2014

The Conflict of Charity, Disability, and the Moral Exchange in *Treasure Island*

Brittany Bruner

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/criterion

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/criterion/vol7/iss1/14

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Criterion: A Journal of Literary Criticism* by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
The Conflict of Charity, Disability, and the Moral Exchange in *Treasure Island*

*Brittany Bruner*

Introduced by Billy Bones’s first warning “to look out for ‘the seafaring man with one leg’” (5), Long John Silver is arguably the most memorable character in Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*. Stevenson devised the character of Long John Silver by observing his friend William Ernest Henley, a dynamic and genial individual who lost a leg from tuberculosis. Jenni Calder writes that “Louis admired immensely Henley’s courage in the face of pain and boredom, and his determination to carve himself out a literary career under adverse circumstances” (93). Long John Silver embodies this same type of determination to succeed despite disability, but he lacks the positive qualities that made Henley such a positive and dynamic part of Stevenson’s life. Instead, Silver becomes a renowned, infamous villain devoid of morals. This conception of Silver took place through a unique experiment in which Stevenson decided “to deprive [Henley] of all his finer qualities and higher graces of temperament, to leave him with nothing but his strength, his courage, his quickness, and his magnificent geniality, and to try to express these in terms of the culture of a raw tarpaulin” (“My First Book” 190). Thus, through an amoral depiction of
Henley, the infamous Long John Silver—with his wooden leg, glib tongue, raw determination, and thirst for power—was born.

Much scholarship focuses on how Silver’s amoral nature creates his villainous side, but surprisingly little focuses on how Silver’s disability plays into his characterization as a villain. Much of Silver’s villainy takes place within the context of a moral exchange, which is the expectation that a recipient of charity offer some kind of moral return. If the recipient of charity offers no moral return, the giver often removes charity. Silver’s disability attracts charity, even though it may be unwarranted, from other characters. The textual (and to the other characters, visual) presence of Silver’s disability defines him throughout the novel because he is viewed as a spectacle worthy of either sympathy or rejection according to his compliance with the rules governing moral exchange. However, Silver turns against those who offer him charity, manipulating these acts of charity until they separate giver and receiver to reveal their shared motivation for selfish gain. Silver’s disability may thus be regarded as the center of conflict in the novel because both Silver and his benefactors expect to obtain power by controlling both the other party’s charitable acts and the moral exchange, leaving neither party with the ability to attain full power.

It is necessary to note the importance of Silver’s disability as a central theme in the novel, because his disability largely influences how the characters perceive and interact with Silver. Much of the description regarding Silver’s actions throughout the novel includes references to his disability. For example, Jim’s first description of Silver at the pub introduces him as a disabled working man. Jim says, “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” (42). He describes Silver’s disability but also comments on his ability to overcome the disability. Jim paints a picture of a crippled, amiable character who elicits tender feelings from both Jim and those who interact with Silver, which shows he can be a positive influence because he works despite his disability. In this situation, his perseverance is lauded because he overcomes his physical struggles. However, Silver’s hard work is often overlooked because the characters focus on his impaired state, pitying him for having a disability rather than recognizing his strengths. This oversight is most apparent in others’ reactions to Silver’s physical impairment. For example, when Silver is working on the ship, Jim states that he “carrie[s] his crutch by a lanyard around his neck” (53), moving with stability and certainty.
Additionally, even in adverse weather, Silver moves across the deck with great efficiency and hands himself “from one place to another, now using the crutch, now trailing it alongside by the lanyard, as quickly as another man could walk” (54). Here Silver effectively performs his tasks, and his physical abilities seem to match those of the able-bodied men. However, Jim further asserts, “Yet some of the men who had sailed with him before expressed their pity to see him so reduced” (54). Despite Silver’s capability to competently perform his duties, the men still focus on Silver’s disability and pity him for it.

