & Steinberg 2016 (3/1)

instructions of Billy. Silver announces the resurrection of Flint in a tavern in Nassau, when they return from Maroon Island after having forged the pirate-maroon alliance. Silver wants to recruit the pirates who have accepted the king's pardon. In the very same tavern, former crewmember and quartermaster Dufresne is attempting to disarm John Silver's arguments, with provocations. The taunts annoy Silver, who ends up stomping off the head of Dufresne with his metal peg-leg, sending a message from Long John Silver that the pirates should stay true to the cause and turn their backs to the British who offers them pardons. In this very moment, the corrupting darkness that took a hold of Flint earlier in the season, has been embraced by Mr. Silver.[64] Doubtlessly, this scene presents a dark and distraught version of Silver. Nevertheless, the exposure of his soft side, might make it easier for the audience to understand or justify the violent actions of the protagonist.

Despite dedicating less attention towards the feelings and sentiment of the pirate figures, the protagonist and narrator of the novel, Jim, reveals that he is emotionally upset by the events that take place. Young Mr. Hawkins does not hide his fear when he writes about the various traumatic episodes, which includes meeting with the various pirates, being threatened and even stabbed.[65] He admits that he could not hold back his tears when Billy Bones dies.[66] He had recently lost his father to illness, when the death of the strange guest occurs right in front of him at the *Admiral Benbow Inn,* where he lives. Like the pirate protagonists of *Black Sails,* the emotional exposure of Jim helps the reader to sympathize with the character. The series undergoes proximation when there is a shift in the emotional focus, from civilian to pirate.

Masculinity

Masculinity has been selected due to its strong presence in both works. However, the way in which it is presented differs significantly. The juvenile no-girls-allowed attitude in the novel is in desperate need for proximation, in order for it to work in the social context of the modern series. While the protagonist Jim Hawkins champions imperialistic values, such as loyalty, bravery, and strength, the pirate protagonists of the series express a rawer, grubbier and less

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[64] Steinberg 2016 (3/7)
[65] Stevenson 2010: 169
[66] Stevenson 2010: 21

polished sense of masculinity. Sweaty, greasy, violent and hard are adjectives that describe the protagonists of *Black Sails.* Similarly in the novel, Billy Bones is described as: "tall, strong, tarry, ragged, scarred, dirty".[67] The pirates, as argued above, are the villains of Stevenson's work, and their appearance thus reflects unethical, ungroomed and filthy beings, and represents counterparts to Jim. Whereas in *Black Sails,* the rough and unrefined pirates, the heroes of the show, could be seen as a reaction to the traditional celebration of the good-guy hero. Levine and Steinberg appear to have decided to emphasize the manly rather than the boyish as part of the proximation towards an older audience.

Moving on, one might also look at masculinity as a counterpart to femininity. Film scholar Mary Dalton presents an interesting idea which stresses some traditional differences between masculine and feminine structures on a narratological level:

> Simply put, stories told in a conventional, masculine form are generally linear, hero-driven tales about conquest, whereas stories told with a more circular and sometimes collective feminine structure are often about overcoming obstacles in order to find connection. That connection may be internal, may involve other individuals or groups, or may even relate to larger communities.[68]

When applying Dalton's suggestions to the two objects of study, both likenesses and discrepancies surface. In relation to Dalton's slightly oversimplified approach *Treasure Island* fits rather easily into the frame of the conventional masculine narrative. The novel could easily be categorized as a linear quest, which is most certainly hero-driven and is preoccupied of defeating the pirates and securing the treasure. One might argue that there is a sense of group identity as Jim becomes part of a crew with Doctor Livesey, Mr Trelawney and Captain Smollet, however it is the voice of Hawkins as a lone wolf which exerts the strongest resonance throughout the novel. In the series however, there are tendencies of both. Like the linear structure in *Treasure Island*, the prequel has a starting point and a fixed destination, except for some anachronic interruptions through the use of flashbacks. Likewise, the constant hunger for gold and fortune among the protagonists of the series seems to echo the catalyst in the source text. Nevertheless, several subplots revolve around the overcoming of obstacles in order to find connection, both on an individual level as well as in larger community. The number of such subplots gradually increase in the storyline of Silver, as the character becomes more involved in the pirate lifestyle. One might argue that the first season leans closer towards the conventional masculine narrative, as it is mainly focusing on the selfish acts of the various

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[67] Stevenson 2010: 3
[68] Dalton 2013: 23

pirates, chasing the Spanish treasure or positions of power. Lacking the feminine structure suggested by Dalton, the viewer may have difficulties identifying with the various characters, which could appear superficial and unlikable, as they are merely concerned with their own success and lacking any sense of empathy.[69] This changes in season two, however.

Violence

The third aspect of which could be said to have been proximated is the violence which occurs regularly in *Black Sails* and could be said to go hand in hand with the emotion aspect discussed above. Pirates have long been labelled as violent, murderous and evil criminals. In Daniel Defoe's work from 1724, the pirates are described as a major contemporary problem in the West-Indies. Disrupting valuable trade routes as well as causing death and destruction, the *ruffians* and *desperadoes,* as they are referred to, have been a problem dating back to Roman times.[70] One of the truly bad ones according to Defoe, was an Italian pirate called *Matthew Luke* who was said to have killed the entire crews of four English vessels.[71] Levine and Steinberg do not attempt to omit or moderate this notion in any way, as there are fights, abuse, or murder in almost all of the episodes of the show. Furthermore, if we are to juxtapose the violence in the series with that in the novel, we would find out that they are on two different levels.

According to stories collected and written by Defoe in the 1720s, some of the contemporary pirates were inhuman and cruel men. As the work by Defoe was a source of inspiration to the author and filmmakers, one ought to have a look at its content in order to find what they decided to weight in their works. In *Treasure Island,* there are continuous instances of violence throughout the entire novel and it spikes when mutineers and those loyal to the captain fight each other. The reader and Jim encounter what is likely to be the most brutal of deaths in the novel, when he witnesses the blind pirate Pew being trampled to death by horses in the early stages of the novel.[72] Two other examples which illustrate the results of the fighting between the heroes and the villainous pirates, depict how death is part of the violence. "After reloading, we walked down the outside of the palisade to see to the fallen enemy. He was stone dead—

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[69] Levine & Steinberg 2014
[70] Defoe 1724: 19, 20
[71] Defoe 1724: 33
[72] Stevenson 2010: 31

shot through the heart", and "The house was by this time somewhat cleared of smoke, and we saw at a glance the price we had paid for victory. Hunter lay beside his loophole, stunned; Joyce by his, shot through the head, never to move again."[73] These are but two of the dead men Jim Hawkins encounters on his adventure to Skeleton Island. It could be argued that Stevenson has attempted to balance or appropriate the details from Defoe's text, in order for it to fit into the conventions of a boys' novel. By incorporating the authentic and violent nature of the pirates in a moderate manner, the late 19th century Victorian boy may have been satisfied without being traumatized by the details.

