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Pirates and Prosthetics: Manly Messages for Managing Limb Loss in Victorian and Edwardian Adventure Narratives

Ryan Sweet

The generation reared on Captain Pugwash and Tintin will have a very clear idea of what pirates do. They wear striped trousers. They sport eye-patches and cutlasses and wooden legs. (Burrow 2013)

The staff was cut and handed to the learner, who, planting it firmly on the ground before him, leaned on it, and exclaimed, 'Let it go!' in tones which instantly suggested 'the anchor' to his friends.

The order was obeyed, and the ex-pirate stood swaying to and fro, and smiling with almost childlike delight. Presently he became solemn, lifted one leg, and set it down again with marvellous rapidity. Then he lifted the other leg with the same result. Then he lifted the staff, but had to replace it smartly to prevent falling forward.

'I fear I can only do duty as a motionless tripod,' he said rather anxiously. (Ballantyne 1883: 238)

Many of us associate pirates with prosthetic body parts. From wooden legs to hook hands, prostheses have frequently appeared in imaginative representations of pirates, such as Captain Hook from J. M. Barrie's 1904 play *Peter Pan*, Captain Barbosa and Ragetti from the *Pirates of the Caribbean* (2003–11) film series, the badges of the sports teams the Cornish Pirates and Pittsburgh Pirates, and the products and branding of the Woodenhand Brewery in Truro,

Cornwall. Yet this prevalent association has not always existed. Its literary history is, in fact, curious.[1] What we might consider the great age of pirate stories (c.1858–1904) exhibits relatively few prosthesis-using characters, aside, of course, from one obvious example: Captain Hook. What we do, however, see in the fiction from this period, and what we today unthinkingly assume are wooden leg users, are a number of pirates who persevere with their deplorable duties in spite of disability.

The second quotation above, from Robert Michael Ballantyne's 1883 novel *The Madman and the Pirate*, exposes a rare example of a fictional pirate from this period who does use wooden legs – though it should be noted that this character, Captain Rosco, only loses his legs and begins wearing prosthetic replacements after his piratical career has ended. This quotation in fact gestures towards a rationale that explains why 'prosthetic pirates' were so scant in nineteenth-century adventure fiction: the prostheses that would have been available in the golden age of piracy (c.1694–1724), the period in which the majority of fictional pirate narratives are set, would have provided their users less physical functionality than other assistive technologies available at this time, such as crutches, deck ropes, and banisters – the latter two are used by Captain Ahab in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851) and all three by Long John Silver in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1881). Indeed, it is apt that Rosco's career as a buccaneer is already at an end when he receives his prosthetic limbs since his physical mobility is almost entirely compromised by his false legs: to begin with he 'can only do duty as a motionless tripod' (Ballantyne 1883: 238); he is later felled by soft ground and then gets stuck in a hole after again falling over. Ballantyne shows both that prosthetics were often impractical for pirates and that they encompassed far too much comic potential to be given to figures whom an author wished to depict as truly villainous.

The credit for this now long-standing association between pirates and prosthetics is often pinned to Stevenson's characterisation of Long John Silver in *Treasure Island*, which when published as a whole in 1883 was a bestseller and has remained hugely popular ever since. But this attribution of credit is peculiar since Stevenson makes it quite clear that Silver is a crutch rather than false-leg user: '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' (Stevenson 1915: 62–3). There remains, however, a misconception of Silver as a peg-legged pirate – in spite of evidence to the contrary.[2] Why, then, do we associate Stevenson's pirate with the use of a false leg? We might trace an answer to this question to Silver's status as an amputee and to point to his repeated references to his crutch as his 'timber leg' (Stevenson 1915: 86, 96) and his infamous catch phrase, 'shiver my timbers' (Stevenson 1915: 67, 87, 210, 230, 244, 264). One might even agree with John Amrhein's claim that Silver was based on the real wooden-leg-using pirate, John Lloyd.[3] And yet it seems strange to assume that such a prevalent cultural association stems from inference or misreading. It is unlikely that readers really know that Silver is based on a wooden-leg user when he is not depicted as such in Stevenson's story.

This chapter reframes these questions as it argues that our association between piracy and prosthetics stems, in part, from the deployment of what David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder have called 'narrative prosthesis' (Mitchell and Snyder 2000) – the use of disability as a character-defining motif, which in this context equates bodily loss with moral decrepitude. The chapter also, however, complicates this disability-studies model by suggesting that the disabled pirates depicted in late-Victorian and Edwardian adventure stories display an alluring form of hyper-masculinity that enables them to continue pirating in spite of their physical impairments. While fictional deployments of pirates with prosthetics are less common than one might expect in the adventure narratives from this period, the instances in

which they do appear, while revealing the functional, cosmetic, and ontological inadequacies of rudimentary prostheses, also draw attention to the ability of impaired figures to earn money in spite of their disabilities. Such a capacity, Martha Stoddard Holmes and Erin O'Connor have shown, was a vital component of manly identity in this period (Stoddard Holmes [2004] 2009: 94–132; O'Connor 2000: 102–47). Though clearly not advocating a life of buccaneering to their young, predominantly male, readership, such stories reveal hyper-masculine disabled role models who work to gain a living and, in some cases, even achieve social mobility. The enduring image of the peg-legged pirate thus stems from the ability, in our minds, of prosthetics to enable disabled subjects to perform their various 'duties'.