In further analyzing the effects of such pity, it is interesting to note that in Treasure Island pity and charity are used to separate giver and receiver, leaving the giver with the power to bestow to or withhold resources from whomever the giver feels is or is not worthy. In connection with this, Martha Stoddard Holmes suggests that, in Victorian culture, the mere visibility of disability identified those deserving charity. She observes,

Traditionally viewed as the “unquestionably deserving” element among the financially dependent because they were assumed to be dependent in all other ways as well, they were often placed at the center of fictional and nonfictional narratives of suffering and charitable relief. As innocently afflicted objects, they inspired a flood of tender feelings and alms that redounded to the donor’s credit, yielding the double satisfaction of having followed in Christ’s footsteps and received the heartfelt gratitude of the feeble recipient. (113-14)

This view compliments the givers but overlooks the disabled people’s potential, reducing them to objects requiring aid. This alienating objectification is masked by the do-gooders’ perceived sense of importance for following Christ and receiving gratitude from the less fortunate. That objectification is seen in the novel, as Long John Silver’s actions are often belittled in connection with his disability despite his proven abilities to lead and persuade others and to navigate the sea. Thus, while charity is often perceived as a positive thing, in the case of Long John Silver, it actually downplays the receiver’s ability to progress and be equal to able-bodied men. This reality becomes problematic for Silver, who has great ambition.

In addition to the giver’s feelings of self-importance, the positive implications of charity are challenged by the idea of a moral exchange; this challenge informs Holmes’s example of benefactors performing Christlike charity in exchange for gratitude (113-14), which is their moral return. Thus charity becomes a selfish act predicated on the presence of a moral return. Audrey
Jaffe also mentions a moral exchange in her analysis of scenes of sympathy. She first analyzes sympathy and charity in Victorian literature and links them with the idea that identity is formulated through capitalist exchange. Jaffe suggests that scenes of sympathy ostensibly occur in an “attempt to ameliorate social differences with assurances of mutual feeling and universal humanity” (15). However, Jaffe suggests that this attempted amelioration of social differences has an underlying motivation separate from creating a universal humanity. She argues that people identify themselves through giving economic charity in the attempt to connect with other humans on a universal level. However, this self-identifying situation is only functional if it is balanced by some kind of return. Jaffe writes, “Sympathy and charity situate the self in a hydraulic relation with other selves, in which a flow of funds in one direction represents a drain unless balanced by some—usually moral—return” (16). Although this criticism on economic charity may effectively inform scenes of sympathy in Treasure Island, her suggestion that the continual occurrence of sympathy and charity requires a moral return provides interesting insight into sympathy given to the disabled in the novel. Those who give sympathy expect the receiver to adopt their moral code. In Treasure Island, the moral exchange acts through reciprocity: the giver provides charity with the expectation that the receiver give back some kind of moral return such as gratitude, humility, or hard work.

This moral exchange is often practiced through giving and attaining money with the expectation that the receiver offer a moral return in exchange for money. This exchange also comes with the expectation that the giver will still keep most of his or her money and that the receiver will receive only that which he or she needs. This expectation is problematic if both parties try to maintain economic advantage. In Treasure Island most, if not all, of the characters are greedy for treasure, and, arguably, the title of Stevenson’s novel suggests that the main conflict ensues from economic greed. Such an interpretation would be informed by Jaffe’s argument about the economic charitable exchange. However, Long John Silver does not seem to be solely motivated by economic gain. For example, Jim overhears Silver tell the other crew members that Silver saved his money rather than squandering it like other pirates, suggesting that he does not need the treasure (57-58). Linda Dryden describes the most telling sign that Silver is not creating conflict solely for the treasure; she states that when Silver escapes at the end of the novel, he “is not overly greedy and only takes a few hundred guineas from the surviving adventurers when he could easily, most likely, have taken more” (18). Dryden suggests that Silver’s motivation to
gain power is not solely driven by money. Rather, Silver's motivations for power are suggested by his desire to be more than a common crew member, which can be seen when he voices his frustration with Captain Smollett in the following conversation with the crew member Dick: “‘Why, we're all seamen aboard here, I should think,’ said the lad Dick. ‘We're all foc’s’le hands, you mean,’ snapped Silver. ‘We can steer a course, but who's to set one? . . . If I had my way, I’d have Cap’n Smollett work us back into the trades at least’” (59-60). Silver’s desire to steer a course suggests that he wishes to lead and have control, but Smollett does not allow upward mobility on the ship. Thus, rather than creating conflict to obtain treasure, Silver creates conflict to elevate himself to be above, or at least equal to, the upper crew; he accomplishes this by using his disability to manipulate the charitable exchange.