In *Black Sails,* on the other hand, the filmmakers did not have to take the same precautions when displaying psychological torment, rape, torture and murder. One of the most manipulative and unlikable figures introduced is the historical pirate Edward Low, captain of the *Fancy.* His first appearance is in episode *IX,* when he leads his men to massacre the crew of *The Good Fortune,* who surrendered without putting up a fight. He is also the one who captures the girl Abigail Ashe, a governor's daughter whose role will be discussed in more detail later on in the thesis. As he is aware of his cruelty and remorseless behaviour, he uses it to instil fear in the one he aims to control. Eleanor Guthrie, the woman in control of the black market in Nassau, is threatened by Low who wants to break down her authority. "When the men see me slaughter the crew of the Good Fortune, when they see me cut out of man's tongue from his mouth for lying, when they see me burn a boy alive in front of his father's eyes, they know, they can see it in my eyes...there's no lie there. There's no seed of remorse there. I simply don't have it in me."[74] As a result of his threats, Low is beheaded by an agitated Vane, who singlehandedly sneaks onboard Low's ship and kills those who try to stop him. Vane places Low's head on a spiked post, with a sign under it reading: "I angered Charles Vane", and by doing so secures his social position in Nassau.[75]

Captain Low is depicted as an advocate of evil deeds in the series. Comparing the representation of Low in the series with that by Defoe in his pirate encyclopaedia, it seems that the grim portrayal of the historical figure is by no means exaggerated. In a letter written by the mayor of New York, Robert Walters, the horrific deeds of Low is told in detail:

> Some Days after, Low took a Fishing-Boat off of Block Island, but did not perpetrate so much Cruelty to her, contenting himself with only cutting off the Master's Head: But after taking two Whale-Boats near Rhode Island, he caused one of the Master's Bodies to be ripp'd up, and his Intrails to be taken out;

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[73] Stevenson 2010: 114, 135
[74] Levine & Steinberg 2015: (2/1)
[75] Kane 2015: (2/3)

and cut off the Ears of the other, and made him eat them himself with Pepper and Salt; which hard Injunction he comply'd with, without making a Word.[76]

Whether or not one is to believe the mayor of New York in his description of the pirate, is another question. His position as the mayor in one of the colonies of the British Empire and suffering the consequences of the presence of the buccaneers, would doubtlessly render the alderman biased. However, it is important to acknowledge that the pirates were a troublesome and devastating force, and the fact that some of them may not have been so far from the descriptions by Robert Walters suggests. The filmmakers appear to have stressed the aspect of violence as a prominent part of the pirates' way of living. In the final section rof the thesis, we will return to essential features of violence in relation to the homosexual discourse which in turn has been added to the semi fictional universe of *Black Sails*.

Flint's Ghost

As mentioned in the introduction, Silver is the only one of the two main characters focused upon in *Black Sails* who plays major roles in both works. This being said, it is worth mentioning that this only applies to Captain Flint, the character, the pirate, not his ghost. Like the some of the other pirates mentioned above, Flint has a lot of blood his hands. Having crushed the skull of his rival for the captaincy with a cannon ball in the first episode,[77] presumably pushed his boatswain and friend Billy Bones over board during a storm,[78] and stabbed his best friend, Mr Gates, the quartermaster when confronted by his loyal man,[79] Flint comes off as a man capable of numerous evil deeds. In spite of being absent throughout the entire novel, his spirit and reputation seem to be very much alive. Even the righteous and respectable companions of Hawkins, Dr Livesey and the squire Trelawney are amazed by his name:

> 'You have heard of this Flint, I suppose?' 'Heard of him!' cried the squire. 'Heard of him, you say! He was the bloodthirstiest buccaneer that sailed. Blackbeard was a child to Flint. The Spaniards were so prodigiously afraid of him that, I tell you, sir, I was sometimes proud he was an Englishman.[80]

In addition to having buried his infamous treasure, and having Silver's pet parrot named after

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[76] Defoe 1724: 388
[77] Levine & Steinberg 2014: (1/1)
[78] Bellson 2014: (1/6)
[79] Levine & Steinberg 2014: (1/8)
[80] Stevenson 2010: 36

him, Flint's name is mentioned 58 times throughout the novel, which makes his legend important for the novel in its entirety. Billy Bones hallucinates and sees Flint in the *Admiral Benbow*, after having heeded the instructions of Doctor Livesey and ceased his consumption of rum.[81] The strong presence of Flint in the minds of characters could be seen as a reason for why the filmmakers would not dare to omit the legendary buccaneer from the prequel to the novel, but rather give his spirit and name a body and a face. Jim concludes his narrative by admitting that his whole adventure took a toll on him, and that he is still haunted by Flint (the parrot's) ringing voice:

> Oxen and wain-ropes would not bring me back again to that accursed island; and the worst dreams that ever I have are when I hear the surf booming about its coasts or start upright in bed with the sharp voice of Captain Flint still ringing in my ears: 'Pieces of eight! Pieces of eight!'[82]

In *Black Sails,* Mr. Silver is warned about how Flint and his treasure will forever be a thorn in his side. This is all well presented in the last episode of the season, when Silver's persuasive prowess shows its true colours. The two have their final dialogue in the jungles of Skeleton Island, where John persuades James to give up the hopes and dreams of Flint, and resume as James McGraw, thereby terminating the figure that is Flint. Silver says that he is tired of fighting and that he will not lose Madi. After he thought he had lost her, Silver says that he finally saw the world the way Flint sees the world. Flint responds by indirectly referring to Stevenson's book when he tells Silver that he refuses to become a monster in the stories: "We will have been for nothing. Defined by their histories distorted to fit into their narrative until all that is left of us are the monsters in the stories they tell their children". As the tense and sentimental dialogue progresses, Flint warns Silver that the chest will come back and haunt him. This is likely the most unambiguous echo from *Treasure Island,* predicting the plot of Silver in the *hypotext*, linking it to the *hypertext,* laying the groundwork for the unquenching thirst for gold that drives Silver to mutiny and violence. At gunpoint, Flint is told by Silver that he will wait with him for as long as it takes, until Flint sees things the same way as he does, so that they may leave together. [83] An unknown deal is struck, in order to remove Flint, without making him a martyr for Madi who still believes in him and his warmongering, along with the rest of his followers. Rackham and Silver, most likely the most cunning of all the pirates are together able to defuse the threat that is Flint.