In order to understand where the links between pirates and prosthetics, and disability and hyper-masculinity stem from, it is worth exploring the real and fictional precedents of the peg-legged or hook-handed pirate. As the first section of this chapter shows, a complex network of influences inspired Stevenson and Barrie to create their amputee pirates, who are for many the iconic prosthetic pirates. After revealing some overlooked literary forbears and the real-life inspiration for Silver's maimed hyper-masculinity, the chapter then shifts to the question of 'narrative prosthesis' before turning to the complex characterisation of fictional pirates as antiheroes, figures who are simultaneously villainous and captivating.

Buried Treasure: The Historical and Fictional Roots of Pirates with Prosthetics

While Linda Grant de Pauw has noted that 'It is easy for writers of fiction to romanticize pirates, partly because hard, factual knowledge about them is scarce' (Grant de Pauw 1982: 20), it is probable that the most longstanding fictional depictions of maimed but nonetheless tenacious pirates, such as Long John Silver and Captain Hook, were moulded, at least in part, on real pirates (or at least pirates that their authors thought were real): Silver from a supposedly real pirate and Hook from Silver himself. Neil Rennie argues both that *Treasure*

Island was ‘a significant prototype and analogue for Neverland’ and that Hook’s hook was ‘Barrie’s rejoinder . . . to Long John Silver’s crutch (Rennie 2013: 197-98). Rennie also suggests that Silver’s one-leggedness may have been inspired by a wooden-legged pirate described in Captain Charles Johnson’s *A General History of the Pyrates* (1724), a text that London booksellers Nutt and Bain provided for Stevenson after he requested ‘the *best* book about the Buccaneers that can be had’ (Stevenson [1881] 1911a: 60–1).[4] The appearance of the pirate described in *A General History* is certainly familiar to a twenty-first-century reader:

> a Fellow with a terrible pair of Whiskers, and a wooden Leg, being struck round with Pistols, like the Man in the Almanack with Darts, comes swearing and vapouring upon the Quarter-Deck, and asks, in a damning Manner, which was Captain *Mackra*: The Captain expected no less than that this Fellow would be his Executioner; – but when he came near him, he took him by the Hand, swearing, *Damn him he was glad to see him; and shew me the Man, says he, that offers to hurt Captain* Mackra, *for I’ll stand by him*; and so with many Oaths told him, *he was an honest Fellow, and that he had formerly sail’d with him*. (Johnson [1724] 2012: 123; original emphasis)

At a glance, the parallels between this supposedly threatening-looking eighteenth-century pirate and Silver seem to suggest that there are legitimate historical roots for the enduring image of the prosthetic (or at least the maimed) pirate. Though, as Rennie later explains, the pirate described in *A General History* was ‘probably as fictional as Long John Silver’ (Rennie 2013: 185). Despite the questionable legitimacy of Silver’s possible real-life antecedent, there is a historical figure who we know inspired Silver’s maimed hyper-masculinity, if not his one-leggedness itself.

Stevenson is widely assumed to have accredited Silver's one-legged characterisation to his friend, the poet, William Ernest Henley, who lost his left leg below the knee after suffering tuberculosis of the bone. While (contrary to popular belief) Stevenson by no means conclusively attributes Silver's one-leggedness to Henley, the author lauds the latter's physical and mental strength as major inspirations:

> I will now make a confession. It was the sight of *your maimed strength and masterfulness* that begot John Silver in *Treasure Island*. Of course, he is not in any other quality or feature the least like you; but the idea of the maimed man, *ruling and dreaded by the sound*, was entirely taken from you. (Stevenson [1883] 1911: 137–8; emphasis added)

Though Stevenson without doubt attributes Silver's '*maimed strength and masterfulness*' to Henley, qualities obtaining to what is labelled in disability studies the phenomenon of the 'supercrip' (Garland Thomson 2000),[5] he at no point states explicitly that Henley inspired him to create Silver as an amputee in the first place. Nonetheless, it is clear that Henley, the author of 'Invictus' (written in 1875 but published in 1888) – one of the most-cited Victorian poems about adopting a never-say-die attitude in the face of life's obstacles, which uses the maritime metaphor 'captain of my soul' to conclude its verses – was a major inspiration for Stevenson's characterisation of Silver. In addition to Henley, it is important to consider Silver within a wider network of influences that includes the one-legged pirate from *A General History* and the depictions of wooden-legged pirates that followed – several of which drew directly from Johnson's portrayal. Of these examples, some prelude the maimed hyper-masculinity exhibited by pirates like Silver and Hook, whereas others provide a stark contrast to such representations.