However, before Silver can manipulate the charitable exchange to gain power, he must understand the gentlemen's moral rules in connection with charity and sympathy. The gentility in Treasure Island present themselves as superior benefactors with the responsibility of determining morality and the proper situations in which to exercise sympathy. Thus moral cues become as important as visual cues in determining whom they deem worthy of charity. Stevenson questions the benevolent, selfless façade of such charity by introducing the gentility to amoral, maimed pirates who challenge the boundaries of traditional moral exchange. This conflict is first shown in the gentility's interaction with Pew.

Pew plays into the moral exchange by acting the part of the sympathetic blind man through his noble display of humility and gratitude when he first arrives at the Admiral Benbow. He steps near the inn and says, “Will any kind friend inform a poor blind man, who has lost the precious sight of his eyes in the gracious defence of his native country, England, and God bless King George!” (17). Pew plays by the rules of the moral exchange by humbly calling himself a “poor blind man,” by showing gratitude for and complimenting the people who can help him, and by showing his loyalty to the country and the king. Jim performs his act of sympathy when offering Pew his hand. However, Pew manipulates this act of charity by forcing Jim to acquiesce to his (Pew's) requests. After manipulating Jim into taking him to Bones, Pew drops his act of humility and gratitude (or his moral return) once he gains power and has the chance to procure the treasure map. With this new assertiveness, Pew and the other pirates storm through the streets as gentlemen on horses charge toward them to thwart their immoral actions. Unfortunately, left to fend for himself
without sight, Pew goes down the wrong path and is trampled to death by a horse despite the rider’s attempt to save him, causing his disability to become his downfall rather than his means to manipulate for gain. After witnessing the accident, Jim states, “I leaped to my feet and hailed the riders. They were pulling up, at any rate, horrified at the accident” (27). This scene elicits the proper sympathy from the horse riders for the shocking accident. However, Jim then tells his story of Pew’s ruthlessness, prompting one of the riders to say, “I’m glad I trod on Master Pew’s corns” (27). This statement suggests that these characters view charity as a means for a moral exchange because the riders are only sympathetic to the blind man until they discover that he was a greedy, conniving pirate. Then death becomes their ultimate form of power over him, showing that they control the moral exchange. At this discovery, the men act as moral judges, deem Pew unworthy of sympathy, and count his death in their favor.

This sense of moral superiority and authority to grant sympathy is expanded upon in Stevenson’s description of the upper class characters. He describes Dr. Livesey, a representation of the upper class, as “very stately and condescending” (29), which suggests that Livesey condescends to those around him. Even though the act of condescension was originally benevolent, Daniel Siegel notes that by the Victorian period,

[t]o condescend was no longer to renounce but to make a show of renunciation; it was no longer to help others but to demean them for one’s own gain. . . . From literary works to the treatises and memoirs of philanthropic innovators, the condescension scene became an emblem of the limitations of charity, a ritual in which fantasies of help degenerated into visions of social collapse. (4)

In light of their perceived moral character, Livesey and his comrades feel justified in condescending to help those they perceive as less fortunate. This kind of condescension follows the moral exchange because charity in Treasure Island is given for gain, but that act also demeans others. Such an act of condescension would put Silver in a subservient position. However, Silver understands that the only way he will gain power is by first acquiescing to the condescension act. This acquiescence will get him out to sea and onto the island where he can then, through mutiny, assert his dominance.