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[81] Stevenson 2010: 16, 17
[82] Stevenson 2010: 225
[83] Levine & Steinberg 2017: (4/10)

It is in Savannah that we see Flint for the last time in the series as he is reunited with his long lost love, Thomas Hamilton. Their dramatic and abrupt separation and Flint's belief that Thomas was killed by his own father for being exposed as a homosexual, is presented in the show as being the cause for Flint's destructive behaviour and his hate towards the world. This is an alternate and a much happier ending compared to what is presented in novel. After having fallen asleep in an apple barrel and overhearing Silver's plan to turn against Captain Smollett and the others, Hawkins is also presented with the fate of James 'Flint' McGraw. Mr. Silver reveals that Flint died an alcoholic in Savannah.[84] Whether this occurs after the joyful and satisfactory ending in the series, or if it is one of Silver's many lies remains a mystery. What is certain is that the writers of the screenplay have proposed a more heartening end to the notorious pirate, as they are presenting a more wholesome and empathic depiction of the pirates as a whole. The ghost of Flint in the novel is prominent and brings with it much history, thus making it almost impossible to overlook when creating a prequel.

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[84] Stevenson 2010: 71

Black Sails: What is added?

Up until now, the thesis has been focusing on what themes, characters and plots are fixed in both hyper- and hypotext, as well what elements have undergone what Sanders refers to as proximation. In the fourth and final chapter the attention will be drawn towards what has been added in the series, in order for it to function as a modern and up-to-date representation of the canonical text. Seen in the light of social context, the aim of this section will be to underline some of the untold stories from the history of literature and from history in general. One could argue that due to the rather recent (but important), increased interest in the suppressed voices, expressed through feminism, racial focus, gender studies and queer theory, the authoritative discourse is under attack. The political climate of today demands the dethroning of an outdated and inapplicable discourse in order to make room for a greater diversity of voices. *Black Sails* is no exception, as all these aspects are highlighted throughout the plot. It appears that in order to make the main character, or the show as a whole, more likeable for audience, they have to play along with these voices, treating them with respect. Silver is depicted as highly eccentric, with a homosexual man as his best friend, partnering up with prostitutes, and becoming lovers with a black woman. Attempting to see through the eyes of the contemporary audience of *Treasure Island*, it appears to be little room for any female, gay, or coloured characters. Below, multiple examples will be presented where the creators of the series have decided to emphasize the voices of the voiceless, following the conventions of creating a versatile and politically correct TV-series in today's Western society. At times, it would appear that a checklist for political correctness has become a frequently applied tool for creators of moving pictures, an analogy which should be kept in mind when continuing the examination of Long John Silver's semi-fictional universe. This checklist metaphor could be said to reflect what Nichols categorizes as one of the major obstacles for filmmakers, namely being able create a world hospitable and inviting to viewers.[85] The preferences of the audience could be said to some extent to echo the norms and cultural conventions of film-making, which to some may occur as progressive and radical, challenging the conservative discourse. Sanders points out that political awareness, and sometimes complicity is required by the viewer of appropriations and adaptations, in order to let old stories become new ones.[86]

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[85] Nichols 2010: 12, 13
[86] Sanders 2016: 104

A key concept which would help us stay on track while working with the topic of giving voices to voiceless, is the eternal struggle against the *authoritative discourse*. Mikhail Bakhtin defined the concept in his *Discourse in the Novel:*

> The tendency to assimilate other's discourse takes on an even deeper and more basic significance in an individual's becoming, in the most fundamental sense. Another's discourse performs here no longer as information, directions, rules, models and so forth – but strives rather to determine the very bases of our ideological interrelations with the world, the very basis of our behaviour; it performs here as **authoritative discourse**, and an **internally persuasive discourse**.[87]

Applying Bakhtin's concept to the two works in the scope of the thesis, the authoritative discourse in *Black Sails* and *Treasure Island* are highly dependent on the social contexts, hence decidedly contrasting. Henceforth, social context will be divided into three categories, each illustrating various overlapping and independent perspectives on the balance between authoritative and supressed discourse. First, the female voice will be in focus, then the homosexual discourse and last the historical approach will be examined. As the various discourses will attempt to illustrate, one might also suggest that the political correctness, which is emphasized in the series, in some way or another reflects the zeitgeist of our time.

The Female Perspective

In *Treasure Island*, the only female figure is Jim Hawkins's mother, who has little influence through the maternal role she plays. However, at one occasion she stands up like a mama bear to protect her cub and what else she has left after the death of her husband. As a band of pillaging pirates has just thrashed their home in search of a sea-chest and the men who ought to have helped them are petrified with fear, she holds a brief speech. "If none of the rest of you dare,' she said, 'Jim and I dare. Back we will go, the way we came, and small thanks to you big, hulking, chicken- hearted men."[88] After the incident with the pirates by the cove where they live, Jim leaves his mother in search for the treasure.[89] This is the last we get to read about her, or any other woman throughout the novel, except for the mention of Silver's partner, Madi, who is referred to as: "(…) his old negress".[90]

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[87] Bakhtin 1981: 213
[88] Stevenson 2010: 23
[89] Stevenson 2010: 47
[90] Stevenson 2010: 224

In terms of identification in relation to the target reader of the novel, which was boys, a mother may be the only or at least the most important female figure in his life.[91] Due to the fact that the target group of the novel falls somewhere in between children and young adults, a stage in life where the opposite sex may not have become of interest, may be a reason for their absence. Arguably, her place in Jim's life has become even more important due to the loss of his father. Nevertheless, the love and care of a mother is something which has been and will always be relevant, across cultures, eras of history and target groups. The theme of parental love is also surfacing at several occasions in *Black Sails*, but is of no major importance to the plot. Lisa Honaker suggest how a notion of "Imperial Manliness" had no room for the emotional component, as the celebration of brawn took up the room in the discourse.[92] However, as exemplified in the section on proximation of emotions, Jim Hawkins does to some extent express his feelings in moments of danger, despair, and relief.

