‘Evil Heroes’ in *Black Sails* – A Case Study: How Character Complexity and Nonverbal Actions Invite Positive Viewer Responses

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Date of the Disputation: 26.11.2021

Statement of academic conduct

I hereby certify that the research described in the thesis

‘Evil Heroes’ in *Black Sails* – A Case Study:
How Character Complexity and Nonverbal Actions Invite Positive Viewer Responses

has not already been submitted for any other degree. I certify that to the best of my knowledge all sources used and any help received in the preparation of this thesis have been acknowledged.

Hamburg, 29th June 2021,

Eidesstattliche Versicherung

Hiermit erkläre ich, dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit

‘Evil Heroes’ in *Black Sails* – A Case Study:
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Hamburg, 29. Juni 2021,

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Abstract

Using the serial *Black Sails*, this thesis examines how character complexity and nonverbal actions invite positive viewer responses towards its 'evil heroes'.

I define these characters as 'morally questionable', because they harm, hurt, kill, and/or act greedily. I investigate why, audiences tend to respond well to these protagonists despite their questionable behaviour that violates cultural norms, laws, and ethics.

To widen the current focus on character engagement in existing research, I carry out a case study using the protagonists John Silver and James Flint from the serial *Black Sails* (2014–2017).[1] Employing a close reading method applied to motion pictures, I analyse selected scenes from *Black Sails*, focusing on two questions. First, can the character James Flint be integrated into literary history as a successor of Milton's Satan from *Paradise Lost* (1667) and Byron's Conrad from *The Corsair* (1814)? Second, can positive nonverbal cues carried out by the actors while portraying the characters invite positive responses despite the characters' morally questionable behaviour?

I use an interdisciplinary approach to integrate literature from relevant research fields such as cognitive media theory, literary and film theory, and, where applicable, from neuroscience, communication studies, psychology, and sociology.

I investigate the subtle influences lying beneath the narrative's plot that can affect the audience's assessment of these characters arguing that nonverbal cues and character complexity can influence the audience subliminally. Selected examples illustrate how creating complex characters tends to support a positive viewer reaction by making the character relatable and 'real'.

The two strands of my research thus proposes to make two main contributions to the field of character engagement. Firstly, it shows that current evil heroes are embedded in literary history, as Flint aligns with Byron's Corsair and even stronger with Milton's Satan. Secondly, my thesis demonstrates the importance of character complexity, establishes that complexity can be conveyed with various methods, and examines the importance of nonverbal actions in creating complex characters to whom the audience responds well.

[1] Robert Levine and Jonathan E. Steinberg, *Black Sails*, STARZ, 2014-7, (Lionsgate, STARZ: Santa Monica, Original DVD, 2017), complete 4-disc set.

Abstract in German

Anhand der Fernsehserie *Black Sails* untersucht die vorliegende Dissertation, wie Komplexität und nonverbalen Handlungen positive Zuschauerreaktionen zu moralisch fragwürdig agierenden Charakteren hervorrufen können. Wenn ich den Ausdruck ‘moralisch fragwürdig‘ verwende, beziehe ich mich auf Charaktere, die andere verletzen, töten und/oder selbstbereichernd handeln, meist um persönlich von solchen Handlungen zu profitieren. Derartiges Verhalten verstößt gegen kulturelle Normen, Gesetze und ethische Grundsätze. Die Normen, gegen die verstoßen wird, sind weitgehend allgemeingültig, auch wenn die Erzählung in der Vergangenheit angesiedelt ist, da „nicht töten“, „nicht lügen“, „nicht stehlen“ in den meisten Gesellschaften und Zeiten gängige Normen sind. Trotz des fragwürdigen Verhaltens reagiert das Publikum gut auf die besagten Protagonisten. Um solche Figuren scharf abzugrenzen, führe ich den Deskriptor ‚evil hero‘ für derartige Charaktere ein.

Um den Fokus im Bereich Character Engagement zu erweitern, bediene ich mich einer Fallstudie mit Fokus auf die Protagonisten John Silver und James Flint aus der Serie *Black Sails* (2014-2017). Unter Anwendung einer Close-Reading-Methode, die auf Spielfilme angewandt wird, analysiere ich ausgewählte Szenen aus *Black Sails* und konzentriere mich dabei auf zwei Fragen. Erstens, lässt sich die Figur James Flint als Nachfolger von Miltons Satan aus *Paradise Lost* (1667) und Byrons Conrad aus *The Corsair* (1814) in die Literaturgeschichte einordnen? Zweitens: Können positive nonverbale Signale, ausgeführt von den Schauspielern während der Darstellung der Figuren, trotz des moralisch fragwürdigen Verhaltens der Protagonisten positive Reaktionen hervorrufen?

Ich verwende einen interdisziplinären Ansatz, um Literatur aus relevanten Forschungsfeldern wie der kognitiven Medientheorie, der Literatur- und Filmtheorie und, wo relevant, aus den Neurowissenschaften, der Kommunikationswissenschaft, der Psychologie und der Soziologie zu integrieren.

Ich untersuche die subtilen Einflüsse, die unter der erzählten Handlung liegen und die Bewertung der Charaktere durch das Publikum unbewusst beeinflussen. Nonverbale Handlungen und die Komplexität der Charaktere wirken unterschwellig auf das Publikum ein. Das Erschaffen eines komplexen Charakters durch das Entwickeln von widersprüchlichem Verhalten wie Sensibilität und Grausamkeit unterstützt eine positive Zuschauerreaktion, indem es den Charakter nachvollziehbar und ‚real‘ macht.

Meine Forschung umfasst zwei Hauptbeiträge zum Feld der Charakterbindung. Erstens zeigt sie, dass aktuelle evil heroes mit der Literaturgeschichte in Beziehung gesetzt werden können, da sich Flint mit Byrons Corsair Conrad und noch stärker mit Miltons Satan vergleichen lässt.

Zweitens verdeutlicht meine Arbeit die Bedeutung von Charakterkomplexität, stellt fest, dass Komplexität mit verschiedenen Methoden vermittelt werden kann, und untersucht die Bedeutung von nonverbalen Handlungen bei der Schaffung komplexer Charaktere, auf die das Publikum positiv reagiert.

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“Everyone is a monster to someone.
Since you are so convinced that I am yours.
I will be it.”
(*Black Sails*, XVIII, James Flint)

1 Introduction

Using a close reading of the characters James Flint and John Silver from the television serial *Black Sails* (2014–2017) as a case study, my thesis aims to contribute to the research on character engagement through exploring character complexity in a twofold approach, asking how the characters can be integrated into literary history and how their nonverbal actions may enhance a positive response to a character. For both research questions, I provide a sample analysis. The thesis, therefore, focuses on the following questions:

First: Does the character of James Flint show similarities with literary predecessors? The comparative focus in this thesis is on Milton's Satan from *Paradise Lost* (1667), and on the Byronic hero character type, using the example of Byron's Conrad from *The Corsair* (1814).

Second: Can bodily cues of the *Black Sails* characters James Flint and John Silver invite positive viewer responses? How do these nonverbal cues contribute to character complexity?

The first research strand explores the historical background of current evil hero characters, while the second research question focuses directly on the current quality television serial *Black Sails.* For a precise naming of such character types, I introduce the notion of 'evil hero' as an update to the commonly used 'antihero', providing further details in chapter 4.

My thesis provides a close reading of selected scenes from *Black Sails* and is informed by an interdisciplinary approach using a framework informed by the key factors of related research areas of literature studies, cognitive media theory, literary, film and movie analyses. I supplement this analytical research with findings on nonverbal communication and the human response from the fields of neuroscience, communication studies, psychology, and sociology. Even though close reading was originally used for literary fiction, this method can also be applied to motion pictures as it generally focuses on a deep and critical understanding of a particular work.[1] In the following, I give an introduction outlining the aims and scopes of the thesis, provide further explanation about my approach towards historical contextualisation and analysis of nonverbal cues, and justify the choice of *Black Sails* as a case study.

This thesis aims to widen the scope of existing studies of evil characters by exploring new aspects of character engagement. The historical contextualisation and influence of evil heroes' nonverbal cues lead the investigation. Although the evil hero character types in current television serials are a relatively new phenomenon, they are contextualised by other evil characters in literary and film history. Examining how the characters can be integrated into literary tradition allows me to show the evil heroes' complexity as they are based on complex

[1] Annette Federico, *Engagements with Close Reading* (London: Routledge, 2015), 9.

literary characters such as the examples I selected for my representative study: Milton's Satan and the Byronic hero. I further add to this multifaceted reading of evil heroes by focusing on a detailed analysis of nonverbal actions, asking questions such as:

1) Can warm and open nonverbal actions enhance positive viewer responses?
2) Can the characters' positive nonverbal actions even out their morally questionable behaviour?
3) Can contradictive nonverbal actions foreground the characters' complexity?

The notion of 'morally questionable' here refers to the characters' bad behaviour. The characters harm, hurt, kill, and/or act greedily to benefit personally from such actions. Through their actions, they violate cultural norms, laws, and ethics. The norms violated are generally valid, even if the narrative is based in the past, as 'do not kill', 'do not lie', 'do not steal' are common norms in most societies and times. The answers to my research questions add to the understanding of why characters are responded well to despite such habits.