Johnson's *A General History* can certainly be considered a forebear for many of the representations of one-legged pirates that we see in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fiction and non-fiction narratives. Indeed, Johnson's description of the pirate is plagiarised in Charles Ellms's 1837 book *The Pirates Own Book*. The wooden-legged pirate of *A General History* is again described in John Biddulph's *The Pirates of Malabar, and an Englishwoman in India Two Hundred Years Ago* (1907), though in this text Johnson is cited. Like Rennie over one-hundred years later, Biddulph links Stevenson's characterisation of Silver to the 'real' pirate as first depicted in *A General History* (Biddulph 1907: 138-39). In addition to Silver, a couple of minor and now largely forgotten fictional pirates bear an uncanny resemblance to the 'non-fiction' representation of the wooden-legged pirate first portrayed by Johnson. For example, the frightful and drunken aspects of the one-legged pirate's portrayal resonate with Harry Gringo's depiction of the barbarous Bill Gibbs in the 1864 novel *Captain Brand, of the Centipede*, a novel that was also loosely based on the life of an infamous eighteenth-century pirate. A pistol-swinging pirate with a wooden leg called 'Timbertoe' is also depicted in George Walter Thornbury's serialised novel *The Little Black Box* (Thornbury 1857: 11). These fictional refigurations of Johnson's one-legged pirate tend to draw from the negative aspects of this buccaneer's representation, in particular his allegedly threatening appearance and alcohol-fuelled conduct. Yet if we look to a wider network of fictional influences that may have contributed towards the characterisation of courageous disabled pirates, such as Silver, we see several characters who bear resemblance to later piratical antiheroes.

It is, for instance, possible that Stevenson derived the idea of making Silver an amputee from reading Michael Scott's popular novel *Tom Cringle's Log* (1829–33). In this text, a classic of nautical fiction, the narrator describes a pattern by which disabled sailors *en masse* continue to work in spite of their impairments:

> It seems to be a sort of rule, that no old sailor who has not lost a limb, or an eye at least, shall be eligible to the office; but as the kind of maiming is so far circumscribed that all cooks must have two arms, a laughable proportion of them have but one leg. (Scott 1834: 76)

Stevenson was certainly aware of Scott's work in 1885 – just two years after *Treasure Island* was published in its complete, most famous, and most popular form – since he mentions the author in a letter to P. G. Hamerton (Stevenson [1885] 1911: 276).[6] Equally, it is possible that Stevenson may have been inspired by the representation of other famous fictional seafaring leg amputees, such as Old Tom from Frederick Marryat's *Jacob Faithful* (1834) – another figure who maintains an active position on a boat despite physical impairment – or Gruff and Glum from Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–65). A clear link between Old Tom and Silver is their shared use of the expression 'shiver my timbers'. Though Silver is today better remembered than Old Tom for the use of this phrase, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the first recorded instance of its usage came in Marryat's 1834 novel. We know for sure that Stevenson read Marryat's work since he gave a scathing review of the latter's 1836 novel *The Pirate* in a letter to Henley dated September 1881. At this time Stevenson was nineteen chapters through writing *Treasure Island*, up to then entitled 'The Sea Cook' ([1881] 1911b: 63–4).[7] It may be a curious coincidence that the two fictional antecedents of the phrase 'shiver my timbers' are both amputees, yet the expression appears to perform a dual function, drawing attention to the speaker's prosthetic device and thus his physical impairment while focalising his ability to work by directly referring to the 'timbers' of a ship – his place of work. This stock nautical phrase inherited by Stevenson is therefore implicitly

tied to not just wooden leggedness but also to a capacity to work regardless of physical disability.

Along similar lines, a major literary figure whose work may have inspired Silver's one leggedness and indeed Hook's hook handedness, but whose influence is often neglected, is Robert Michael Ballantyne, an author whose importance to Stevenson is revealed in the prefatory poem to *Treasure Island*, 'To the hesitating purchaser':

> 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! (Stevenson 1915: ix)

Like Stevenson, Barrie also acknowledged his indebtedness to Ballantyne in a preface he wrote for a 1913 edition of the latter's most famous novel, *The Coral Island* (1857): 'Ballantyne was for long my man' (Barrie 1913: vi). Barrie's comment, which establishes a decidedly masculine appreciation of Ballantyne's work, is telling of the widespread appeal of the earlier writer's stories: they were for a male readership and concerned decidedly masculine issues. As I will show, a particular aspect of Ballantyne's portrayal of an amputee sailor makes manifest an aspect of disabled pirate characterisation that has remained an enduring trope: the association between physical impairment and violent villainy.