The presence of independent women is strong throughout the series. Especially three women put their mark on the series, solving a problem or taking over the reins when the men fall short. *Eleanor Guthrie*, the successful business woman, keeps the horde of pirates in check, while maintaining her position as functioning governess. *Anne Bonny*, who is the tough and fearless companion to Jack Rackham. As ferocious as a wolverine, Bonny excels in combat, filling out the shortcomings of Rackham. *Max the Prostitute*, is, like Silver, working her way up in the system. With seduction, blackmailing and brilliant strategies, the woman who once was a slave, becomes the true head of power in Nassau. In her change, she moves out of the role of what Nichols calls the seductress stereotype, and into the role as a politician.[93] She proves to be capable of both enticing and persuading, and thus possesses the same characteristics of temptation and politics as Silver.

Over the course of history perspectives change, and today's demand for equality between the sexes could be said to be mirrored in our entertainment. Looking at history as a concept of retelling events and depicting people who lived before, women have without question gotten the short end of the stick. The presence of female discourse in history is limited to a minimal, being almost entirely excluded from the narrative, up until recent times. Contemporary modes of literature could be seen to even out the odds, granting more space for the female discourse, and even empowering their role in our perception of history. It would appear that *Black Sails*

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[91] Nichols 2010: 68
[92] Honaker 2004: 31
[93] Nichols 2010: 404

seems to stay in a limbo of sorts, between a traditional voyeuristic tendency found in filmmaking in its attempt to keep alive the romanticism of stereotypical masculine pirates and rallying behind the banner for equality and breaking free from outdated ideas.[94] Being able to entertain, shock and satisfy the thirst for nostalgia through the use of theme-based action and plot, violence and sex, and breathing life into old crooks like Long John Silver, is as mentioned a challenge for the filmmakers. Making a quality show for a mature audience today about pirates excluding: plundering, drinking, clashing cutlasses, thundering canons, wooden ships, unshaven ruthless men, treasure and alluring tavern wenches, could prove to be difficult. From a fan-centred perspective, keeping the pirate fans satisfied without being too politically incorrect, seem to be the fulcrum of Levine's and Steinberg's creation. The protagonists of *Black Sails* appear to be found in the very centre of balance, as they maintain the pirate-like behaviour, while at the same time comply to female discourse. As the section on proximation underlined, the pirates have maintained their masculinity, fulfilling the criteria as pirates. However, it is important to note that their masculinity does not slide over to sexism, undermining women. In the plot summary of *Black Sails*, the acknowledgement of the maroon queen and Madi as rightful leaders, with equal worth to that of white men proves this. Silver's view on women (and race) is one of the 21st century, making it easier for the audience to identify with the characters.

Contrasting Principles

As illustrated above, the role and liberation of women has for some time been important in film and literature. However, the representation of this liberation seems to include a double standard, which appears to be prominent within these fields. The progression from conservative and puritan traditions of representing women has often taken the form of expressing their sexuality. It could seem that the female wilfulness and defiance often been expressed through visual and explicit sexual character have in film and television. Already in 1988, Felly N. Simmonds suggested in the *Feminist Review* that sexuality could not be the only way of liberating the black woman on screen: "We cannot allow sexual promiscuity to be the sole defining factor in our liberation. In fact, it pinpoints the basic contradiction for women in an overemphasis on sex."[95] *Black Sails* fits nicely into this description, where scenes containing

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[94] Nichols 2010: 376
[95] Simmonds 1988: 20

female nudity or sexual activities occur on a frequent basis. It takes less than twenty minutes before the first scene where both the spectator and John Silver encounter sexual content in the series, which turns out to be an orgy with Silver as the only male participant. [96] This exemplifies the imbalance between sexes in the series, where the female characters' key and perhaps only real power is to utilize their bodies. Nevertheless, Anne Bonny and Eleanor Guthrie are, as we have learned, exceptions to the rule, excelling in combat, politics and trade. The last member of our trio of women, Max, is in some ways the female equivalent to Mr. Silver, undergoing a similar ascendance to power as him. Her transition goes from being a cunning and ambitious prostitute participating in the opening group sex sequence, and being molested when crossing the wrong people in the second season, working her way up to becoming the *Madame* of the brothel in Nassau in the third season, before finally being revealed as the real governor of Nassau.

All three women mentioned are shown as having some sort of sexual relationship in the various seasons. Max has sexual intercourse with both Miss Guthrie and Anne Bonny, and the relevant scenes include partial nudity. In the first season Max wants to run away with Eleanor from their life in Nassau, to live somewhere else as lovers, but this never takes place. After Max is held responsible for the loss of large sums of the capital of the Ranger crew, she is kept chained up in a tent for the amusement of the pirates serving under Charles Vane. Through systematic rape and brutalization, she is humiliated and brought down. Bonny cannot stand to witness the treatment of Max and ends up releasing the broken woman.[97] This is the start for their romantic and sensual relationship which to some degree remains throughout the series. These desires were once deemed too perverse for the cinematic medium, but has with time and with some help of avant-garde films turned into something natural, obvious and beautiful in the eyes of the public.[98] This very example illustrates how mistreatment of women on screen, as well as female subordination is often interlinked with violent and voyeuristic tendencies. It is also worth noting, that the inclusion of daringly dressed prostitutes is another part of the issue. One might argue that the female characters too frequently are reduced to mere accessories as sexual creatures, and victims of violence.