The major hypothesis when setting out on the case study was that character complexity and nonverbal actions can invite a positive viewer response towards evil heroes. Nonverbal actions and their positive effects contribute to the characters' complexity because they support evening out the characters' morally questionable actions. Moreover, nonverbal cues can foreground the inner contradictions of the characters. A further hypothesis is that viewers react to characters' nonverbal cues in a similar way as they would to real humans; and I assume viewers watch *Black Sails* with the intention of finishing the serial and do not stop watching it at some stage. With these hypotheses in mind, I investigate new aspects of character engagement. Exploring character engagement in motion pictures can benefit from a wide approach. Carl Plantinga even proposes to sum up all "narratives in any of the moving-image media, produced for and viewed on any type of screen: theatrical screens, video and computer monitors, tablets, phones, and countless other screen surfaces" under the notion of "screen stories", which is taken on within this thesis. [2] The descriptor "screen stories" exemplifies the overlapping aspects of different media formats and also the overlaps within the research. Since current television serials, for instance, share used techniques and production effort with cinema but also, as I outline in chapter 6, have characteristics of television series, Carl Plantinga's integrative term appears to be comprehensive and relevant to times. Sabrina Eisele also argues that research on television,

[2] Carl Plantinga, *Screen Stories: Emotion and the Ethics of Engagement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1.

cinema, and even literature show substantial overlapping when it comes to character engagement, thus, theories regarding characters can be transferred from literature onto film.[3]

As I show in the literature review, existing studies of character engagement, such as those by Margrethe Bruun Vage and Kathi Gormász, provide answers to how positive reactions toward morally questionable characters are evoked, and tend to focus on the plot and the characters' behaviour. A range of different explanations, provided by, for example, film studies, cognitive media theory, or affective disposition theory (ADT), engage with why audiences respond positively to evil characters. The focus in these discussions has shifted away from moral evaluations. Yet, most of this research focuses solely on the narrative. These approaches and resulting debates are introduced in chapter 2. Further studies show consistency in arguing that traits like charm, being shown as caring or sick are some of the factors that can bring an audiences onto an evil hero's side. The aim of my study is to examine further elements affecting viewers' reactions and therewith show how factors besides what is told in the story can support the audiences' potential liking of evil heroes. Thus, it enables the examination of the influence that visual character features can have on an audience. As discussed in chapter 2, studies on character engagement carried out so far conclude that familiar protagonists, strong backstories, and the presentation of the character in everyday situations hold a large stake in answering the question of why morally questionable-acting characters are responded to well. I interpret television as a medium consisting of several layers, arguing that, comparable to a fabric, different threads, such as acting, camera techniques, light, and sound, need to be woven together to create the finished fabric of a serial.

Evil is present in nearly every fictional story. The villain's function is usually to oppose good, trying to prevent the hero's success.[4] At least, that is how it used to be. Nowadays, current television serials show a strengthened focus on the wicked characters as protagonists.[5] Serials centring around morally questionable-acting heroes, such as *Dexter* (2006–2013), *Breaking Bad* (2008–2013), and *The Blacklist* (since 2013), and movies like *The Joker* (2019), *Maleficent* I & II (2014; 2019), and *Cruella* (2019) illustrate a great interest in bad protagonists. Such characters are deployed as the stories' central heroes and simultaneously are introduced as morally questionable. Sophie Janicke and Arthur Raney observe what seems to be a discrepancy

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3 Sabrina Eisele, *Entgrenzte Figuren des Bösen: Film- und tanzwissenschaftliche Analysen* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2016), 52.

4 Linda Seger, *Creating Unforgettable Characters: A practical guide to character development in films, TV series, advertisements, novels & short stories* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1990), 138.

5 Benjamin Poore, "The Villain-Effect: Distance and Ubiquity in Neo-Victorian Popular Culture," in *Neo-Victorian Villains: Adaptations and Transformations in Popular Culture*, ed. Benjamin Poore, (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2017), 10.

here, stating that "[i]f character liking begins with moral consideration of motivations and behaviours, then it stands to reason that antiheroes are at a distinct disadvantage in their quest to be beloved by audiences."[6] Through their violation of moral norms, these protagonists could, theoretically, repel viewers, yet the evil protagonists are liked. As Jessica Black points out, characters need a positive response if a narrative aims to be profitable.[7] If none of the characters in a serial is liked, viewers are unlikely to continue watching, which reduces a show's success and might lead to a format's cancellation. As the successes of the named shows indicate, they do attract a large number of viewers. The main characters in such shows are, however, not purely bad but rather ambivalent. Yet positive responses towards ambivalent characters are not an entirely new phenomenon because what appears to be a recent trend of leaving behind binaries and not clearly assigning allocations like 'good' or 'evil' has a long tradition, particularly in literature and theatre.[8] For example, characters in Marlowe's and Shakespeare's plays show ambivalence,[9] and Milton's Satan also challenges the set norms of good and evil.[10] Such characters are predecessors for a paradigm shift in the late 18th century. As Benjamin Poore shows, the Victorian age introduced a change in thinking, moving away from merely black- or white-shaped characters to more colourfully drawn characters with ambiguous features and complex inner lives. Although such ambiguous villainous characters originated in the late 18th century, they have increasingly moved back into the centre of literary and medial interest since the late 1990s.[11] Poore points to *The Sopranos* (1999–2007) as one of the first shows with evil hero characters.[12] Sebastian Armbrust additionally mentions Dr House (*House, M.D.* 2004–2012) as an ambivalent protagonist and Dexter (*Dexter* 2006–2013) as a well-liked serial killer.[13] Starring evil characters as heroes started earlier in television than in feature film. On the big movie screen of the cinemas, such heroes are a more recent trend. This historical background frames this thesis's key research questions of how the *Black Sails* character James Flint can be integrated into literary tradition and how nonverbal actions can enhance positive responses to such evil-hero character types.

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6 Sophie H. Janicke and Arthur A. Raney, "Modeling the Antihero Narrative Enjoyment Process," *Psychology of Popular Media Culture* 7, no. 4 (2018): 535.

7 Jessica E. Black *et al*., "Who can Resist a Villain? Morality, Machiavellianism, Imaginative Resistance and Liking for Dark Fictional Characters," *Poetics* 74 (2019): 1.

8 Poore, "The Villain-Effect," 2.

9 Peter-André Alt, *Ästhetik des Bösen* (München: C.H. Beck, 2010), 12.

10 Neil Forsyth, "Satan," in *The Cambridge Companion to Paradise Lost,* ed. Louis Schwartz, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 27.

11 Poore, "The Villain-Effect," 2, 34.

12 Poore, "The Villain-Effect,"10–11.

13 Sebastian Armbrust, "Serielle Perspektiven auf Patienten und Ärzte: Körper, Psyche und Sozialität in *Dr. House*," in *Medialität und Menschenbild,* ed. Jens Eder, Joseph Imrode and Maike S. Reinerth (Berlin/Boston: DeGruyter. 2013), 116.

An interest in the liking of evil characters also exists beyond academia. For example, in a 2019 newspaper article about the new Disney movie *Cruella* for the German newspaper *DIE ZEIT,* journalist Friederike Quander proposes that wicked heroes relieve the audience.[14] The relief, argues Quander, is given because viewers themselves cannot achieve the always-calm, good looking, and charming ideal represented through a good and noble hero. Another attractive trait Quander detects is the wit of the antagonists. Does Quander provide the answer? Does the permission not to be perfect, as well as villains' intelligence and humour, attract viewers to morally questionable characters? Even though Quander offers a starting point for discussing why morally questionable characters are liked, the overall response is more complex. As I show in chapters 8, 9, and 10, a more comprehensive response to this research question can be given based on historical contextualisation and a close reading of selected scenes from *Black Sails*. Character complexity and nonverbal cues affect viewers' reactions and the stance viewers develop towards characters.

My study of two selected characters from *Black Sails* is divided into two parts: historical contextualisation, and the effects of the characters' nonverbal actions. Hence, I explore first how the morally questionable-acting character of James Flint from *Black Sails* can be integrated into literary history as a successor of Milton's Satan and Byron's corsair Conrad. With his Satan in *Paradise Lost*, John Milton presents an ambiguous character who initiates a shift in the assessment of 'good' and 'evil.' Milton's rebellious and vivid Satan is an important landmark in the questioning and shifting of the binaries of good and evil through Satan.[15] Satan is also a character influencing George Gordon Byron in the creation of his own character type, the Byronic hero.[16]

The Byronic hero was created in the early19th century and quickly developed into a well-liked character type which evoked Lord Byron's fame.[17] In today's television serials a positive response in the audience to evil protagonists might be enhanced as such character types like the Byronic hero occur frequently in different types of narratives and therefore are familiar to viewers. Morally questionable-acting main characters refer to a long-standing tradition and well-known and established character types. Such character types spread from the 18th century into modern narratives and, for instance, appear in western, science-fiction, or adventure

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14 Friederike Quander, "Cruella de Vil kommt zurück: Tierschützer aufgepasst: Disney gibt der Pelzfanatikerin eine zweite Chance," *Die Zeit* Online, September 4, 2019, updated September 10, 2019, https://www.zeit.de/2019/37/disney-film-cruella-emma-stone.

15 Mike Edwards, *John Milton: Paradise Lost* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 84.

16 Jerome McGann, "Milton and Byron," in *Byron and Romanticism*, ed. Jerome McGann, James Soderholm, Marilyn Butler and James Chandler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 20.

17 Ghislaine McDayter, *Byronmania and the Birth of Celebrity Culture* (Albany: Suny Press, 2009), 90.

movies,[18] and in quality television serials such as *Black Sails*. For different serials, different literary characters may underline the design of the protagonists. As *Black Sails* focuses on pirates, the Noble Outlaw character type might also come to mind. As I introduce in chapter 7.2.3, however, the character of Flint lacks the Noble Outlaw's nobility. The Noble Outlaw is a character type who is not initially evil, and does not begin his career as a criminal but is a victim of injustice or personal error.[19] Being forced to lead an outlaw life, the Noble Outlaw nonetheless has a strong sense of honour. He rights wrongs, takes from the rich, and gives to the poor, and never kills but in self-defence.[20] The prototype for the Noble Outlaw character is Robin Hood, and pirate stories can take on the Noble Outlaw character type also. A closer look at the *Black Sails* pirates suggests, however, that the characters appear to not resemble Noble Outlaws, as I will argue in chapter 7. Instead, they seem to stand in the tradition of the Byronic hero. Byronic heroes are related to Noble Outlaws and share some of their traces, but Byronic heroes have a "dark soul"[21] and can be arrogant cold, ruthless, unsociable, and emotionless.[22] Such character traits can be found in Milton's Satan too, who is bothered with inner torments and torn between two identities. These characteristics appear to match more strongly with *Black Sails'* James Flint. In chapter 4, both character types are introduced in more detail. Chapter 8 examines if Flint aligns with Satan and Conrad.

Secondly, I explore how the positive and inviting body language of the characters James Flint and John Silver might enhance positive audience responses, and how nonverbal motions are used to foreground character complexity. This strand of my analysis is informed by research that explores the influence of nonverbal cues on how individuals react towards others. For example, Plantinga notes that

> [b]ody language, including the use of facial expression, posture, and gesture, is one of the primary means of communicating emotion both in social reality and in the motion pictures.[23]

Nonverbal influence affects viewer reactions towards fictional beings and is my focus for eliciting viewer responses.