The condescension scene takes place when Trelawney hires Long John Silver as sea cook and describes Silver in his letter to Dr. Livesey. Trelawney tells Livesey that he met Long John Silver, a well-connected, old sailor who “wanted
a good berth as cook to get to sea again” (38). When Silver meets Trelawney on the sea coast, he tells him that “he had hobbled down there that morning . . . to get a smell of the salt” (38), emphasizing his disability through the use of the word “hobbled” to evoke sympathy from Trelawney. Commenting on this incident, Trelawney writes, “I was monstrously touched—so would you have been—and, out of pure pity, I engaged him on the spot to be ship’s cook” (38). Despite the fact that Silver has been a successful sailor and a military man, Trelawney sees his job offer of the subservient position of sea cook as no more than an act of pity. Both parties utilize the exchange for selfish gain: Silver to get back to sea and into a position of power and Livesey to feel satisfied for offering charity while filling the sea cook position and finding, through Silver’s connections, hardworking crew members with whom he will not have to share the treasure.

Silver initially complies with the gentlemen’s moral exchange by being amiable, positive, and hardworking, and he appears to follow the gentlemen’s rules. Silver first establishes this perception by convincing the gentlemen that he is both hardworking and honest. He promises the gentlemen a moral return by representing the ideal disabled body because he perseveres despite his struggles and will inspire others to do the same. Sally Hayward describes this paradigm by analyzing Henry Mayhew’s *London Labour and the London Poor*, writing, “Demonstrating a perfect balance between a Christian morality and a Utilitarian, self-reliant politics, the disabled male body that ‘will work’ is a body that can inspire the able-bodied and disabled, middle- and working-class male into their own particular brand of right, useful, and Godly action” (66-67). Silver, in his ability to work despite struggles, would be such an example for the other crew members because he would motivate them to work hard. In this situation, not only would Silver be offering a personal moral return, he would also inspire others to offer their own returns. Thus the gentlemen offer merely a moment of charity toward Silver and receive a hardworking crew that will lead them toward treasure.

Combined with this hardworking attitude and ability to motivate others, Silver often acts and speaks honestly, a trait many characters comment on when Silver is first hired. When Silver recounts the story of seeing Black Dog in his pub, Jim describes the account as one of “the most perfect truth” (45), and later the doctor states that Silver and the captain are both honest men (50). The trust that Trelawney has developed for Silver because of Silver’s hard work and perceived honesty proves useful to Silver because Trelawney allows
criterion

him to choose the crew members, whom he handpicks from Flint’s past crew. Trelawney comments, “Long John even got rid of two out of the six or seven I had already engaged. He showed me in a moment that they were just the sort of fresh-water swabs we had to fear in an adventure of importance” (39). This comment shows Trelawney’s unwavering trust in Silver because Silver has offered him a display of moral values and the promise of a successful crew.

Through this setup, Silver secures his power play by conforming perfectly to the gentlemen’s rules of moral exchange until he approaches Treasure Island, where the rules will no longer be in effect. He keeps up this façade while he is out to sea. Even after Jim warns the upper crew of Silver’s plans, Silver plays the gentlemen by continuing his act of subservience. Jim states, “If an order were given, John would be on his crutch in an instant, with the cheeriest ‘Ay, ay, sir!’ in the world; and when there was nothing else to do, he kept up one song after another, as if to conceal the discontent of the rest” (71). Although the gentlemen recognize his act, his behavior protects him until he can separate from the honest crew because the gentlemen cannot accuse him of mutiny while he is offering them a moral return, even if it is false. By following the rules of their moral exchange, Silver binds the gentlemen into following their own constructed setup for charitable giving. Because of this constriction, the conflict does not arise until Silver explicitly challenges his position in the moral exchange.