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[96] Levine & Steinberg 2014 (1/1)
[97] Levine & Steinberg 2014
[98] Nichols 2010: 430

A Girl's Perspective in *Black Sails*

> "It would seem these monsters are men, and it would seem these men fear their own monsters: an empire, a navy, a king, my father."[99]

<div style="text-align:right">

\- Abigail Ashe in *XVI*

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The voice of the child is almost entirely omitted in the series. However, the feminist discourse comes in another wrapper, when a girl in her early teens named Abigail Ashe is introduced in the second season.[100] Looking at other written or on-screen works containing pirates, children tend to be dragged into conflict with pirates. Other examples would be Jim Hawkins in *Treasure Island,*[101] Peter Pan and the Darling children in J.M. Barrie's play *Peter Pan,*[102] as well as Elizabeth Swan in the more recent Disney blockbuster film series, the *Pirates of the Caribbean.*[103] Somehow, all the children in the three works mentioned end up in the affairs with buccaneers due to their appetite for adventure and exploration. This is tightly interlinked with the narrative often used in Victorian and Edwardian boyhood literature.[104] As part of the shift to include both sexes and empowering the female voice, both Miss Swan and Miss Ashe break with the old traditions of imperialistic boyhood conventions, adding femininity and equality to a masculine genre.

Abigail is treated with great care during her entire stay in Nassau among the pirates, even when she is held in a dungeon by Charles Vane. The pirates believe that her well-being is important for the ransom they are hoping to get for delivering her to her father. Miss Ashe's voice is silent until she starts to write in her diary in episode *XVI*, after Miranda Barlow, another influential voice in the series, convinces Vane, Flint and Silver to hand her over to her father, Peter, a former friend, in hope of a peaceful solution to the disputes between Nassau and England.[105] On the voyage towards the disaster of Charlestown, Abigail writes down what she has experienced, and with use of extra-diegetic sound, her voice presents a girl's perspective on the pirates.[106] The quote above is taken from her reflections in her diary, where she underlines the fact that the pirates are human beings, not the demons she has been led to believe. Her

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[99] Levine & Steinberg 2015 (2/8)
[100] Levine & Steinberg 2015
[101] Stevenson 2010
[102] Barrie 2008
[103] Bruckheimer 2003
[104] Deane 2011: 693
[105] Levine & Steinberg 2015 (2/8)
[106] Nichols 2010: 499

contemplations could be seen as an echo of Flint's political view in *Black Sails*, and a direct comment to the readers of *Treasure Island,* emphasizing the humanness of the pirates.

Homosexual Discourse: How did love become more harmful than mutilation?

Similar to the neglected discourses of women, homosexual identity has to a great extent been excluded from the narrative throughout time. It is certainly a non-existing issue in the novel. The legalization of homosexual activities among adult men in private, did not take place until 1967, through the *Sexual Offences Act of 1967*.[107] Thus, with most certainty, one could exclude the idea of a 19th century British Empire allowing the inclusion of any kind of homosexual voice in the public sphere. The social context would doubtlessly stop such ideas from spreading among their youngsters. I daresay that the tolerance for brutality and violence could be seen as higher, compared to that of the homosexuality which possibly would be deemed as more harmful to Victorian boys.

By integrating the love story of Flint and Thomas Hamilton as major narrative in the plot, *Black Sails* engages with a homosexual discourse. Whether to label this as addition or as proximation of Flint's character is a difficult question to answer. On the one hand, it could be seen as a modernization of the character Captain Flint, whom is only described in part in the novel. On the other hand, in terms of diversity, the voice of the homosexual could be seen as something entirely new among Stevenson's creations. Either way, the inclusion of a homosexual discourse could be said to be one of the most significant additions carried out by Levine and Steinberg. Later decades have seen the emergence of queer cinema, which, according to Beaver, is the result of an increase in independent films. The function of the queer cinema is to explore and depict gay and lesbian lifestyle through social, psychological, and personal perspectives.[108] In the contemporary context of western culture, many boundaries have been breached, and rules and conventions that once dictated censorship are now deemed old fashioned and outdated. One might suggest that the queer cinema has paved the way for the homosexual love story within *Black Sails*.

Furthermore, Nichols states that films (along with today's series) play a significant role in the creation and preservation of culture; either setting "a cultural standard", or undermining

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[107] Sexual Offences Act of 1967 1967
[108] Beaver 2007: 199

"existing values".[109] The fact that James 'Flint' McGraw, the haunting ghost from the past in *Treasure Island*, the toughest and roughest of villains in the fictional pirate world, is portrayed as a bisexual man, on a mission to unleash his vengeance upon civilisation for prohibiting his sexuality seems ground-breaking. However, there appears to be an underlying fear or reluctance to fully embrace the idea of homosexuality between men in popular culture. On the one hand, *Black Sails* has come far compared to a lot of contemporary shows, by raising issues of homosexuality and integrating homosexual discourse as an essential, yet sublime part of the appropriation of the canonical text. On the other hand, except for a few moments of modest expression of affection, there is no explicit sexual content shown in the interactions between the men, while there are numerous occasions of female nudity and sex. In other words, there is an imbalance between the sexes in terms of nudity and sex on screen.

If we look beyond the inequalities of sexes and sexual orientation and shift our gaze upon another matter which was discussed earlier, violence, what seems controversial is the high tolerance for physical and psychological torture and the low tolerance for homosexuality. Doubtlessly, the value of a human life and ideas of its well-being has changed considerably throughout history, and the use of torture is no longer seen as decent ways of punishing crime in the western world. Nevertheless, somewhere in the Caribbean Ocean, during the war on piracy of the 18th century the case may have been different. In episode *XXXI*, in the fourth season Woodes Rogers tortures and executes Captain Edward Teach in a most brutal manner. The use of subjective sound and the absence of music in the scene when the body of 'Blackbeard' is dragged and scraped against the barnacle-riddled hull three times, was a highly efficient way to create a sense of revulsion by director Roel Reiné. When the mangled pirate is finally put to rest, by a pistol shot to the head carried out by a frustrated Rogers, even more hostility against empire and its representatives is generated.[110] As this example illustrates, on screen this type of torture is not a part of the prior censorship of the show. However, that seems to be case for the homoerotic-relationship between the two men.[111]

How could it be appropriate to see someone being brutally keelhauled, to witness a man being grated into shreds, when the acts of affection between two men is too much for a popular audience to endure? Ever since the dawn of the moving pictures in the 19th century, debates concerning both violence and sex have been raging. The emotional impact film or series may

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[109] Nichols 2010: 8
[110] Kane 2017: (4/3)
[111] Nichols 2010: 510

have on the audience, is a double-edged sword which has caused both widespread celebration and uproar. Nichols raises the question of whether movies could pose as threats to society.[112] One might agree with Nichols, that some films could be abused or misinterpreted, being potentially harmful to parts of society. Arguably, the torture scene discussed above could pose such a threat. Explicit depictions of physical and psychological violence, or other disturbing material may have a traumatizing effect on children, who is often deemed a vulnerable group, hence the age limits on films. The exclusion of homosexuality implicitly suggests, that portrayals thereof are more damaging than portrayals of brutal and graphic violence.