I move the focus away from the level of the plot, paying attention to factors underneath the plot's surface. I consider elements that viewers respond to on a subconscious level, such as

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18 Atara Stein, *The Byronic Hero in Film, Fiction, and Television* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 1.

19 Elisabeth Frenzel, *Motive der Weltliteratur* (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1976), 578.

20 Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, [1969] 2000), 47.

21 Peter L.Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), 3.

22 Stein, *The Byronic Hero in Film, Fiction, and Television*, 2.

23 Carl Plantinga, *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2009), 121–22.

nonverbal actions and character complexity. These factors do influence the audience but in a subliminal way. Threads not yet widely researched are the connection between current serial protagonists and their literary ancestors, how the influence of a literary predecessor might still reverberate in a current character, and if characteristics shared with a character from literary history can influence the audience's reaction. The topic of how nonverbal actions carried out by the actors whilst portraying the characters may affect audience reactions has also not largely been considered in character engagement. When referring to nonverbal actions, body language, bodily cues, or motions, I consider the range of bodily cues summed up under the term of kinesics:

> [t]his code includes messages sent by your body, through gestures, postures, body movement, body lean, and so forth. It also includes messages sent by your face, such as smiles, frowns, grimaces, and pouts.[24]

The comprehensive notion of kinesics includes all relevant actions, nonverbal motions, and research fields for my investigation. Bodily cues can influence human reactions on a subtle level. Therefore, their area of influence lies beneath the surface of the plot. My detailed analysis of specific scenes will show how such subtle elements can induce a morally questionable-acting hero to be liked.

My analysis is based on the assumption that nonverbal actions are an important part of interaction and reaction towards others by influencing people on a subtle level. Human communication consists of a combination of nonverbal and verbal elements that supplement each other. Understanding others' bodily cues is essential for successful communication, thus humans naturally decode others' motions and react to those.[25] This interest is steeped in history. For example, neurology professor Hedda Lausberg points out that body language is a human interest that can be traced back to the ancient Greek.[26] The psychologists Michael Argyle and Peter Trower identify that "[h]uman relationships are established, developed and maintained mainly by non-verbal signals."[27] Researchers agree that 65–70 % of meaning in a message is

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[24] Laura K. Guerrero, Michael L. Hecht, and Joseph A. DeVito, "Perspectives on Defining and Understanding Nonverbal Communication," in *The Nonverbal Communication Reader: Classic and Contemporary Reading*, ed. Laura K. Guerrero and Michael L. Hecht (Long Grove, Illinois: Waverland Press, 2008), 9.

[25] Barbara Flückiger, "Emotion Capture. Wie es einer digitalen Figur gelingt, Emotionen zu wecken," in *Audiovisuelle Emotionen: Emotionsdarstellung und Emotionsvermittlung durch audiovisuelle Medienangebote,* ed. Anne Bartsch, Jens Eder and Kathrin Fahlenbrach (Köln: Herbert von Halem Verlag, 2007), 403.

[26] Hedda Lausberg, "I. An Interdisciplinary Review on Movement Behaviour Research," in *Understanding Body Movement: A Guide to Empirical Research on Nonverbal Behaviour. With an Introduction to the NEUROGES System*, ed. Hedda Lausberg (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2013), 1.

[27] Michael Argyle and Peter Trower, *Person to Person: Ways of Communicating* (London/New York a.o: Harper&Row, 1990), 22.

carried nonverbally,[28] and reading others' nonverbal behaviour is a natural and automatic response. Television as a visual medium uses extensive nonverbal actions displayed by characters to affect its audiences. In my thesis, I therefore move away from the extensive study of the characters' spoken language and plot-related actions, focusing instead on the nonverbal behaviour of the characters in the serial. Cognitive media scholar Carl Plantinga, moreover, notes that viewers do react to a subconscious level to elements of film: "[m]ost of the time, these physical, automatic responses occur beyond conscious control. Viewers flinch when surprised and recoil at the sight of vermin or filth."[29] Plantinga's observation supports the assumption of the influence coming from the factors lying beyond the level of the narrative's plot.

I have chosen the serial *Black Sails* for my case study, which aims to provide new insights into evil characters in TV serials, as *Black Sails* has not yet been investigated as part of an analysis of quality television serials. This is surprising, given its popularity: according to the International Movie Database (IMDb), a total of 89,503 male and female viewers rate *Black Sails* with an average of 8.2 out of a score of 10.[30] An ample relevance of this data is given as the ratings assigned to *Black Sails* by females and males are much alike. *Black Sails* first aired on STARZ, an American cable network, in January 2014 and was quickly released in other countries such as France, the Netherlands, Argentina, Mexico, Portugal, the UK, and Germany.[31]

As *Black Sails* is a television serial, the show can take time to introduce the characters and unfold their traits. As a serial, *Black Sails* belongs to so-called quality television. One of the main criteria to classify quality television is 'serials.' 'Serials' provide a detailed and extended narrative that enables a developing character arc for the protagonists that continues to expand throughout each episode, unlike television 'series' with closed episodes.[32] Thus, serial characters can be introduced thoroughly and become more and more complex over time. The long-running show format can also enhance the influence of the characters' nonverbal actions, as the characters can be shown within several different surroundings, interactions, and mindsets. The label 'quality television' is intended to distinguish serials from 'series', which are produced for 'normal' television. 'Normal' television consists of, for instance, talk and game shows, and

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28 Peter A. Andersen, *Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions* (California/London/Toronto: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1999), 1.

29 Plantinga, *Moving Viewers*, 117.

30 IMDb, "Black Sails. User Ratings." https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2375692/ratings?ref_=tt_ov_rt.

31 IMDb "Black Sails. Release Info." https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2375692/releaseinfo?ref_=tt_dt_dt.

32 Gregory Mohr, *Slow-Burn-Narration: Langsames Erzählen in zeitgenössischen Fortsetzungsserien* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2018), 20.

sitcoms, which are labelled as 'series.'[33] Series such as *Friends* (1994–2004) comprise mostly closed episodes which do not largely influence the next episode, the narrative starts at roughly the same point every week, and the themes discussed are light and often humorous.[34] Thus the series is distinguished from the long-running quality television 'serial' with its ongoing narrative, larger ensemble cast, several storylines, and darker topics.[35] The serial format and its evil main characters are interesting for my investigation because the protagonists can often not be judged as either morally good or bad anymore.[36] The 'quality' in quality television is not to be understood as a label for excellent television production, and the term is controversial.[37] Several scholars, however, use the notion of quality television to state the differences between 'quality' and 'normal' television. A more in-depth discussion about quality TV is provided in chapter 6. The serial *Black Sails* fulfils the criteria of quality television. The serial consists of several main characters, a long-term narrative, darkly shaded topics, and an ongoing narrative. Moreover, *Black Sails* includes morally questionable-acting protagonists.

Black Sails, moreover, widens the focus on character studies because existing studies seldom exceed the unofficial set canon of serials to research, which includes *The Sopranos*, *Breaking Bad*, and *Dexter*.[38] Using *Black Sails* allows an approach largely influenced by previous research findings on this very serial as there has not been much scholarly discussion on the show. Furthermore, *Black Sails* links back directly to literary history as it uses characters from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1881–1882) as main protagonists. Stevenson's buccaneers are mixed with historical figures from real life in constituting the narrative of the serial. The show narrates an imaginary prequel to Stevenson's pirate story and takes two villainous *Treasure Island* characters, John Silver and James Flint, and, while not stripping them of their villainy altogether, develops them into well-liked protagonists rather than retaining their historically established roles as antagonists.

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33 Mohr, *Slow-Burn-Narration,* 21.
34 Mohr, *Slow-Burn-Narration,* 21.
35 Mohr, *Slow-Burn-Narration,* 21.
36 Mohr, *Slow-Burn-Narration,* 8.
37 Birgit Däwes, "Transgressive Television: Preliminary Thoughts," in *Transgressive Television.: Politics and Crime in 21st-Century American TV Series,* ed. Birgit Däwes, Alexandra Ganser and Nicole Poppenhagen (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2015), 23; Jason Mittell, "Lengthy Interactions with Hideous Men: Walter White and the Serial Poetics of Television Anti-Heroes," in *Storytelling in the Media Convergence Age: Exploring Screen Narratives*, ed. Roberta Pearson and Anthony N. Smith (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 75.
38 Jonas Nesselhauf and Markus Schleich, "„Watching Too Much Television" – 21 Überlegungen zum Quality-TV im 21. Jahrhundert," in *Quality-Television: Die narrative Spielweise des 21. Jahrhunderts?* ed. Jonas Nesselhauf and Markus Schleich (Berlin: Lit, 2014), 11.

In this thesis, "character" is defined as a recognisable fictional being in a narrative, shaped by the features of being able to think, act, and have an inner life.[39] Through character engagement, audiences react to characters. Character engagement describes "the viewer's or reader's 'relationship' with characters during the course of a viewing or reading."[40] How a viewer reacts to a character is entailed in character engagement; such reactions can be either positive, negative, or, as Plantinga and Sabrina Eisele demonstrate, mixed.[41]

When analysing reactions towards characters, my research aligns with the insight provided by, for instance, Jens Eder, Fotis Jannidis, and Ralf Schneider that "we resort to knowledge about real people when we try to understand characters"[42] and that viewers react to characters – to a degree – as they would to persons.[43] This claim is a cornerstone for my investigation as it allows me to transfer theories and findings from relevant areas regarding nonverbal actions onto screen stories. Eder's insight that viewers react – to a degree – in similar ways to characters and humans matches with cognitive media theory that watching a film can be compared to experiences in everyday life.[44] Motion pictures create what Plantinga calls a "twofoldness", a dual response in which characters are simultaneously experienced as 'real' and as fictional beings.[45] Theatre expert Bruce McConachie introduces the term "doubleness",[46] which refers to a process in which the audience blends actors and characters together into one image. McConachie's observation aligns with Plantinga's "twofoldness" and thus, although being aware of seeing fiction, viewers' reactions can be compared to encounters in real life. I am aware that the notion of "twofoldness" was introduced by Richard Wollheim and that Ted Nannicelli delivers a discussion as to whether the notion is the best one to use. Nannicelli argues that a vivid star actor's persona can move the character to the background and restrict "twofoldness."[47] When I use the term "twofoldness', I do so in the sense that Plantinga uses, stating that audiences are aware of the characters' fictionality and yet react to the characters simultaneously as if they were 'real.' Arguing from this basis allowed me to transfer findings

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39 Jens Eder, Fotis Jannidis and Ralf Schneider, "Characters in Fictional Worlds. An Introduction," in *Characters in Fictional Worlds: Understanding Imaginary Beings in Literature, Film, and Other Media*, ed. Jens Eder, Fotis Jannidis and Ralf Schneider (Berlin/New York: DeGruyter, 2010), 10.