While best known for this enduringly popular Robinsonade, Ballantyne was seemingly obsessed with limb injuries, amputation, and prosthesis use. Indeed, in *The Young*

Fur-Traders (1856), a doctor is suddenly called to set a broken leg for a trapper; in *Hudson's Bay; or Every-Day Life in the Wilds of North America* (1859), a Native American has the whole calf of his left leg bitten off and walks with a limp as a result; in *The Pirate City: An Algerine Tale* (1874), the narrator notes how under Turkish rule theft is punishable by amputation; in *Wrecked but Not Ruined* (1881), a clerk pledges to make an injured sailor 'a splendid wooden leg', providing that his chief performs an amputation (Ballantyne 1881: 89); and, as earlier noted, in *The Pirate and the Madman*, Rosco is eventually fitted with a pair of wooden legs after his feet are so badly burnt that they are amputated following a near-death experience at the hands of 'savages'. Most notably, though, amputation, prosthesis use, and subsequent madness are depicted in Ballantyne's fabular 1864 novella *Why I Did Not Become a Sailor* (1864), a text that I argue displays parallels with Stevenson's novel and Barrie's play in terms of its depiction of the effect of seafaring injury. As I will suggest in the following section, this story, like the popular pirates narratives that followed it, sets up physical injury as a visual signifier for, and cause of, a violent disposition.

Peg-Legged Pirates: Narrative Prosthesis?

Why I Did Not Become a Sailor features a dream in which a teenager is transformed from an adventurous but nonetheless fairly domesticated, kind-hearted, able-bodied young man, into a wild, blood-thirsty amputee. A clear link is therefore established between disablement and moral aberrance. Jack, the best friend of the narrator and protagonist, is injured and his leg is amputated after the boys are unwittingly inducted as pirates and their ship embarks in a bloody battle with a Russian merchant vessel. Soon after Jack's leg is amputated, he fits himself with a wooden leg that 'is three inches too short, . . . caus[ing him] to hobble in a most undignified manner' (Ballantyne 1864: 315). The narrator, Bob, grows increasingly concerned by his companion's rash conduct. Following their escape from the pirates and

landing on an unknown island, Jack first insults a slave keeper, who with his allies then assaults and captures the two young boys. Jack then continues to berate his captors, resulting in Bob's assessment of his friend as 'probably under the influence of madness' (Ballantyne 1864: 342). Jack's behaviour grows increasingly reckless and irrational as his captivity draws on. To Bob's horror, Jack eventually throws all caution to the wind and attempts to take the lives of his captors. He convinces them to lock the door of the building in which he and Bob are chained and then starts a fire. The scene that follows is bewildering:

> The men uttered a yell, and rushing forward, threw themselves on the smoking heap in the hope of smothering it at once. But Jack applied the torch quickly to various parts. The flames leaped up! The men rolled off in agony. Jack, who somehow had managed to break his chain, hopped after them, showering the blazing straw on their heads, and yelling as never mortal yelled before. In two seconds the whole place was in a blaze, and I beheld Jack actually throwing somersaults with his one leg over the fire and through the smoke; punching the heads of the four men most unmercifully; catching up blazing handfuls of straw, and thrusting them into their eyes and mouths in a way that quite overpowered me. I could restrain myself no longer. I began to roar in abject terror! (Ballantyne 1864: 352–3)

Here Jack's wild and barbarous behaviour is shown to come as a direct result of his injuries: after his assault and capture, he brashly exclaims, 'A man with only one leg, no head, and an exposed brain, isn't worth caring about. *I* don't care for him – not a button' (Ballantyne 1864: 339). He is thus shown to have lost all hope and all self-respect as a result of his damaged physical state. His violence is depicted as a consequence of his despondent mentality.

While Jack is not a pirate, his eventual ferocious conduct matches him in terms of brutality with the buccaneers displayed earlier in this novella and even the vicious kidnappers who arrest him and Bob. By aligning physical disability with moral decrepitude this story fits Mitchell and Snyder's model of 'narrative prosthesis'. Now an important theory in disability studies, 'narrative prosthesis' describes 'the myriad relations between the literary and the historical' (Mitchell and Snyder 2000: 9), focussing specifically on the way that physical and mental difference is used as a form of supplement by authors and filmmakers to perform a number of narrative functions: 'as a character-making trope', 'as a social category of deviance', 'as a symbolic vehicle for meaning-making and cultural critique', and 'as an option in the narrative negotiation of disabled subjectivity' (Mitchell and Snyder 2000: 1). A particular aspect of narrative prosthesis is evident in Ballantyne's novella: that is, 'the pervasiveness of disability as a device of characterization in narrative art' (Mitchell and Snyder 2000: 9). Indeed, the association that Ballantyne draws in this tale between loss of body and loss of mind is almost identical to the way that 'Disability conjures up a ubiquitous series of associations between corrupted exterior and contaminated interior' in Melville's *Moby-Dick* (Mitchell and Snyder 2000: 139).