The homosexual discourse is therefore not fully embraced by the series. Homosexual discourse, one could argue, is still fighting to be accepted as a part of the norm. Long John Silver's role as figure who tolerates and accepts the homosexual nature of his best friend reflects the social context of the series. He never seems to raise questions, show antipathy or use Flint's sexual preferences against him, or in ways which seem to collide with the western world values. Such open-mindedness could be seen as a direct result of the political and cultural emphasis of the filmmakers. An important and necessary act of proximation in order to create a sympathetic and identifiable character for a twenty-first century audience.

Historical Discourse – Blurred Truth

> A story is true. A story is untrue. As time extends, it matters less and less. The stories we want to believe, those are the ones that survive, despite upheaval and transition and progress. Those are the stories that shape history.[113]

> - Jack Rackham

"Like written histories, films are not mirrors that show some vanished reality, but constructions, works whose rules of engagement with traces of the past are necessarily different from those of written history", Robert Rosenstone argues.[114] In accordance with the topic at hand, there is one aspect of it which has not yet been highlighted which ought to get some recognition, namely historical discourse. Due to the series' fictional character, set in a real environment, riddled with actual persons and recorded events of the past, the series holds a

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[112] Nichols 2010: 7, 8
[113] Levine & Steinberg 2017: (4/10)
[114] Rosenstone 2006: 37

slight documentary touch. In other words, each episode of *Black Sails* has the potential of being a highly entertaining history lesson, with an educational value hinging on the historical interest and knowledge of its creators. This being said, the use of historically situated TV-series and films as a mode of teaching history is a part of a sensitive and seemingly everlasting debate among historians, who appear to not agree on the balance between historical correctness and value of entertainment. This section will have a closer look at both sides of the scale, both being important for the function of historical discourse.

In his *History on Film/ Film on History* Robert A. Rosenstone discusses the rules for making films with a historical setting. In his attempt to help us grasp these conventions, he emphasizes the divide between written and cinematic history, suggesting that the rules dictating written history are not relevant for history on film. According to Rosenstone, films use data in a much looser sense than academic history, but at the same time suggests that the best historical films are those which manages to add new material and voices to the universal historical discourse.[115] Arguably, *Black Sails* has achieved this balance, which appears to have been the result of extensive historical research. Furthermore, Rosenstone argues for a change of mindset when it comes to dramatic films and history. Apparently, we ought to stop placing the historical drama in a position of constant siege, as something lacking historical accuracy, but rather accept it as the genre it is and let it be a construction of our ideas of the past.[116]

If we are to adopt some of this thinking into the idea of a fictional past, what then could be said about the fictional biographies of Flint and Silver? As suggested above, the dramatic film (or in our example, the series), cannot follow the same conventions of the use of historical facts and data, belonging to a different realm than written history. By doing so we have unshackled the creative hands of the producers and writers of this modern form of entertainment. However, Jakob Lothe writes in his definition of "The concept of character" that the expectations concerning real and fictional characters differ. Lothe continues by underlining that in "Realistic Hollywood cinema", we are asked to put aside our scepticism and to think of the plot of film as real events.[117] Based on these statements, one ought not go as far as to call the series a docudrama, which according to Beaver's definition is a film which is documentary wrapped in

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[115] Rosenstone 2006: 30, 31
[116] Rosenstone 2006: 37
[117] Lothe 2000: 76

a drama packing. However, the STARZ production has clear factual traits intermixed with the fiction, which would suggest that it could be labelled as both "infotainment" and "faction". [118]

On the topic of biographies, Rosenstone has also discussed the balance between fact and fiction. In agreement with several scholars, Rosenstone argues for a thin line between fiction and the selection process of choosing what is to be mentioned and what is to be left out.[119] What Rosenstone seems to suggest is: "Never let the truth get in the way of a good story."

Returning once more to their final dialogue of the series and the opening quote of the thesis, similar to his peer Jack Rackahm, James Flint, in his attempt to withstand Silver's persuasion, summarizes some of the issues regarding historical discourse:

> They paint the world full of shadows and then tell their children to stay close to the light. Their light. Their reasons, their judgments. Because in the darkness, there be dragons. But it isn't true. We can prove that it isn't true. In the dark, there is discovery, there is possibility, there is freedom.[120]

One way to interpret quote is to see it as an attack the embodiment of the authoritative discourse, itself being the British Empire, the opposing to the one of Flint, his buccaneers and the ones who follow his beliefs. After looking at the development of the protagonists, from unlikable self-centred crooks to true champions against the tyranny of empire, the filmmakers have managed to present an enticing and engaging perspective of the men, labelled as criminals of the worst kind, making it even harder for the readers of history to separate good from evil and the truth from lies.

The Union Jack and *The Jolly Roger*

"The cannon-shot was followed, after a considerable interval, by a volley of small arms. Another pause, and then, not a quarter of a mile in front of me, I beheld the Union Jack in the air above a wood."[121] This extract is taken from a dramatic sequence where Jim has met with Ben Gunn, the marooned sailor from Flint's crew, and the two are hurrying towards a small fort in the woods, where the pirate mutineers and the loyal seamen skirmish. The British flag, the Union Jack, the very symbol of the Empire on which the sun never sets, is presented as a beacon of hope for Hawkins and as a battle standard under which one is willing to kill and

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[118] Beaver 2007: 76
[119] Rosenstone 2006: 90, 91
[120] Levine & Steinberg 2017: (4/10)
[121] Stevenson 2010: 99

perish. In the 27th chapter, Hawkins kills Silver's most trusted man, Mr. Hands, by tossing the drunk and wounded man overboard.[122] The willingness to die for king and country, was seen as something obvious in the contemporary context of the novel:

> (…) Add to this that Gray, the new man, had his face tied up in a bandage for a cut he had got in breaking away from the mutineers; and that poor old Tom Redruth, still unburied, lay along the wall, stiff and stark, under the Union Jack. [123]