40 Plantinga, *Screen Stories*, 195.

41 Plantinga, *Screen Stories*, 203; Eisele, *Entgrenzte Figuren des Bösen*, 12.

42 Eder, Jannidis, and Schneider,"Characters in Fictional Worlds," 7.

43 Jens Eder, *Die Figur im Fil*m: Grundlagen der Figurenanalyse (Marburg: Schüren, 2008), 36.

44 Amy Coplan, "Empathy and Character Engagement," in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*, ed. Paisley Livingston and Carl Plantinga (London: Routledge, 2008), 97.

45 Plantinga, *Screen Stories*, 31.

46 Bruce McConachie, *Engaging Audiences - A Cognitive Approach to Spectating in the Theatre*, (New York/Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008) 42.

47 Ted Nannicelli. "Stars, Twofoldness, and the Imagination," In *Screening Characters. Theories of Character in Film, Television, and Interactive Media*, ed Johannes Riis and Aaron Taylor (New York/London: Routledge), 26.

on nonverbal communication and its impact onto motion pictures. The concept of a similarity in responses towards characters and persons is further elaborated in chapter 5.

In my focus on nonverbal actions and their influences, I am aware that reactions towards others and others' behaviour are subjective and slight differences in reactions to nonverbal behaviour can occur. As the scope of the thesis is limited, I base my argumentation on the research findings of experts in nonverbal behaviour who point to general tendencies in responses. For example, researchers largely agree on the positive effects of warmth and welcome that nonverbal communications, such as smiling, open gestures, or eyebrow flashes have.[48] I use their results as a basis to develop an argument for why spectators are likely to respond to nonverbal actions in a certain way, and why and how bodily cues support characters' likeability. The main focus of my analysis is on nonverbal actions. However, the plot cannot be completely excluded since the plot and nonverbal actions influence and complement each other, and their interplay creates the complete screen story. Thus, I integrate facts from the plot line, for example, the characters' relationship with other characters, and how their interaction with likable characters might influence the perception of evil heroes, and what effect the backstories might have.

In my investigation, I assume a viewer type who might watch *Black Sails* when it first aired in 2014. I assume a viewer representing the average person who watches *Black Sails* in their free time and for entertainment without any intention to actively analyse in detail what they see. Plantinga refers to this viewer type as "typical."[49] Mindful that slight differences in reactions towards bodily cues can appear, I presume an audience that is influenced by western culture, such as films, television, games, music, and books. Most researchers agree that the interpretation of nonverbal actions in western countries is largely similar.[50] Moreover, *Black Sails* has primarily been released in western, or western-influenced countries. Assuming an audience influenced by western culture for the serial studied here promises a fruitful outcome, for two specific reasons. First, most of the research on nonverbal communication accessible in Australia and Germany continues to be carried out by western scientists, focusing on western cultures in their studies. Research informed by a different gaze remains a desideratum. Hence, I do not address viewer reactions from different cultures but explore potential responses based on existing findings in the research of nonverbal actions. These findings explain why it is likely that a reaction will occur in a certain way to a nonverbal action. I also take the perspective of

48 Andersen, *Nonverbal Communication*, 273.

49 Carl Plantinga, "Spectatorship," in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*, eds. Paisley Livingston and Carl Plantinga (London: Routledge, 2008), 250.

50 Keir Elam. *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, [1980] 2002), 59.

gender-neutrality in my analysis arguing that *Black Sails* is not tailored to suit a particular gender group. The IMDb ratings of the serial are 8.2 points from males and 8.1 points from females. The number of males rating the serial is 57,596, nearly 47,000 higher than the number of females rating the show.[51] However, this shows that more males rate the serial and does not necessarily also mean that more males watched the serial. Even if males are in the majority of *Black Sails* viewers, tying this fact back to gender appears difficult as *Black Sails* was apparently liked by both genders, giving the nearly equal rating points. Females who watched *Black Sails* appear to react to it the same way males did, as far as overall positive responses to the serial are concerned, as the ratings indicate.

Moreover, already in 1996 Ien Ang notes that gender is not necessarily a reliable indicator of viewing behaviour.[52] Since then, gender roles have become even more fluid and the habits and ways of watching television have changed. So have the ways in which women are represented on screen. For example, soap operas, which

> do not simply reflect already existing stereotypical images of women, but actively produce a symbolic form of feminine identity by inscribing a specific subject position—that of the 'ideal mother'—in its textual fabric[53]

have largely been replaced by shows and serials with more complex characters.[54] Visual media expert Jens Thiele points out that in the early 21st century gender roles and how they are presented within screen stories are changing. Gender presentation, according to Thiele, starts moving away from clichés and characters are not necessarily living up to designated gender roles and binaries. Yet, even with not fulfilling stereotyped gender roles, such characters are not automatically presented as outsiders but are well integrated into life and society.[55] In *Black Sails*, female characters such as Eleanor Guthrie and Anne Bonny appear to align with Thiele's observation. Neither fulfil gender clichés (especially considering that the serial's present time is the 18th century). Anne Bonny is a notorious pirate and Eleanor Guthrie – at least for the first half of the narrative – is a tough businesswoman ruling over a city of pirates. In 'civilised' English society, both would likely be outsiders or even criminals, but the serial presents them as integrated in Nassau's pirate society.

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51 IMDb, "Black Sails. User Ratings." https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2375692/ratings?ref_=tt_ov_rt.

52 Ien Ang, *Living Room Wars. Rethinking Media Audiences for a Postmodern World* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 93.

53 Ang, *Living Room Wars*, 95.

54 Tina Grawe, *Neue Erzählstrategien in US-amerikanischen Fernsehserien: Von der Prime-Time-Soap zum Quality TV* (München: Akademische Verlagsgemeinschaft München, 2010), 7.

55 Jens Thiele, "I will Dance – I will Fight. Geschlechtsidentität und Körper im aktuellen Mainstream-Kino," in *Wo/Man. Kino und Identität*, eds. Cristine Rüffert, Irmbert Schenk, Karl-Heinz Schmid and Alfred Tews (Bertz, Berlin, 2002, 81.

Since *Black Sails* does not largely include gender clichés and research on nonverbal signs and reactions to them indicates that open and warm nonverbal actions are a 'universal' code to communicate friendliness, I take on a gender-neutral perspective in my case study. Ang states that

> gender-neutral identifications should emphatically be kept in mind in our search for understanding the variability and diversity of media consumption practices, both among and within women and men.[56]

Ang emphasises that how people react to a screen story is not primarily influenced by their gender.

Even with an audience that is assumed to be largely homogenous, what is classified as 'evil' can vary. Evil is a human-defined concept used to label unapproved behaviour and provide and support a framework of social rules. Regulations and definitions of evil can vary from society to society. Nonetheless, basics that condemn killing, robbery, or violence are at the core of most human groups. With investigating characters that clearly violate these given moral norms, however, it appears likely that most viewers would normally classify the behaviour carried out by the evil heroes as morally wrong. The possibility exists that, despite the overall homogeneity of viewer responses, individual viewers do not react positively to evil heroes but instead dislike them. These spectators are excluded from my analysis as it appears likely that viewers with such a reaction "give […] up on the series altogether"[57] because viewers who do not like the main characters are unlikely to continue watching a serial. Thus, my study is carried out on the premise that the viewers who watched *Black Sails* did like at least one of the story's evil heroes. It is this conjecture that underlies my analysis.

Regarding my examination of the historical contextualisation, I focus on selected the examples of Satan and Conrad. Due to limited space and scope within this thesis, I do not carry out a full investigation for all possible literary predecessors. Since Satan and the Byronic hero appear to be two important and well-known character types with whom James Flint shares the complexity and inner torments, I concentrate on these two.

As explained above, my research question results in two strands: the overlaps that James Flint shows with Milton's Satan and Byron's Conrad, and how the characters' nonverbal actions might invite positive viewer reactions. I explore these research questions in eleven chapters. The first seven chapters convey the theoretical background and key terms for the analysis carried out in chapters 8, 9, and 10. The literature review in chapter 2 presents the most relevant

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56 Ang, *Living Room Wars*, 105.

57 Margrethe Bruun Vaage, *The Antihero in American Television* (New York/London: Routledge, 2016), 16.

research literature and outlines how my study relates to significant existing publications. Chapter 3 introduces the methodical approach used in my investigation. Chapter 4 concentrates on evil characters: I differentiate between distinct types of evil characters, introduce and discuss the concept of the 'evil hero'. The last part of chapter 4 frames positive audience responses in terms of 'liking' and 'likable' evil heroes. Chapter 5 focuses on viewers and explains in more depth why viewers respond to fictional characters in a way comparable to their responses towards humans, and why it is important that viewers feel they have something in common with a character. Then I explain the influence of the visual in creating liking and highlight how nonverbal communications come into play in people's reactions towards each other. Chapter 6 establishes *Black Sails* as a quality television serial, summarises the characteristics of quality television, and explores the format with respect to audience engagement. Chapter 7 situates *Black Sails* in connection with literary history where I outline the characteristics and development of Satan and the Byronic hero. Moreover, I introduce the relations between *Black Sails* and *Treasure Island* in literary and film history, discuss the evil character types in both stories, and argue why Flint and Silver are evil heroes. Chapter 8 analyses whether James Flint shares characteristics with Satan and Conrad and how such characteristics may enhance complexity for his character. Chapter 9 is dedicated to a close reading of the characters' positive nonverbal action, with an argument of how these bodily cues can influence the viewers positively. Chapter 10 provides a widening of the investigation, looking at how nonverbal communication can foreground contradictions within the character and their behaviour and thus support character complexity. The study then finishes with chapter 11, giving the conclusion and outlook.

2 Literature Review

After the previous chapter introduced the research question, aim and scope of the thesis, this chapter sets out key literature relating to character engagement, to identify major concepts and key debates that surround my study. In undertaking this literature review, I draw upon transdisciplinary scholarship ranging from media studies, cognitive media theory, and television studies to research nonverbal action such as communication psychology and sociology research. In reviewing the literature, I structure the chapter broadly around the themes of the shift in academic literature towards and interest in characters' inner lives and character complexity. The literature review will address topics such as the development of Byronic heroes, the influence of Milton's Satan, the move away from evaluating morals in audience engagement with characters, the complexity of viewer reactions, and findings on nonverbal behaviours.