When Silver is finally able to separate himself, he performs an adversarial flip by turning against the honest crew, gathering a mutinous crew, and overtly defying the moral exchange in order to claim power. Siegel describes the adversarial flip, stating, “In the battle for authority, it is occasionally the subordinate who condescends” (26). To show this phenomenon, he uses the example of Frankenstein’s monster flipping on Frankenstein. Siegel then continues, “Condescension is here at its adversarial peak. It is the vehicle whereby the creature reveals his dominance, and the word itself fires a semantic revolution after which the father and creator is no longer to be supplicated but simply tolerated” (26). This same exchange can be seen once Silver reaches the island because he challenges the position of the captain, the other gentlemen, and the honest men by placing himself above, or at least on equal ground with, the upper crew by taking a leadership position rather than humbly taking his lower position. Siegel compares moments like this to the idea of the gift exchange where both parties seek the advantage. He writes, “Condescension is often just this sort of competitive exchange, with both the one who condescends and the
one condescended to seeking to turn the encounter to advantage” (26). The upper crew sought the advantage by obtaining Silver’s help without offering him any promise of treasure, and Silver now seeks the advantage by claiming his “right” as captain and his “right” to seize claim to part of the treasure. This rebellion complicates the moral exchange because it is now only beneficial to Silver, which drives the conflict between Silver and the gentlemen since they all expect to benefit from the moral exchange.

In securing his new position, Silver capitalizes on his perceived physical weakness to manipulate the charitable exchange by using his body and his crutch to exert power over others, instead of using these symbols of dependency to elicit sympathy. Thus the original sources of condescension—his wooden leg and crutch—become a means for power. Jim describes Silver’s dexterity throughout much of the novel, and when Silver’s villainy and rebellion is at its peak during his mutiny, Silver’s abilities become the ultimate form of rebellion against the Victorian stereotype of disability and the moral exchange. Shortly after killing the crew member Alan, Silver has an altercation with the honest crew member Tom, who tries to touch Silver and reason with him. Jim describes the scene: “‘Hands off!’ cried Silver, leaping back a yard, as it seemed to me, with the speed and security of a trained gymnast” (76). This description seemingly eliminates any impediment caused by disability. Silver then dominates Tom with the crutch by paralyzing him, and he consolidates his power by brutally murdering Tom with a knife. Thus the disability that secured Silver’s subservient position on the ship also acts as a gateway to physical domination. Because he could not show physical domination on the island without his sea cook position, Silver’s manipulation of the condescension scene allows him to take power and create conflict by eliminating anyone who turns against him.

While this physical domination seems to leave Silver with the power, Captain Smollett reduces Silver’s physical power and his attempt to manipulate the moral exchange by refusing him any aid when Silver comes to demand an equal sharing of the treasure. For example, when Silver first goes to meet Smollett, no one will help him up the hill. Jim comments, “Silver had terrible hard work getting up the knoll. What with the steepness of the incline, the thick tree stumps, and the soft sand, he and his crutch were as helpless as a ship in stays” (105). This struggle challenges Silver’s attempt to manipulate the moral exchange because he still needs charity, because of his disability, from those who only offer charity in exchange for a moral return. Yet Jim further asserts, “But he stuck to it like a man in silence, and at last arrived before the captain”
Despite his struggles, Silver overcomes his disability to eventually meet with Smollett, but his power is diminished by the juxtaposition of his crippled body with Smollett’s able body. In this scene, Smollett drives the conflict by reducing Silver’s power, exposing his weakened physical state, and punishing him for refusing to offer a moral return.