According to literary historian Patrick A. Dunae, there was a strong presence of indoctrination of the younger generations during the last decades of the nineteenth century and until the first world war. A great method of persuasion which the Empire could control was the written word, enticing, alluring and fascinating, especially for boys soon to enter their teen years. Duane continues: "The adventure novels sold in their thousands; the penny weeklies in their millions." This large-scale production of literature belonging to the age of *new-imperialism,* owes much of its success to the progress of the juvenile press, as well as the *Education Act of 1870*. A few years later, Stevenson's novel was published and became part of a genre which glorified the achievements of the Empire, strengthening its position and keeping the fires of interest for it burning. There was no room for opposing thoughts, no one dared to speak against the authoritative discourse of empire. [124]

In a similar manner to the Union Jack, the Jolly Roger becomes the very symbol of the pirates' cause. The black flag, donned with a white skull, crossbones or crossed cutlasses has become the standard of pirate flags, the last version mentioned belonging to Calico Jack or Jack Rackham. In the final scene of *Black Sails*, he is presented with what is to become his own colours as a pirate captain commanding his own ship. Without being completely amazed by the result, he remarks upon the importance of artistic quality: "Because what's it all for if it goes unremembered? It's the art that leaves the mark. But to leave it, it must transcend. It must speak for itself. It must be true."[125] If there is one flag which has truly transcended and left its mark upon history, his flag is the one. Like the different houses of nobility, the various pirate captains had their own coat of arms in the form of a pirate flag. They became symbols of danger and rebellion, and a means for instilling fear in the sailors at sea.

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[122] Stevenson 2010: 170
[123] Stevenson 2010: 121
[124] Dunae 1980: 105, 106
[125] Levine & Steinberg 2017: (4/10)

Their actual function was, according to professor in economics Peter T. Leeson, to signal that pirates wanted to avoid bloodshed and violence, by revealing their intentions, hoping that the unfortunate merchants would surrender their cargo without a fight. In most cases, the merchant ships did so without any attempt at confrontation. The ones who flew it were almost exclusively former merchant sailors or navy seamen, who had left the dangerous and demanding job at sea, in exchange for an even more perilous and risky occupation. However, with risk came wealth. The ones who committed themselves to buccaneering were already branded as criminals, enemies of the civilised world, only suited for a noose.[126] The efficiency of it is shown in the sixth episode in the second season in *Black Sails* when an inexperienced Jack Rackham sails out to hunt his first prize. Without any confrontation, the merchant ship surrenders its cargo. However, when another, more experienced, more dangerous pirate captain also claims the prize, Rackham gets into trouble.[127] This suggests a dog-eats-dog world among the pirates, one which also Silver has to endure.

"The Hispaniola still lay where she had anchored; but, sure enough, there was the Jolly Roger— the black flag of piracy —flying from her peak."[128] The Jolly Roger is likewise present in the imperialistic novel, as the standard of the bad guys, the wrongdoers, the thieves at sea. They become the uncivilised world, the opposing side to the authoritative discourse of a civilized and lawful empire. Stevenson's creation, Jim Hawkins, the law-abiding citizen with justice on his side, becomes the paragon-youngster for the target audience. The very name of the series, *Black Sails*, expresses whose narrative is in focus. It belongs to the ones on the wrong side of the law, the ones fighting against the value of Hawkins and the Empire. The voices of the pirates and of the Jolly Roger are added by the filmmakers.

Trailers and Epigraphs

Alongside the choice of theme, perspective and discourse for establishing viability in the product, strategies for hooking an audience are also required to interest viewers in the highly competitive film and series universe. The use of trailers appears to be close to mandatory when making motion-pictures today, and *Black Sails* have numerous of trailers and teasers containing action-filled clips and a focus on the main characters. The trailers are often presented in a flurry

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[126] Leeson 2010: 10, 11, 12, 14
[127] Bellson 2015: (2/6)
[128] Stevenson 2010: 119, 120

of short clips, teasing the audience with cliff-hangers. By giving the potential viewer a taste of the series through the most dynamic and intriguing scenes of the show, the aim of the trailer is to make the public wanting to see more. Interestingly, the nineteenth century writer Stevenson did something which could be seen slightly equivalent. In his novel the author wrote an epigraph called "To the Hesitating Purchaser", where he directly addresses the possible buyers of his novel through a poem:

> If sailor tales to sailor tunes, Storm and adventure, heat and cold, If schooners, islands, and maroons And Buccaneers and buried Gold And all the old romance, retold, Exactly in the ancient way, Can please, as me they pleased of old, The wiser youngsters of to-day:

> -So be it, and fall on! If not, If studious youth no longer crave, His ancient appetites forgot, Kingston, or Ballantyne the brave, Or Cooper of the wood and wave: So be it, also! And may I And all my pirates share the grave, Where these and their creations lie![129]

In his invitation to his fictional world, he promises an exact retelling of the romanticized pirates of old, a story which he hopes will please "the wiser youngsters of to-day" as it once pleased him in his youth. In this sentence Stevenson reveals who he wants to read the book, and he appeals to the target group by acknowledging their "wisdom" in a flirtatious manner. He refers to Kingston, Ballantyne the brave, and Cooper, figures that the contemporary audience most likely would have recognized, and which, as was discussed earlier, was a part of his source of inspiration. The novelist's authorship was highly respected by his contemporaries, as well as by the generations which superseded.[130] A direct invitation by Stevenson himself would prove to be a neat trick in recruiting more readers.

Both the trailer and the epigraph seek to persuade their targeted audience, either to buy the book or to watch the whole series. They do so by presenting the essence of the works. In the epigraph, there is promise of sailor tunes, tales of adventure, maroons, buccaneers, and buried gold. In the trailer, on the other hand, sex scenes, violence, pirate ships, thundering canons and explosions are in focus, which serves to highlight the mad, the immoral, and the violent in which Silver operates. By juxtaposing the two, the additions and proximations in the series become rather visible. It is a much more unpolished and raw portrayal that meets the viewer of the series, than that which meets the reader of the novel.