Morally questionable characters, often called 'antihero' characters,[1] are trending in current television serials targeting western audiences. Evil heroes – a term that I employ as part of my updated conception of antiheroes – inhabit several narratives, such as *Black Sails*, the serial my analysis focuses on. Evil heroes also appear in television programs such as *Dexter*, *The Sopranos*, *The Blacklist*, and *Breaking Bad*. In investigating evil heroes, two major gaps in the scholarship are evident. First, the analytical focus centres mainly on the plot when exploring why morally questionable-acting protagonists are responded to positively, excluding factors that lie beneath the plot's surface such as nonverbal actions. The plot is vital for narrative but, due to television being an audio-visual medium, other factors, like bodily cues of the actors depicting the characters' and the audiences' reactions to such nonverbal actions, need to be considered too in understanding the whole fabric generating a serial and not just the thread of the plot.[2] Second, the researched main characters have not yet been contextualised in the tradition of literary history, nor have possibilities beyond the plot level to flesh out character complexity been fully explored. Milton's Satan and the Byronic hero appear to be the most plausible ancestors of the ambiguous evil heroes in contemporary television serials.[3] Several relevant discussions on the topics are mentioned above, such as character engagement, evil characters in fiction, the perception of Satan, the influence of the Byronic hero, quality

1 Bruun Vaage, *The Antihero in American Television*, 16.

2 Factors like light, sound, camera setting, or atmosphere should also be considered. However, there is not enough room here to provide a full investigation of every thread beneath the plot, thus the focus is set on nonverbal actions.

3 For a thorough classification, several characters from different serials would need to be compared with character types in literary history. Again, this thesis cannot provide a full investigation; it has to single out one character type to examine and can only serve as thinking impulse an impetus for following studies.

television, and body language. In this literature review, I focus on the most influential subjects, and those most relevant for my thesis. More background and theory is provided within the different chapters and subsections of this thesis.

The presentation of evil throughout fiction, such as literature, movies, and television, shows significant overlap. The reactions evoked are analogous: emotional responses are triggered, audiences engage with characters or disconnect from them, and characters are catalysts for the story's unfolding. Thus, theories regarding (evil) characters can be transferred from one medium to another. Evil protagonists increasingly appear in current television serials and feature films. Despite having characters who seem unsuitable to be a story's protagonist, or liked; viewers respond well to them, as proven by the serials' success. An often-used example of such a character is Hannibal Lecter (the character played by Anthony Hopkins, *The Silence of The Lambs,* 1991). Despite his cannibalistic habits and cruel crimes, Hannibal attracts the viewers.[4]

The fascination for evil characters, however, is not new. In *Ästhetik des Bösen* (2010) Peter André Alt investigates presentations of evil from biblical times until the 20th century. Alt's focus is evil and its connection with, and violation of, morals. In selected examples, largely from German literature, Alt explores the connection of imagination and fiction and discusses how literary ideas of evil may be conveyed. Evil relates to moral boundaries and its interaction with these. Literature, Alt argues, discusses, differentiates, and shapes evil and its presentation. Alt notes that ambivalent evil characters already exist in Marlowe, Shakespeare, Racine, and Lohenstein.[5] Increasing interest for ambivalent evil, however, flourishes in the late 18th century. Evil now is not necessarily detached anymore from being handsome or attractive.[6] The inner life of evil characters comes into focus, and why protagonists act evil and what drives them are questions discussed in the works of poets and writers.[7] Character complexity moves more to the centre of narratives and tales. Characters act morally wrongly because they are forced to do so and not, as more traditional villains do, by choice. Friedrich Schiller's play *Die Räuber* (1781) and its protagonist Karl Moor, who guiltlessly is forced to lead a life as outcast and robber, is an example of such a character. Karl Moor is contrasted by his brother Franz, who Alt names a "majestic monster" and whosehis ambition makes evil.[8] Thus, Schiller's

4 Murray Smith, "Gangsters, Cannibals, Aesthetes, or Apparently Perverse Allegiances," in *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition and Emotion,* eds. Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith (Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 225–226.
5 Alt, *Ästhetik des Bösen,* 12.
6 Alt, *Ästhetik des Bösen,* 16.
7 Alt, *Ästhetik des Bösen,* 13.
8 Alt, *Ästhetik des Bösen,* 186–8.

drama demonstrates both Karl, a character forced to act evil, and Franz a character that is evil and shows no pardonable reasons for his actions; Franz, therefore, is a challenge to the aesthetics of evil. It is, however, characters like Karl Moor in which audiences and writers appear to be interested and it is such characters' audiences respond positively to. Authors dwelling on characters' intrinsic motivations, circumstances, and being softer in judging characters pave the way for more ambivalent characters. In Schiller's *Verbrecher aus Infamie* (1786), the short criminal report follows Christian Wolf as he, again guiltlessly, is forced to violate the law and common morals. Heinrich von Kleist's *Michael Kohlhaas* (1808) focuses on the seeking revenge of the grim horse merchant Kohlhaas who loses sight of moral values in doing so. But, instead of solely judging Kohlhaas, the novella explores the reasons for his actions, thereby allowing character complexity to shine through. Alt points to a paradigm shift in character assessment, altering the focus away from judging protagonists towards exploring their intrinsic motivations and inner life.

In his chapter "The Villain-Effect: Distance and Ubiquity in Neo-Victorian Popular Culture", Benjamin Poore examines this paradigm shift in more detail by focusing on audiences' reactions towards 'evil'. He explains that the villains in the Victorian era were presented in various ways and that

> it would be an error to presume that Victorian popular entertainment created a black-and-white conflict between hero and villain that the twentieth and twenty-first century then reinterpreted, finding interesting 'shades of grey' in the anti-hero and the sympathetic villain that the Victorians simply hadn't recognised.[9]

He argues that the Victorian ideas of villains and villainy and the associated changed attitude towards villains still cast a shadow today.[10] Like Alt, Poore argues that the Victorian characters have ancestors reaching back into the 16th century or even earlier. However, while these earlier iterations of villains were judged in the binary terms of what is 'good' and what is 'evil', in the Victorian age this clear division gave way to more blurry assessments of character behaviour.[11] Poore discusses how villains have developed over time and observes a contemporary fascination with villains.[12]

One result of villains being allocated a greater presence in contemporary media productions is that characters are presented with "character individuality, to uniqueness, rather than working with archetypes."[13] This complexity now given to villainous characters further blurs any

9 Poore, "The Villain-Effect," 2.
10 Poore, "The Villain-Effect," 2.
11 Poore, "The Villain-Effect," 2.
12 Poore, "The Villain-Effect," 11.
13 Poore, "The Villain-Effect," 34.

binaries. As a result, the villains in contemporary productions often no longer function in opposition to a hero; instead, they become the narrative's main characters themselves. In screen stories aimed at adults, these central characters tend to be dark, tormented, and acting morally inappropriately or immorally.[14] Here a connection to literary predecessors like Satan and the Byronic hero character type already becomes discernible. As Poore and Alt emphasise, protagonists who act morally questionably and were yet responded well to by the audience are established by the late 18th century. However, the introduction to such ambiguous protagonists starts earlier and is strongly connected with John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) and the figure of Satan within that epic poem. *Paradise Lost* represents an important landmark in shifting the assessment 'evil' and eventually the binaries of good and evil through Satan. Satan is drawn by Milton as a rebellious and vivid character.[15] Milton equips his apostate with qualities such as charisma, eloquence, and also a certain level of complexity. Thus Milton's Satan introduces the change in the representation of devils as well as in the judgement of good and evil.

In *Hierarchie der Teufel* Isabel Grübel examines the view and development of the devil's figure in Christianity and the allegorisation of evil in theology. Grübel argues that in the Middle Ages the devil's figure was simply used to antagonise human or Christian ideas. From the high Middle Ages, the interest in the terrifying devil increased. However, the devil's figure changed. The devil became a figure with deconstructive powers, ideal for revolutions. Such a view, argues Grübel, happens in the succession of Milton's Satan. Comparable to the ambiguous 'evil' protagonists in romanticism, since Milton and Klopstock, an interest in the devil's state of mind arises and the devil was now given more complex character traits that could evoke sympathy or admiration.[16]

A humanistic view of the Satan from *Paradise Lost* is often taken on by other scholars. Since several researchers refer to Milton's *Paradise Lost* and his Satan as an influential and ambiguous character, several discussions of the whole poem and with a special focus on its devil do exist. Literature scholar Bernard J. Paris, for instance, introduces in *Heaven and its Discontents. Milton's Characters in Paradise Lost* a rather critical view of God and Heaven in the poem. In his book, Paris addresses the questions of what might be driving the characters to their actions, and how and why things do happen the way they do in the poem. Paris takes a

14 Poore, "The Villain-Effect," 11.
15 Edwards, *John Milton: Paradise Lost*, 84.
16 Isabel Grübel, *Die Hierarchie der Teufel. Studien zum christlichen Teufelsbild und zur Allegorisierung des Bösen in Theologie, Literatur und Kunst zwischen Frühmittelalter und Gegenreformation* (München: tuduv Verlag, 1991), 12, 90, 101.

critical position towards God, foregrounding the flaws of God as vindictive, narcissistic, and unloving.[17]

A view of *Paradise Lost* offering the possibility to see Satan as the hero or the tragic hero is, for example, shared by scholars like Neil Forsyth, David Hopkins, and Nancy Rosenfeld.[18] Scholars analysing *Paradise Lost* and its Satan agree that Milton's devil is an important character within literary tradition as he influenced the development of several other characters and leads the way for a more complex 'evil' with its own sorrows and (inner) conflicts. Alt states that sublime characteristic in Satan achieve an ambivalent effect and that rhetorical methods and used to nobilise the character of Satan *in Paradise Lost*.[19] Literature expert Jerome McGann notes that the basis of such a humanistic reading of *Paradise Lost* and seeing Satan as the poem's hero was laid by the 18th century critics, "who had done so much to establish the ground for the romantic idea that Satan was the hero of *Paradise Lost*."[20] In *Imaginationen des Bösen,* Karl-Heinz Bohrer notes that with Milton's Satan a re-evaluation of the devils occurred, from the great romantic criminal to the affirmative depiction of criminal acts and perversions. Bohrer also makes aware that the label 'evil' always refers to a particular literary school into which it can be classified.[21] Scholars accordingly point out the influence Milton's Satan gains especially through his ambiguousness and the different possibilities to judge him. With his Satan, Milton paves the way for 'evil' characters to be responded to positively.