The bond between disability, villainy, and violence is indeed a strong one in the pirate adventure fiction from this period. In many instances, the loss of a body part is reflective of injuries sustained while performing piratical duties, as in the case of Silver and Hook. In these instances, the prosthetics and/or assistive technologies that are used stand as unwanted yet alluring trophies of their violent escapades. Often, such characters are shown to be vengeful to those who inflicted injuries upon them. Hook, of course, is the best example of this kind of portrayal. Revealing that Peter Pan was responsible for the amputation of his arm, he threats, ''Twas he cut off my arm. I have waited long to shake his hand with this. (Luxuriating) Oh, I'll tear him!' (Barrie [1904] 1977: 28–9). In other cases, the loss of a body

part is seen as either secular or divine punishment for previous piratical deeds: see Bill Gibbs from *Captain Brand*, whose leg is crushed and piratical career all but ended by an enraged slave protecting his mistress (Gringo 1864), and Rosco from *The Pirate and the Madman*, whose double-foot amputation coincides with his redemption as a character: 'the ruin of his body had been the saving of his soul' (Ballantyne 1883: 216).

While narrative prosthesis is certainly a useful theoretical apparatus for considering why physical aberrancies and the primitive prosthetics that were used to mask them have so often been associated with pirates, the characterisation of popular pirate figures, such as Silver and Hook, as antiheroes complicates this framework somewhat. Despite being out for revenge against Peter Pan, Hook nonetheless has a number of amicable and admirable attributes, which make him comical and likeable as well as a compellingly criminal. He is, for instance, charming, polite, and well-spoken. Perhaps even more so than Hook, Silver, though a cold-blooded murderer, is likeable in many ways. He is physically strong, brave, and commanding. He is also, according to Squire Trelawney, a man of considerable integrity: 'Silver is a man of substance; I know of my own knowledge that he has a banker's account, which has never been overdrawn' (Stevenson 1915: 57). Silver is in fact so likeable that he is all but forgiven by Jim Hawkins and his comrades in spite of him leading the mutiny that put their lives in danger in the first place. Jim goes so far as to pledge to save Silver from the gallows should he go to court for his evil deeds. Silver also avoids dramatic justice. He escapes the reclaimed *Hispaniola* in a shore boat rather than facing the consequences for his piratical endeavours back in England thus revealing his place in the author's heart. Our most famous fictional pirates are, therefore, more than just villains whose evil is made manifest by their injuries. Silver and Hook are complex figures who are not quite evil through and through. They actually possess some qualities that are compelling to a young male readership.

Above all, these fictional pirates adapt remarkably well to their physical impairments, displaying to their readership how a manly man 'should' respond to physical loss.

Message in a Bottle: Manly Markers for Managing Limb Loss

In a time when dangers to physical integrity came in many forms and the importance of bodily wholeness could not be underestimated,[8] a contingency plan was needed for those aspiring to go places in life but whose bodies did not meet the establishing standards for the bodily 'norm', which came to the fore in the nineteenth century.[9] For many, prosthetics provided a solution to this problem. A burgeoning profession of prosthesis makers promulgated the mimetic capacities of their devices, which they claimed could 'substitute for the handiwork of nature' (Bigg 1855: 2). Such claims were supported by some journalists, who were awestruck by the 'ingenuity shown by . . . wooden-leg makers' (anon. 1875: 463) and other prosthetists, such as glass-eye makers, a profession pioneered by Auguste Boissonneau, who coined the term 'ocularist' to describe those working in the trade. Others, however, were less sure about prosthetics and lambasted what they saw as a means of deception: devices that could disguise bodily difference thereby obscuring popular physiognomic prejudices. William Blanchard Jerrold, for instance, famously debated the virtues and vices of prosthetics, identifying that some saw artificial body parts as 'emblem[s] of deceit', 'device[s] of ingenious vanity', or items that 'cover[ed] the wearer with gross and unpardonable deceit' (Blanchard Jerrold 1851: 64). A concern for those who had lost limbs was that certain prosthetics came to be associated with beggary. David Copperfield's sweetheart, Dora, for instance, associates beggary with 'a yellow face and a nightcap, or a pair of crutches, or a wooden leg, or a dog with a decanter-stand in his mouth, or something of that kind' (Dickens [1849–50] 2004: 545–6). Thus while prosthetics provided a practical material solution for those who could afford top-end products, such as those created by

British prosthetists Henry Heather Bigg or Frederick Grey, such devices were not available to everyone and the efficacy of them was debatable. In his 1855 treatise on artificial limbs, for instance, Grey lamented that 'from the expense entailed by their elaborate construction, they are not within the reach of the poorer class of sufferers' (Grey 1855: 107). If prostheses did not provide a complete solution to the perceived problems caused by bodily loss – loss of function, respect, and job prospects – what was needed was a specific attitude to deal with physical loss. As I suggest, a piratical approach to dealing with physical loss – that encompassed adaptability, defiance, determination, courage, and resilience – was promulgated by late-Victorian and Edwardian adventure narratives.