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[129] Stevenson 1883
[130] Stevenson 2010: vi, v

Conclusion

As the thesis draws to an end, it seems appropriate to include Hans Robert Jauss's argument concerning the strengthening of literary works on the basis of it being the target of rereading.[131] When canonical figures such as Long John Silver of *Treasure Island* are recycled into a different and contemporary social context, their statuses and renown are extended. This allows new generations easier access to the character, and to become acquainted with legendary characters of old through a different medium of entertainment, and through a different focus.

Through its three stages, the thesis has attempted to discuss and exemplify how a contemporary prequel, an appropriation of Robert Stevenson's novel, has kept details unchanged from its source text, undergone updates through proximation and added new content and new voices for it to gratify the social context. Fundamental characters and settings from the source text, such as Long John Silver, Billy Bones, Israel Hand among others, living the lives of pirates in the West Indies of the Caribbean have maintained their importance in the appropriation. The characteristics and personality of Mr. Silver highlighted in the novel become the destination of the dynamic portrayal of Mr. Silver in the series: one-legged, charismatic, and devious. The filmmaker duo, Robert Levine and John Steinberg, have had to proximate several aspects of the novel for it to be more relatable and enticing for a modern audience. By adding emotional elements to the pirates, who were reduced to types and villains in the source text, the filmmakers have turned the antagonists of the novel into the protagonists of the series, and into characters whom the audience is able to identify with. Including a rawer and more explicit form of violence can also be seen as a proximation in order to appeal to a more mature and contemporary audience, unlikely to be impressed by the polished narrative, written for 19th century Victorian boys.

The appropriation has also introduced new voices into the semi-fictional universe. The authoritative discourse of the empire found in the novel has been muted in order to make room for voices which, traditionally, have often been neglected. The female voice which is almost entirely left out in the novel, receives a lot of focus in the series, through its strong and influential female characters who in different ways survive in the harsh social climate of the masculine pirate world. The homosexual discourse is also represented, as Levine and Steinberg have based the wrath of the perhaps toughest fictional pirate of all times on the sad love story of a bisexual James 'Flint' McGraw. One might argue that this choice is a bold one, but it is an

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[131] Jauss 1981: 87

important step towards the inclusion of an often suppressed narrative. In the final stages of the thesis, questions regarding history and discourse are raised and answered. Attention is drawn towards how the novel may be seen to reflect the political situation of its time, and how the inclusion of the various voices in the series appear to represent the contemporary social context.

While reading Lothe's *Narrative in Fiction and Film: An Introduction,* I came upon a remark by Christian Metz, which in many ways supports what has been attempted in this comparative analysis, namely the acknowledgement of the appropriation's necessity: "Film tells us continuous stories; it says things that could also be conveyed in the language of words, yet it says them differently. There is a reason for possibility as well as for the necessity for adaptations."[132] Put differently, there is a need for new *Black Sails* in order to keep narratives of the old canons alive. However, as the thesis suggests, changes have to be made in order for it to present stories with characters that are relatable for the viewer or reader. As Nichols urged, one of the greatest challenges for filmmakers is the creation of a world that is welcoming to viewer.[133]

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[132] Metz 1991: 44
[133] Nichols 2010: 12, 13

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of contextuality, proximation, and discourse in the novel Treasure Island (1883) by Robert Louis Stevenson and the television series Black Sails (2014-2017) by Robert Levine and John Steinberg, which is made as a prequel to Stevenson's novel. First, the aim is to establish viable terminology in order to define and explain what methods the filmmakers have used. Second, the canonical pirate Long John Silver is discussed as an example of how a character is kept alive through the creation of adaptations and appropriations. The third part of the thesis seeks to explore which elements the filmmakers have kept unchanged, which elements have undergone proximation, and what has been added to the modern prequel series. In the thesis, these choices are suggested to be based upon the social context of the time in which the appropriation is created. The thesis is based upon a close reading of the novel and the viewing of the STARZ-series in its entirety. Treasure Island, as one of several adventure novels of the Victorian era, was written for an audience of young boys, and in an attempt to stimulate the patriotic spirit of exploration in the name of Empire. Black Sails is a prequel to the events of the plot in Stevenson's novel, aimed at an older audience containing more brutal and sexual content, focusing on the perspective of the pirates, both actual and fictional. The analysis focuses on how Mr. Silver is portrayed in both works, underlining changes based on context and the links between the nineteenth-century novel and its twenty-first century appropriation. The study finds signs that the change of social context in particular has had a major impact on the presentation of John Silver and his fellow pirates. In the process it has also granted space for female, homosexual and anti-imperialistic voices, fulfilling the implicit demands of a new audience.

The Master's Project's Relevance for Teaching

Looking at the thesis from a teacher's perspective, the thematic relevance seems far-off, with 18th century piracy as something a little on the side in the English curriculum in 21st century in Norway. However, the field of adaptation is very much pertinent in a time when series and films are have become everyday entertainment. Additionally, in the curriculum of history, 18th century events concerning the British Empire and the *Triangular Trade* are present, making the topic of piracy not as far-fetched as first suggested.

Working with film and adaptation studies in the classroom, the teacher will be able to present moving pictures as an alternative form of text, an alternative form of literature. According to the competence aims in the English curriculum on upper-secondary school, the students should be able to: "discuss and elaborate on English language films and other forms of cultural expressions from different media." Especially for the reluctant reader, who struggles with engaging in the process of reading voluntarily, the use of film and series may be a useful tool in order to trigger their interest as well as tailoring their education. This might also work as a gateway to literature. Having seen the story on film might aid in the reading-process. Additionally, the age group in which the novel is aimed at corresponds well with that of the students, at least of lower-secondary school, and would perhaps be able to provoke some adventurous feeling as Stevenson endorses in his epigraph. One might argue that making the students aware of the how crucial the context of a text is, would prove to useful in order to draw clear lines between different eras of literature. It is also worth mentioning that the inclusion of adaptation studies might help broaden their notion of what is meant when studying literature, illuminating that literature is so much more than books written by dead white men.

In my case in particular, who eventually will be teaching both English and history, using historical and even semi-historical texts and films such a *Treasure Island* and *Black Sails,* may help illustrate the different how a similar theme may be viewed contrarily in different contexts, as highlighted in the thesis, and therefore be particularly useful. Stated in the competence aims in the history curriculum, the students should be able to: "discuss and elaborate on how history has been used and is used in political contexts." Looking at how the novel and the series have different political approaches may therefore be used as an example.