A second prominent character type deriving from the basis of Satan and the binary shift in the late 18th century is the Byronic hero. The Byronic hero is a character with dark shades connected to him. He originates from several ancestors, including the Gothic villain, the Noble Outlaw, and Milton's Satan.[22] Peter L. Thorslev's *The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes* (1962) is still an undeniable landmark regarding Byronic heroes, and explores their origins, development, and influence in a carefully arranged layout. He regards the German literary movements *Sturm und Drang* and *Aufklärung* as influential in developing this character type. Thorslev's view aligns with Alt's and Poore's findings of a shift in character design and assessment from the late 18th century, whereby characters become more ambiguous, complex,

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17 Bernard J. Paris, *Heaven and its Discontents. Milton's Characters in Paradise Lost* (New Brunswick/London: Transaction, 2010), 16–21, 53.

18 Forsyth, "Satan," 27.; David Hopkins, *Reading Paradise Lost* (West Sussex: Wiley, 2015); Nancy Rosenfeld, *The Human Satan in Seventeenth-Century English Literature. From Milton to Rochester* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008).

19 Alt, *Ästhetik des Bösen*, 165.

20 Jerome McGann, "Milton and Byron," in *Byron and Romanticism*, eds. Jerome McGann, James Soderholm, Marilyn Butler and James Chandler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 21.

21 Karl Heinz Bohrer, *Imaginationen des Bösen: Für eine ästhetische Kategorie* (München/Wien: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2004), 14.

22 Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero*, 8, 22, 70.

and driven by several influences. In contrast to characters like Karl Moor or Michael Kohlhaas, the Byronic heroes' 'crimes' often remain unclear, and the characters have fewer noble traits. Nonetheless, the movement into an increased interest into the character's inner life, as noted by Alt, paves the way for the "dark soul"[23] of the Byronic hero.

After Thorslev, other research projects on Byronic heroes have been conducted, focusing on different aspects of the Byronic hero. In *Dark Imaginings: Ideology and Darkness in the Poetry of Lord Byron*, literature scholar Geoff Payne explores 'darkness' within Byron's work and how such darkness affects the meaning of Byron's writing.[24] For Byron's Corsair Conrad, Payne, for instance, notes a "dark nature", and that Conrad is "is presented with darkness as the central aspect of his being, and as a hero, he draws his power to act from his fragmentary nature."[25] Payne's observations align with the findings of Thorslev, ascribing a "dark soul" to Byronic heroes. In doing so, Payne also engages with the question of Byron's influence on later authors and works. So do, for example, Sarah Wootton's *Byronic Heroes in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing and Screen Adaptation* (2016), and Ghislaine McDayter's *Byronmania and the Birth of Celebrity Culture* (2009).[26] Both analyse Byronic heroes and their influence. Yet no study is comparable to the status and impact of Thorslev's investigation which, even today, is still the first point of reference in exploring Byronic heroes, as it consists of relevant examples of Byronic hero characters and their ancestors. I provide a more detailed insight into the Byronic hero, his features, and current investigations regarding that character type in chapters 8 and 9, where I take other investigations into account but draw largely on Thorslev. The Byronic hero is one of the character types who are complex and act morally questionably, ranging from villains to liked protagonists.

The establishing of such character types enables television serials today to centre around evil heroes without rebuking viewers, as the concept is often used and thus familiar. Even though characters like Karl Moor or the Byronic hero character type developed in the late 18th century, and from there made their way through literature to the present day, film and television took longer than literature to focus on morally questionable-acting characters as main protagonists. Following the principle of the Hero's Journey,[27] protagonists were for a long time morally good

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23 Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero*, 3.

24 Geoff Payne, *Dark Imaginings: Ideology and Darkness in the Poetry of Lord Byron* (Oxford/Berlin/Wien u.a.: Peter Lang, 2008).

25 Payne, *Dark Imaginings*,185, 187.

26 Sarah Wootton, *Byronic Heroes in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing and Screen Adaptation* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Ghislaine McDayter, *Byronmania and the Birth of Celebrity Culture* (Albany: Suny Press, 2009).

27 Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, 3rd edition (Novato, California: New World Library, [1949] 2008), 3.

and equipped with traditional hero qualities, such as being a role model, acting brave and selfless, and working for a good cause.[28] Current movie heroes such as James Bond, or Ethan Hunt, the protagonist of the *Mission: Impossible* series, face traditional villains who are seldom very complex. Several publications over the last years have established how protagonists themselves became more and more ambiguous, acting in morally questionable ways. Ambiguous character types known from literature find their way into screen stories. Villains move away from being an opponent and into being the main character. Evil heroes are a major trend over the last decade. Since the 1990s, evil heroes inhabit a television genre that research categorises under quality television serials.[29] What constitutes quality television has been the subject of scholarship for over 30 years. Thompson (1996) analyses the quality television genre and establishes 12 rules distinguishing it from 'normal' television. I outline the characteristics of quality television in chapter 6. Even though Thompson's study is over 20 years old, and media keeps evolving, Thompson's 12 rules are still a benchmark for the discussions about quality television. Thompson states "[b]y the 1990s, the 'quality drama' had settled in a small but viable part of the network schedule."[30]

Television shifts away from daily soap programs and an increased featuring of quality television programs can be seen in the 1990s. Jason Mittell argues that serialised television made its way to prime time (8–11 pm)[31] in America already in the mid-1980s.[32] When shows such as *Dallas* (1978–1991) or *Dynasty* (1981–1989) are considered, Mittel and Thompson do not necessarily contradict each other, as such serialised formats were aired in the prime time in the 1980s. They are a hybrid form, leaning towards a quality television serial but still recognised as being in the traditional series format. Yet such shows paved the way for serials. The television show *ER*, starting in 1994, for example, can be rated as a serial. Programs like *Dallas* or *ER*, however, do include ambiguous characters but mostly focus on likable and more traditional hero types. A serial featuring evil heroes in their centre then made its breakthrough with *The Sopranos* in 1999. Thus, current quality television serials and their evil heroes are, as a relatively new genre, still in the focus of interest.

Scholars are using the term 'serial' versus 'series.' 'Serial' as a scholarly notion often, although not consistently, differentiates the quality television serial with its specific features

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28 Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Storytellers and Screenwriters* (London: Boxtree, [1992] 1996), 39.

29 Robert J. Thompson, *Television's Second Golden Age: From Hill Street Blues to ER* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 13.

30 Thompson, *Television's Second Golden Age*, 31.

31 Grawe, *Neue Erzählstrategien in US-amerikanischen Fernsehserien*, 13.

32 Jason Mittell, "Film and Television Narrative," in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 164.

like a slow-burn narration with a slower and more detailed unfolding of the plot, a large ensemble cast, difficult topics, and dark characters, from the series.[33] 'Series' refers to easy-going shows like sitcoms where one episode hardly influences the next one, and lighter daily life problems are at the centre.[34] To avoid confusion in terms, I apply the term serial when discussing quality television productions. Scholars have discussed how to best label the distinct types of television productions. Using the term 'quality' is controversial as it carries contested meanings. Instead of being understood as a descriptive term, the notion could evoke a discussion focusing on the value of television and cultural hierarchies.[35] Therefore, alternative genre labels to replace 'quality' have been introduced. Birgit Däwes proposes "transgressive television"[36] as a notion, and in his essay *Lengthy Interactions with Hideous Men: Water White and the Serial Poetics of television Anti-Heroes* (2015), Mittell recommends the use of the expression "complex television,"[37] yet the proposed change in terms could not be asserted sustainably and the term 'quality television' dominates the debates. Plantinga's recent suggestion to combine narratives for various types of screens under the notion of "screen stories"[38] is used within this thesis. As Plantinga only introduced this term in 2018 it is not clear yet if scholars will take on his suggestion. With "screen stories" as a scholarly term, Plantinga presents a possibility to research motion picture media-overlapping, production type independent, and to reduce the competition and value discussion between different formats. Plantinga's notion of "screen stories" promises to be useful as the borders between different genres are merging and formats do not appear in 'pure' versions.[39] Thus, combining productions for screens under one inclusive term enables more nuanced research possibilities as scholarly concepts and debates can be transferred across media types. Quality television serials are an example of the amalgamation of different genre traits and come, due to the large budget, even close to feature film.[40]

Much research on quality television has centred on what has become an established canon. For this thesis I have chosen to widen the existing corpus to add to the existing scope of research regarding evil heroes. To do so, I selected *Black Sails* as a serial to research to widen the focus

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33 Mohr, *Slow-Burn-Narration*, 5.

34 Robert Blanchet, "Quality TV: Eine kurze Einführung in die Geschichte und Ästhetik neuer amerikanischer Fernsehserien," in *Serielle Formen: Von den frühen Film-Serials zu aktuellen Quality-TV und online Serien*, eds. Robert Blanchet, Kristina Köhler and Julia Zutavern (Marburg: Schüren, 2014), 38.

35 Kristina Köhler, "«You People are not Watching Enough Television!»: Nach-Denken über Serien und serielle Formen", in *Serielle Formen: Von den frühen Film-Serials zu aktuellen Quality-TV und online Serien*, eds. Robert Blanchet, Kristina Köhler and Julia Zutavern. (Marburg: Schüren, 2014), 21.

36 Däwes, "Transgressive Television," 23.

37 Mittell, "Lengthy Interactions with Hideous Men", 75.

38 Plantinga, *Screen Stories*, 1.

39 Mohr, *Slow-Burn-Narration*, 21.

40 Grawe, *Neue Erzählstrategien in US-amerikanischen Fernsehserien*, 6.

outside the canon. A narrow focus indicates a lack of variety regarding the screen stories investigated. The media and literature researchers Jonas Nesselhauf and Markus Schleich point out in their essay *„Watching Too Much Television" – 21 Überlegungen zum Quality-TV im 21. Jahrhundert*

> that a strongly **reductionist canon** has formed around a few series and genres. *The Sopranos*, *The Wire*, *Mad Men*, or *Breaking Bad* are the obligatory core of this canon, around which other productions like *Boardwalk Empire*, *Homeland*, *Six Feet Under* or *Dexter* can be arranged. […] what the exact criteria are that grant access to the exquisite circle of canonized classics often remains vague.[41]

Researchers are demonstrating a preference for certain serials, albeit analysed from different angles. Analysing a serial that has not yet been largely investigated allows a more unbiased approach towards the serial as there are no previous findings influencing the analytical stance, which supports a widening of the research focus.