The developmental role of late-Victorian adventure fiction has received increased critical attention in recent years. David Head has suggested that late-nineteenth-century educators, librarians, and psychologists thought pirate stories good for boys' physical masculine development. He argues that 'Pirate stories could . . . encourage boys to be vigorous, fighting the perceived tendency of modern middle-class life to create soft boys and softer men' (Head 2012: 112). Discussing a very different Victorian genre, Karen Bourrier has outlined the capacity of disabled male figures in fiction to 'train the reader emotionally' (Bourrier 2009: 117). As she contends, in mid-century sentimental fiction, disability opens up a more capacious emotional range for male characters, while the physical limitations of disability mirror the emotional restraint expected of both able-bodied male characters and readers (Bourrier 2009: 118). Tom Shakespeare, meanwhile, suggests that 'non-disabled men have things to learn from disabled men' (Shakespeare 1999: 63). While studies on disability and masculinity have tended to dwell on the incompatibilities between the realities of male disablement and traditionally held ideals of masculinity, which usually hold physical strength in high regard,[10] pirate stories tend to exhibit quite the contrary: disabled male figures who persevere by exhibiting a kind of hyper-masculinity. The disabled pirates depicted in

Stevenson and Barrie's adventure stories serve as disabled male role models, whose ability to battle through life's obstacles – in their cases limb loss – provide a masculine model of resilience to both able-bodied and disabled readers. It is, however, noteworthy that the messages promulgated by disabled pirates are buttressed by an ablest philosophy that encouraged men with disabilities simply to 'get on with it' rather than hope for social changes to lessen their disablement – disability being a condition now considered at least in part, if not largely, socially constructed.[11]

Silver and Hook, however, are not the only disabled characters in pirate adventure fiction that display the hyper-masculinity described above. Though not a pirate per se, but a character unwillingly and unwittingly formerly employed on a pirate vessel who adopts the blood-thirsty traits of his former comrades because of injury, Jack from Ballantyne's *Why I Did Not Become a Sailor* is another character who exhibits extreme adaptability and surprising physical capacities in spite of his limb loss. Jack not only manages to engulf his eventual captors with flames while performing somersaults, but earlier bludgeons an alligator, kills a dog, and injures a slave keeper all by using his wooden leg as a club. With some significant adaptation to his prosthesis, Bob and Jack fashion an artificial foot out of a 'square piece of bark off a tree' (Ballantyne 1864: 327), Jack is also able to traverse a swamp. Jack's bravery is probably the most impressive aspect of his characterisation. The narrator notes, 'Poor Jack was very gentle and uncomplaining. He even made light of his misfortune, and laughed a good deal at himself; but I could see, nevertheless, that his spirits were at times deeply affected, in spite of his brave efforts to bear up and appear gay and cheerful' (Ballantyne 1864: 329). *Why I Did Not Become a Sailor* thus presents a complex portrayal of disability that, on the one hand, shows some alluring, hyper-masculine ways of dealing with limb loss while, on the other hand, supporting prejudices that associated disability with villainy and violence.

Ballantyne's other prosthetically adorned pirate, Rosco from *The Madman and the Pirate*, also shows a relatively stoic attitude to disability while revealing the functional inadequacies of primitive lower-limb prosthetics. Notwithstanding the humorous trials of his double-prosthesis use – he is first unable to walk with his prosthetics, then breaks one of his false legs, realises that his prostheses are poorly suited to the terrain of the island, wears defective limbs with lifted toes, and finally falls over repeatedly, requiring the assistance of others to return him to his feet – Rosco perseveres and eventually achieves a degree of physical mobility and, more importantly, happiness: he reacquires the art of walking 'to such perfection' that he is seen 'almost at all times and in all weathers, stumping about the village' (Ballantyne 1883: 240). His contentedness is revealed by the image presented at the close of the novel where he is described to be sitting 'slightly bent, with eyes gazing sometimes at the children, and sometimes at his wooden toes' (Ballantyne 1883: 246). Acceptance is, above all, the quality encouraged here.