When Silver finally arrives, Smollett is condescending toward him to assert his authority, but his condescension is no longer masked with charity since Silver has denied the moral exchange. This condescension creates conflict between Silver and Smollett because they both seek an advantage by stubbornly demanding things and refusing to accede to the other party. When Silver asks to go inside, Smollett replies, “Why, Silver . . . if you had pleased to be an honest man, you might have been sitting in your galley. It’s your own doing. You’re either my ship’s cook—and then you were treated handsome—or Cap’n Silver, a common mutineer and pirate, and then you can go hang!” (105-06). Here Smollett expects what Siegel describes as a reciprocal relationship: “Philanthropists argued that any help they offered, spiritual or temporal, could have value only in the context of a personal, reciprocal relationship between themselves and those in need” (19). When Silver denies the reciprocal relationship by creating mutiny, Smollett does not provide Silver with any other options to progress. This lack of options leaves Silver in a dichotomous state: either he can work in the subservient position of sea cook or he can rebel, in which case he will be denied aid and comfort. Through this dichotomous separation, Smollett hopes to control Silver and elicit moral behavior from him or to let him die—either situation leaves Smollett with the upper hand. Yet Silver will not accept this, and the meeting creates further separation and conflict between the two parties.

After the meeting no one helps Silver out of the stockade, which further escalates the conflict among Silver and the honest crew because it angers Silver and educes his threats. Silver becomes a spectacle of disability as “he crawl[s] along the sand till he g[ets] hold of the porch and c[an] hoist himself again upon his crutch” (108). Silver then curses at the honest team and tells them to laugh while they can before he kills them. Then finally, Jim explains, with “a dreadful oath, [Silver] stumbled off, ploughed down the sand, and was helped across the stockade, after four or five failures, by the man with the flag of truce” (108). This scene is particularly poignant because Silver is at his weakest moment here and will not make it across the stockade without help, unlike his first attempt to climb the hill where he manages by himself. However, only the man of truce offers to help him. Despite Silver’s earlier attempts to master other men with
physical domination, the lack of charity for his disabled state thrusts him back into the power of those who will only help him when they receive a moral return and can exert dominion. Silver, angry at this attempt to control him, works even harder to outwit the honest crew and find the treasure first.

One of Silver’s next plans to outwit the honest crew is to secure Jim’s loyalty for his protection in case Silver’s plans fail, because he knows the gentlemen will honor Jim’s loyalty according to their moral code, which will in turn save Silver. For example, when Silver fears that his side is going to lose and that his life is in jeopardy, he tells Jim, “They’re going to throw me off. But, you mark, I stand by you through thick and thin. . . . I see you was the right sort. I says to myself: You stand by Hawkins, John, and Hawkins’ll stand by you” (154). In this critical moment, Silver uses rhetoric to instill honesty into Jim in order to ensure Silver’s safety. Silver makes Jim promise that he will not escape: “Hawkins, will you give me your word of honour as a young gentleman . . . not to slip your cable?” (163). He not only establishes a trustworthy relationship with Jim, he also calls him a gentleman, encouraging him to adopt the moral codes that the gentlemen espouse. This promise will benefit Silver later and will allow him to continually gain power over his situation. Silver also reminds Jim to tell the doctor about how Silver saved Jim’s life. His manipulation of Jim is successful, because when the doctor attempts to get Jim to run away with him, Jim refuses, stating, “Silver trusted me; I passed my word, and back I go” (165). Through Jim, Silver secures himself against the wrath of the gentlemen—at least while they are still out at sea.