Scholars have argued that it is vital for any narrative, including quality television serials, that viewers respond in a positive way to the main protagonists.[42] Thus, engagement with characters has largely been discussed. Murray Smith, for instance, focuses on character engagement in the mid-1990s. With *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion and the Cinema* (1995), Smith sets the emphasis on character engagement as a central theme in cognitive media theory for the following years.[43] Smith proposes the term "allegiance"[44] between viewer and character. Allegiance describes loyalty for, or the taking of sides towards, the character by the audience, based on the information about the character given in a narrative. Plantinga explains that allegiances are "typically reserved for protagonists or other major characters."[45] Consequently the protagonist can be considered as the character to whom the audience becomes closest. Moral judgement and approval of the characters' actions are vital factors in achieving allegiance. Viewers react best to the characters perceived as morally good. Allegiance, together with concepts like empathy, sympathy, or identification align with the 'Heroes Journey' as introduced by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (1949). The Hero's Journey foregrounds the typical stages a hero passes in a narrative to achieve a transformation. It moreover defines the character that viewers and readers normally relate to: a heroic character

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41 Nesselhauf and Schleich, "„Watching Too Much Television"." 11. Original quote: "[…] dass sich ein stark **reduktionistischer Kanon** um einige wenige Serien und Genres gebildet hat. *The Sopranos*, *The Wire*, *Mad Men*, oder *Breaking Bad* sind obligatorischer Kern dieses Kanons, um den herum sich andere Produktionen wie *Boardwalk Empire*, *Homeland*, *Six Feet Under* oder *Dexter* anordnen lassen. […] was die genauen Kriterien sind, die Zugang in den erlesenen Kreis der kanonisierten Klassiker gewähren, bleibt oftmals vage." Original emphasis.
If not stated otherwise, all translations of German quotes are provided by the author of this thesis.

42 Black et al. "Who can Resist a Villain?", 2.

43 Bruun Vaage, *The Antihero in American Television*, 4.

44 Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion and the Cinema*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 63.

45 Plantinga, *Screen Stories*, 202.

who is honest, brave, and possesses high moral standards. In *The Writer's Journey* (1992), screenwriter and movie expert Christopher Vogler gives a different perspective on Campbell's observations of how the traditional moulding of a hero influences audiences. Vogler advises on how to create a compelling hero and in doing so offers a perspective in character engagement from the viewpoint of the character's creator. Vogler observes that "[a] Hero is someone who is willing to sacrifice his own needs on behalf of others, like a shepherd who will sacrifice to protect and serve his flock."[46] The hero has a high moral attitude and does good. Vogler states that the audience is invited early on to identify with the hero to follow him through the story.

The concept of allegiance has also been used by other scholars, such as Alberto N. García, Jason Mittell, and Carl Plantinga.[47] Nonetheless, although allegiance is a largely neutral term, it has not replaced other terms used in the discussion about character engagement, such as 'empathy', 'sympathy', or 'identification'. Plantinga intervened in the discussion, pointing out that a difficulty connected with 'allegiance' regarding character engagement with evil heroes is the entailed moral approval of the audience towards the character. Such a judgement, argues Plantinga, can be manipulated or even be confused in film.[48] He does not disagree entirely with the concept of allegiance which, when achieved, entails that "we wish good things for the character and sympathize with her or him."[49] Such a response is evoked by the moral approval of the characters' actions. Plantinga suggests that allegiance must be distinguished from other responses such as empathy, sympathy, or liking.

Other scholars have argued for using the term 'empathy' instead. Torben Grodal states that empathy holds a large stake in responding to a character.[50] Empathy describes the understanding and sharing of someone else's feelings and emotions. Cognitive philosopher Amy Coplan notes that "we are empathetic when we try to imagine how we would feel if in the other's situation."[51] Being empathetic is achieved through picturing being in someone else's shoes. While empathy means imagining oneself in someone else's position, sympathy implies, for example, reactions such as getting angry because someone is treated badly, but without sharing the experience. Coplan contends: "[w]hile sympathetic emotions are typically triggered by and related to a

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46 Vogler, *The Writer's Journey*, 39.

47 Alberto N. García, "Moral Emotions, Antiheroes and the Limits of Allegiance," in *Emotions in Contemporary TV Series*, ed. Alberto N. García (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 58; Mittell, "Lengthy Interactions with Hideous Men," 75; Plantinga, *Screen Stories*, 44.

48 Carl Plantinga, ""I Followed the Rules, and They All Loved You More"": Moral Judgment and Attitudes toward Fictional Characters in Film," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 34, no. 1 (2010): 35.

49 Plantinga, "I Followed the Rules," 35.

50 Torben Grodal, *Moving Pictures: A New Theory of Film Genres, Feelings, and Cognition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 93.

51 Amy Coplan, "Understanding Empathy: Its Features and Effects," in *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, eds. Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 9.

target individual's emotions, they need not be qualitatively the same."[52] Sympathy describes a reaction to someone else's emotions without necessarily sharing them. The concepts of allegiance, empathy, and sympathy still exist in discussions. Which term is used appears to depend on the researcher's preferences and research focus. The concepts are not always introduced as nuanced or distinct from each other. I introduce my choice of terms in chapter 4.4.

Widely dismissed by scholars from cognitive media studies and media and film studies, however, is the concept of identification.[53] It is seen as misleading and entails the necessity to clearly state that viewers do not believe they are the characters they see: nor that characters are experienced as a stand-in for the spectators.[54] Although researchers such as Eder, Plantinga, and Smith repeatedly note that identification appears to indicate that a viewer believes to *be* the character, which is not in accordance with the facts,[55] the concept has not disappeared entirely from the discussions. However, for example, when identification is used, it describes a closeness between viewer and character and that the viewer is on the character's side.[56]

In recent years, the focus of discussion in cognitive film studies has shifted from character engagement in general to an analysis of how audiences engage with evil heroes. Television serials feature increasingly morally questionable heroes, who tend to be nonetheless liked by the audience, as evident in recent studies such as by Margrethe Bruun Vaage. In *The Antihero in American Television* (2016), she analyses how evil heroes are humanised and made to appear amenable, how such characters can evoke familiarity, and how admirable character traits can induce a positive response to evil heroes. These effects are achieved on a plot level. Bruun Vaage notes that a critical factor in eliciting a positive response to an antihero, which is the term she uses in a way similar to my use of evil hero, is "that the antihero typically claims that he does it all to provide and care for his family."[57] The researcher teases out how the portrayed social aspects, caring for others, and factors like sickness, fear of losing a job or a love, can affect responses towards antiheroes and manipulate the audience on a psychological level to develop a positive response to such characters. Suspense can also be harnessed to achieve such

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52 Amy Coplan, "Empathic Engagement with Narrative Fictions," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 2, no. 62 (2004): 145.

53 Bruun Vaage, *The Antihero in American Television*, 27.

54 Bruun Vaage, *The Antihero in American Television*, 4.

55 Eder, *Die Figur im Film*, 600.

56 Karin Hoepker, "No Longer Your Friendly Neighborhood Killer: Crime Shows and Seriality after Dexter," in *Transgressive Television: Politics and Crime in 21st-Century American TV Series*," eds. Birgit Däwes, Alexandra Ganser and Nicole Poppenhagen (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2015), 254–255.

57 Bruun Vaage, *The Antihero in American Television*, 183.

a response.[58] Plantinga agrees with Bruun Vaage that various textual strategies are used to manipulate and confuse viewers in their reactions.[59]

The focus noticeable in recent studies on character engagement and evil heroes is an exploration of the question of how such characters can be humanised and made to appear amenable through the plot or made appealing for the viewers. Presenting the characters in daily tasks or around their family is a major means that current studies flesh out. Kathi Gormász's study *Walter White & Co. Die neuen Heldenfiguren in amerikanischen Fernsehserien* (2017) also argues that letting a character interact in daily life situations that viewers can relate to has positive effects on their response towards characters,[60] and she includes that a "readable"[61] and predictable characterisation supports positive reactions. Characters that can be experienced as "real"[62] are appealing. Presenting characters with a nuanced personality can also create such an effect.

A change of perspective towards an investigation specifically of morally questionable characters is evident in fields of research outside of film studies. In media psychology, Dolf Zillmann's Affective Disposition Theory (ADT) is a major theory that investigates audiences' engagement with characters. Comparable to allegiance, ADT assumes that viewers make moral judgements about characters. ADT argues that "characters motivated and behaving in morally correct ways are liked to a varying degree, whereas characters motivated and acting in morally improper ways are disliked to a similarly varying degree."[63] How positively a viewer reacts towards a character depends, according to ADT, on the moral 'goodness' of that character. In response to an increase in quality television featuring morally questionable characters as main characters, ADT needed to adapt to these new character types. Arthur Raney tries such a development in ADT. Together with Sophie Janicke, he argues that ADT can be used to explain why viewers enjoy what they term 'antihero narratives' in the sense of evil heroes being the lead protagonists. The authors conclude that to form favourable dispositions towards antiheroes, viewers must be induced to "overlook—or better yet, justify—some moral shortcomings."[64]

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58 Bruun Vaage, *The Antihero in American Television*, 76.

59 Carl Plantinga, "Ethics and Bad Protagonists in Serial Television Drama," in *Contemporary Television: Cognition, Emotion, and Aesthetics*, eds. Hector Lopez and Ted Nannicelli (Oxford University Press, forthcoming), 8. I quote here based on the pre-print copy of the article which Carl Plantinga kindly sent to me on June 16. 2020 on my official Macquarie email address. The page numbers refer to the document I was given.

60 Kathi Gormász, *Walter White & Co: Die neuen Heldenfiguren in amerikanischen Fernsehserien* (Köln: Herbert von Halem, 2017), 108.