If acceptance is the favoured response to disability espoused by Ballantyne, then defiance is the preferred attitude propagated by *Treasure Island*. Silver's physical capacities are no doubt aided by his otherwise impressive physique ('He was very tall and strong, with a face as big as a ham' [Stevenson 1915: 62–3]) and yet his mobility and physical prowess in the text are, at times, remarkable – if not, to an able-bodied Victorian reader, somewhat disconcerting. As Alan Sandison has commented, 'perhaps the two most striking things about Silver are his remarkable physical agility, given his missing limb, and a parallel and equally notable mental agility' (Sandison 2005: 238). Silver is at one point described as moving 'with the speed and security of a trained gymnast' (Stevenson 1915: 117) and in the same scene, the one where he murders the seaman Tom, he is also said to be as 'agile as a monkey, even without leg or crutch' (Stevenson 1915: 117). Possibly a nod to the also 'monkey-like' double-amputee Miserrimus Dexter from Wilkie Collins's *The Law and the Lady*, who is said

to move ‘as lightly as a monkey, on his hands’ (Collins [1875] 1876: 212), Silver’s portrayal is similarly sensational and transgressive in this scene. The reader is simultaneously shocked, impressed, and terrified by the acrobatics of Stevenson’s disabled antihero. Though Silver’s physicality is impressive, it is, more than anything else, his ability to work and at times climb the social ladder that is truly admirable. If, like Jim, the doctor, or Stevenson himself, we forgive Silver for his misdeeds, one can do little more than marvel at the pirate’s unwavering commitment to self-betterment throughout *Treasure Island*. He progresses from respected sea-cook to pirate captain, and is only reduced to a valued crew member and eventually an unpursued exile after his mutiny attempt is compromised and he forms an alliance with his former enemies. Silver begins *Treasure Island* a landlord with a bank account and ends it with a sack of coins ‘worth, perhaps, three or four hundred guineas’ (Stevenson 1915: 288), an amount roughly equal to the annual income of a middle-class household at this time. Though by no means a rich man at the end of the novel, Silver ends it with more than he began with. He also earns decidedly more than he would have had he remained an honest sea-cook. Although his means of securing an income are dubious, he certainly works for it, thereby elevating him above the status of the stereotypical wooden leg user from this period – the street beggar.

A considerable amount of stigma surrounded disabled men who were reduced to begging in the nineteenth century. Wooden legs were commonly associated with mendicants. They were also routinely seen as fraudulent props used to dupe alms givers into giving more. A number of reasons why wooden legs were seen as beneficial to street vendors, a class barely above beggars in the Victorian class hierarchy, was propagated in an anonymous 1877 *All the Year Round* article titled ‘Mr. Wegg and his class’. In this piece, the author describes the various duplicitous strategies of a one-legged crossing sweeper for increasing his income: he uses his wooden leg to inspire the idea that he is a war veteran; he draws upon the

sympathy of others, claiming to be in constant pain; after his wooden leg breaks, he uses this as an excuse to demand extra money from passers-by; and finally, he claims to have found Salvation and so uses Christian verses to encourage charitable donations (anon. 1877). Other fraudulent wooden-legged street dwellers are depicted in Mark Twain's *Roughing It* (1872) and Arthur Melbourne Cooper's 1903 short film *Blind Man's Bluff*. Though Silver is certainly deceptive, his cunning, unlike other calculating amputee characters, such as Silas Wegg from Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, is less deplorable because of his activeness and robustness. Unlike Wegg's scheme for success, Silver's designs rely on his actions rather than the mistakes of others. Silver's activeness, work ethic, and ability to accrue capital in contemporary eyes elevates him above the status of street 'cripples', as does his decision to not use a peg leg, which was seen as a signifier for paupers. Certainly a slippery character, Silver nonetheless commands respect and is an antihero not only in the novel's context but also for both able-bodied and disabled men in general. Young male readers are not intended to aspire to Silver's piratical ways but are encouraged to admire his unrelenting attitude to physical injury and perhaps life's obstacles by and large. Stevenson was, after all, impressed by his friend Henley's 'maimed strength and masterfulness' (Stevenson [1883] 1911: 137).

Hook is another impaired fictional pirate who transcends the association of prosthetics with beggars. Indeed, Hook's aristocratic attire – based on the apparel of Charles II – and stately diction elevate him from the lower echelons of society in spite of his piratical career. Like Silver, Hook is also separated from street beggars by his apparent work ethic and ability to continue his duties in spite of his loss of a hand. Unlike Silver, however, Hook is not driven by financial reward but is motivated by vengeance. Though physically compromised and once defeated by Peter Pan, Hook continues his buccaneering career in order to avenge his bodily loss. Despite his neglect for looting, Hook remains apparently wealthy. His ability to continue working as a pirate stems primarily from his adaptability. He adjusts profoundly

well to his hand loss, claiming to prefer his hook to his remaining organic hand: conversing with Hook, Smee comments, ‘I have oft heard you say your hook was worth a score of hands, for combing the hair and other homely uses’, to which Hook responds, ‘If I was a mother I would pray to have my children born with this instead of that’ (Barrie [1904] 1977: 29). Hook’s success as a pirate therefore relies on the efficacy of his hook prosthesis and also on the unflinching way in which he has adapted to using it. Like Silver, Hook adopts a never-say-die attitude to his loss of a body part.