This loyalty is important for Silver to use as leverage for his survival because he fails to secure the treasure. However, Jim’s loyalty will only prove useful if Silver obtains a place on the boat with the other gentlemen, where he can continue to manipulate the moral exchange, until he can escape with some treasure. To secure this position, when Silver’s plans fail, he quickly abandons the other pirates and relentlessly follows Jim and Dr. Livesey when the doctor comes to save Jim. Jim states, “The work that man went through, leaping on his crutch till the muscles of his chest were fit to burst, was work no sound man ever equaled; and so thinks the doctor” (179). Silver’s extreme perseverance allows him to get on the boat with the survivors, where he goes back to being his hard-working, genial self. Jim observes, “Silver, though he was almost killed already with fatigue, was set to an oar, like the rest of us, and we were soon skimming swiftly over a smooth sea” (181). To ensure his prolonged survival, Silver immediately goes back to work, providing the required moral return.
Silver’s tactics work for his survival, because once his amoral, mutinous nature has been revealed, the gentlemen relinquish their charitable feelings toward Silver and only keep him alive because they value Jim’s loyalty. Silver recognizes this, stating, “It were fortunate for me that I had Hawkins here. You would have let old John be cut to bits, and never given it a thought, doctor,” to which Dr. Livesey cheerily replies, “Not a thought” (181). Livesey, who once pitied Silver for his disability, no longer cares about Silver’s fate and happily imagines his death. Here the doctor uses death as a means to gain power over those who do not exert morality. While it is difficult to empathize with Silver after his rebellion, it is interesting that the doctor can so readily change his concern for the well-being of the maimed pirate. Yet Silver still manipulates the situation by acquiescing to the gentlemen’s required moral behavior through his hard work and feigned humility until he is able to escape with a bag of coins. By playing by the rules of the gentlemen’s moral exchange, he dupes the other men once again and ultimately comes out with part of the treasure and an escape from the gallows.

Since both Silver and the gentlemen use Silver’s disability to gain advantage through a charitable exchange, neither party succeeds in gaining full power over the other. The gentlemen try to secure power through the paradigm of charity for the disabled, which automatically places benefactors in a superior position. As a result, the disabled receiver becomes a spectacle expected to offer a moral return. Hayward critiques this construct, arguing that “unfortunately, the disabled male was assigned no intrinsic value in and of himself in this economy and, consequently, remained a mere object, an extreme example of a manhood available for middle-class scrutiny” (67). In Treasure Island, Silver is scrutinized according to his moral performance, but because of his disability he is not given the opportunity to advance. The mere presence of his disability makes Silver an object of charity, and the only way that he can ever come out of his pitiable state is to manipulate charity itself.

However, the existence of a moral exchange within society prevents Silver from ever attaining his desired power and status in the world in which he lives, which is why he is only able to try for power on Treasure Island. Jim himself suggests that Silver could never actually have power on the mainland. Commenting on Silver’s fate, Jim says, “I daresay he met his old negress, and perhaps still lives in comfort with her and Captain Flint. It is to be hoped so, I suppose, for his chances of comfort in another world are very small” (187). Of course, Silver’s small chance of comfort in another world has much to do with
the crimes he commits at sea. However, it is also likely that Silver could not exist in Jim and the gentlemen's world because he wants to have leadership, power, and a prominent position, which he would have been denied had he stayed in his occupation of pub master with no pension. The gentlemen's treatment of Silver's disability and their manipulation of Silver for hard work and no promise of advancement drive conflict with Silver, who is motivated to be more than a simple sea cook. In the context of Treasure Island—a far off, mysterious world—the gentlemen cannot control Silver through the societal expectation of moral gain. However, Silver cannot manipulate the moral exchange once he comes back to England, so neither party ever succeeds in gaining full power.

Through this careful examination of both the real world and the world of Treasure Island, the conflict in the novel breaks down the preconceived binaries of selfless charity and weak disability and scrutinizes the effects of a limiting charitable exchange. The novel suggests that charity itself is an act of selfishness, with the givers always hoping to gain something for themselves. In the Victorian England in which Silver lived, the receivers of charity were often placed in subservient positions with no means for mobility because they were defined by their disabilities. Yet Long John Silver had the potential to be as successful as the gentility. Silver's crippling came about from other people's charity. He was driven to villainy and dealt with his limitations by removing himself from a world with laws so he could make his own rules. While he tried to manipulate the charitable exchange, this manipulation could only be done outside of a world with social constraints against those who were different. Long John Silver compels the reader to analyze the real implications behind charity in order to assess if it aids or cripples the disabled.
Works Cited