To return finally to the question of where the enduring image of the prosthesis-using pirate comes from, a piece of biographical conjecture sheds light on another possible inspiration for Stevenson’s depiction of Silver – and thus Barrie’s portrayal of Hook – and also explains why the image of the disabled pirate remains so pertinent. While the stimulus of Stevenson’s friend Henley has been well documented and we cannot dismiss the complex network of influences discussed earlier in this chapter, few have considered how Stevenson’s own experience of disabling illness shaped his depiction of a resilient physically impaired character. Stevenson was a long-term sufferer of nervous exhaustion and various lung problems, rendering him, by Victorian standards, ‘a cripple’. Oliver S. Buckton has observed the impact of Stevenson’s body on his literary work: ‘Disease was an apt metaphor by which Stevenson could represent subjection to power, being a state of oppression under which he had long suffered’ (Buckton 2007: 28). Reading the mobility of Silver in light of Stevenson’s often bed-ridden lack of it may encourage us to consider whether Silver represents a disabled fantasy of physical and social mobility. Alternatively, we may wish to view Silver as imbued with some of Stevenson’s own mechanisms for coping with impairment. In 1901, former Free Church of Scotland minister William Robertson Nicoll, who himself was forced to retire from pastoral ministry after contracting pleurisy, praised Stevenson’s resilience to illness and gestures towards his enduring success:

> He was simply the bravest of men. Now and then, as in his letter to George Meredith, he lets us see under what disabling conditions he fought his battle. Human beings in a world like this are naturally drawn to one who suffers, and will not let himself be mastered or corrupted by suffering. They do not care for the prosperous, dominant, athletic, rich, and long-lived man. They may conjecture, indeed, that behind all the bravery there is much hidden pain, but if it is not revealed to them they cannot be sure. (qtd. in Hammerton 1907: 148).

Though Stevenson's own struggles with his body are little-known to popular audiences in the twenty-first century, the image of Long John Silver, a physically impaired character so durable and resilient that he manages without a prosthetic and who inspired our most famous prosthesis-using pirate, Captain Hook, endures as a Stevensonian role model for coping with life's obstacles. While Silver is not the archetype for our association between pirates and prosthetics, the fantasy of disabled durability that he embodies gestures towards an explanation for this enduring stereotype: the image of wooden-legged and hook-handed pirates stems from a complex web of real and fictional influences, an admiration for the piratical attitude towards disability displayed by maimed buccaneers, and an ablest assumption that sees prostheses as a logical, practical, and materially effacing solution to the difficulties occasioned by limb loss. Our understanding of fictional pirates' resistance to disability is thus propped up by peg legs.

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Notes

[1] Hans Turley and Mel Campbell suggest that the association between pirates and prosthetics, in addition to various other 'fashion plates' – such as 'dashing rogues waving Jolly Rogers and sporting puffy shirts, parrots, rakish bandannas, gold earrings . . . eye-patches and velvet coats' – 'would seem at odds with the economic, political and legal realities of piracy in eighteenth-century Europe' (Campbell 2011: 11). See Turley (1999: 37–42).

[2] For recent examples of where Silver has been referred to as a wooden leg user, see Kemp (2009: 8–9), Narain (2011), BBC News (2011), and Burrow (2013).

[3] See Amrhein (2012: 'Chapter Thirteen: The Hunt for Lloyd').

[4] See Rennie (2013: 179–87).

[5] Garland Thomson argues that 'Modernity secularized wonder into the stereotype of the supercrip, who amazes and inspires the viewer by performing feats that the nondisabled viewer cannot imagine doing. Contemporary wonder rhetoric emphasizes admiration rather than amazement, in part because bourgeois respectability now deems it inappropriate to delight in staring at disabled people' (Garland Thomson 2002: 60–1).

[6] David Cordingly, a leading expert on pirate history, notes some other possible cultural influences, including a one-legged sea cook depicted by Thomas Rowlandson (Cordingly 2006: 8).

[7] Stevenson describes Marryat's novel as an 'arid, feeble, vain, tottering production' ([1881] 1911b: 64).

[8] For work on the perceived importance of physical wholeness, see Haley (1978) and O'Connor (2000). For work on possible dangers to this integrity, see Kirkup (2007).

[9] As Lennard J. Davis has argued, the idea of the bodily norm came to prominence in the nineteenth century when statistics emerged as a powerful model for modern life (Davis 1995:

23–49). It is also worth considering the effect of legislative reforms, such as the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, which tightened poor relief eligibility requirements thereby placing the physical capacities of those with impairments under the spotlight (Stoddard Holmes ([2004] 2009): 108–22).

[10] See Shakespeare (1999), Serlin (2003), Shuttleworth (2004), Wilson (2004), and Bionaz (2005).

[11] See Shakespeare (2006) for a thorough yet concise survey of literature, discussion, and interrogation of the social construction of disability.

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