61 Gormász, *Walter White & Co*, 14.

62 Gormász, *Walter White & Co*, 87.

63 Janicke and Raney, "Modeling the Antihero Narrative Enjoyment Process," 533.

64 Janicke and Raney, "Modeling the Antihero Narrative Enjoyment Process," 536.

Creating characters in a way that enables viewers to engage with them despite their morally questionable actions is vital to a story's success.

Raney's research aligns with the findings of cognitive media studies, that the viewers need to be manipulated by the narrative's design to enable a liking for morally questionable characters. Recent studies highlight factors that can seduce the audience, which include humanising a character, letting them appear ordinary in their daily life, making them appear familiar, giving them character traits, which are, despite the characters' morally questionable actions, admirable, and equipping them with charm. Gormász highlights that liking a serial character is only partially connected to the values and morals of the characters.[65] Gormász outlines how an imaginary closeness between viewer and character can be created. A complex and even conflicting presentation of the character is a vital factor in Gormász's argument of how audiences can be made to like characters who appear unlikable. Consistent with other current studies, Gormász highlights the character's personal relationship and interactions with other characters as crucial.[66] Gormász proposes further in the text that which character is liked best by the viewers is mostly preconstructed. Narrative attention, the characterisation, and who is playing the role present a dramatic aim and direct the audience's reactions towards character.[67] Such strategies offer devices directing and shaping the audiences' response to fictional beings. One of the identified strategies is realistically designed characters and complexity in character design. Bruun Vaage, in contrast to Gormász's claim, suggests that television serials contain an "intended response of liking the antihero, at least initially."[68] I agree with Bruun Vaage's stance that positive reactions towards morally questionable-acting characters are intended, and thus methods are applied to tease out the aimed responses and direct them. Next to plot-related techniques, I suggest that factors lying beneath the plot, such as nonverbal behaviours, contribute to the whole fabric of a screen story and therefore need to be considered in audience responses.

In her analysis, Gormász follows Jens Eder's approach to consider characters as fictional beings and artefacts. In his 2008 publication *Die Figur im Film. Grundlagen der Figurenanalyse*, film- and media-theorist Eder offers a fresh perspective towards character analysis. Eder argues that characters are neglected in research and need to be analysed in a more complex way, as a whole fabric.[69] Eder does not focus so much on character engagement but seeks to provide a rounded and integrated theoretical approach which allows a nuanced analysis

65 Gormász, *Walter White & Co*, 221.
66 Gormász, *Walter White & Co*, 142
67 Gormász, *Walter White & Co*, 223.
68 Bruun Vaage, *The Antihero in American Television*, 16.
69 Eder, *Die Figur im Film*, 42.

of characters in all their facets. Eder introduces a model that he calls "the clock of character."[70] With this clock, he aims to develop a concept drawing from different theories, bringing them together to create a complex pattern in character analysis: Eder infers clues given from the way people talk about characters in daily life, from philosophical, movie, literature, and art-historical theories and psychological approaches. Of importance is the reception of the character, meaning both how the audience experiences a character (empirical reception) and how the moviemakers intended the character to be experienced (intended reception).[71]

The clock distinguishes between four areas that can analyse a character: artefact, fictional being, symbol, and symptom. Eder specifies them as follows:

> 1. *Artifact:* How and by what means is the character represented? In this context, characters are considered in their relations to stylistic devices and kinds of film information, which generate the perceptual experiences of the viewers […] and later may be aesthetically reflected by them […].
> 2. *Fictional being:* What features and relations does the character possess as an inhabitant of a fictional world, and how does the character act and behave in this world? The answer to this question rests on the formation of mental models of characters.
> 3. Symbol: What does the character stand for, what indirect meanings does it convey? The term "symbol" is to be understood here in a broad sense to comprise all forms of higher-level meanings, in which characters may function as signs of something else. Of what, may be inferred from their features as fictional beings and artifacts.
> 4. Symptom: What causes the character to be as it is, and what effects does it produce? In this perspective, characters are taken to be symptoms, that is, consequences or causal factors of real elements of communication; for example, as the outcome of the work of the filmmakers or as role models for viewers.[72]

Together the four areas of the clock, according to Eder, provide a rounded image of a character. Gormász applies two of the four areas specified by Eder, artefact and character as fictional being as the basis for her study. Eder's "clock of the character" is used by other scholars such as, for instance, Sabrina Eisele, but has not been yet taken up by the majority of all scholars in character analysis or character engagement.

Plantinga also foregrounds the idea of a rounded approach. Plantinga's suggestion for the term "screen stories" highlights that the current research about characters has moved towards an interdisciplinary approach; studies, and literature become discipline-overlapping. Consistently, scholars like Plantinga, Eder, or Bruun Vaage use, or suggest, interdisciplinary approaches in their research, mostly informed by cognitive media studies, film studies, and cognitive psychology when discussing viewers' responses to characters. Plantinga, for instance, advocates for new research and widened theoretical aspects in the analysis of character

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70 Eder, *Die Figur im Film*, 133.
71 Eder, *Die Figur im Film*, 109–110.
72 Jens Eder, "Ways of Being Close to Characters," *Academia.edu*, Accessed October 10. 2019, https://www.academia.edu/1842144/Ways_of_being_close_to_characters, 21. Emphasis and numbers in the original.

engagement. Supporting a broad-ranging approach to research for new theories and ideas, he does not dismiss approaches such as folk psychology,[73] which describes a concept helping people to intuitively process encounters of daily life.[74] Plantinga also supports interdisciplinary approaches, conceding that non-canonical theories and ideas can contribute to insights into audiences' responses towards media. Yet even Plantinga's claim for a widening of theoretical fields has not, to date, made a lasting impact on research approaches in a way that the focus on answering the question of how viewers respond well to evil heroes is largely moved away from plot-related investigations.

Sabrina Eisele, who focuses on film and dance studies, also sees a limitation in current theoretical approaches to character engagement. Although she explores film and not serials, due to the overlapping research and media characteristics, her findings align with investigations carried out for serial characters. She argues that the focus lies too extensively on how a character's daily life and/or backstory influences the audience while other influences are neglected,[75] thus, more nuanced investigations are needed. In her cultural-studies-based publication, *Entgrenzte Figuren des Bösen: Film- und tanzwissenschaftliche Analysen* (2016), Eisele investigates the fascination with the villains Hannibal Lecter (*The Silence of the Lambs*), The Joker (*The Dark Knight*), and Yukio Murata (*Cold Fish*), using the term "Entgrenzte Figuren", which translates to "unbound characters". Eisele specifically focuses on characters where the story provides audiences with little to no background information and knowledge regarding the characters' daily lives. Eisele proposes that an if/or reaction in viewers should be replaced by thinking of an as-well-as response as different stimuli, camera and light techniques, and character actions constantly influence the viewers' reactions. Viewers are not limited to deciding for or against a liking of a character. Thus, *if* the character is liked *or* not is not a black-and-white decision where one choice automatically rules out the other. Instead, viewers can include both responses into their reactions. Eisele further foregrounds that spectator reactions are more complex and not simply black and white and, therefore, studies should take wider approaches in investigating how such responses are elicited through the text of a movie. A major means for the assumed 'as-well-as response' is "Ludische Fiktionalität", ludic fictionality. Eisele uses this notion to explain that viewers are part of a playful communication situation that frames the narrative. "Ludische Fiktionalität" means in detail that

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73 Carl Plantinga, "Folk Psychology for Film Critics and Scholars," *Projections: The Journal for Movies and Mind* 5, no. 2 (2011): 40.

74 Holm Tetens, "Folk Psychology," in *Encyclopedia of Neuroscience*, eds. M.D. Binder, N. Hirokawa and U. Windhorst (Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer, 2009), 1593.

75 Eisele, *Entgrenzte Figuren des Bösen*, 49.

> the recipient's participation in the fictional event and the observation of the production of the fictional event can be realized simultaneously: the Recipient is thus able to participate both emotionally and cognitively in the fictional world and at the same time to observe their constructedness and artificiality.[76]

The cognitive involvement of the brain enables viewers simultaneously to be aware of the constructed nature of evil heroes and to experience these characters in a similar way as the viewers would a human being in 'real life'. Thus, an as-well-as decision regarding a bad protagonist is probable to happen rather than a more restricted if–or reaction. Eisele's as-well-as reaction corresponds with Plantinga's observation that ambiguous characters might create a pull-and-push reaction. In such a reaction the audience is pulled towards the character and simultaneously pushed away from him in regards to forming their stance to the character.[77] Plantinga argues that viewers can like characters in one respect and dislike them in another.[78] The characters' ambiguity in their presentation, actions, and function for their stories can be supporting factors for a positive response in the audience towards morally questionable-acting characters. Even if they have, as in the movies discussed by Eisele, a good protagonist to differentiate from, quality television serials often lack such a morally good protagonist.

Additional discussions focusing on the ethics of audience responses have been introduced, but my study will not engage with these debates. Such debates appear to move the focus away from researching why audiences react in a certain way and, instead, qualify reactions. In the present thesis I do not aim to draw conclusions if viewers assumed positive responses towards evil heroes are good, bad, or should be different. Instead, the goal is widening the insights on how audience responses might be created and steered into one way or other. Therefore, I leave the ethics of responses aside. As highlighted by Eisele and Plantinga, viewer reactions to characters can be complex. However, if viewers react overly positively to a morally questionable-acting evil hero, they might be considered a "bad fan". The term "bad fan" has been introduced by television critic Emily Nussbaum, who claims that "bad fans" engage without reflection with an evil character.[79] Bruun Vaage agrees with Nussbaum's notion, and clarifies:

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76 Eisele, *Entgrenzte Figuren des Bösen*, 13.
Original quote: "[…] die Anteilnahme des Rezipienten am fiktiven Geschehen und die Beobachtung der Herstellung des fiktiven Geschehens simultan realisiert werden können: Der Rezipient ist also in der Lage, sich sowohl emotional und kognitiv an der fiktiven Welt und ihren Figuren zu beteiligen als auch gleichzeitig ihre Konstruiertheit und Artifizialität zu beobachten. "

77 Plantinga, *Screen Stories*, 203.

78 Plantinga, *Screen Stories*, 200.

79 Emily Nussbaum, "The Great Divide. Norman Lear, Archie Bunker, and the Rise of the Bad Fan," *The New Yorker*, April 7, 2014.

> so-called bad fans who arguably watch Breaking Bad (and other antihero series) wrongly because they reduce the morally complex antihero to a heroic figure, whom they only like and never come to see as morally problematic. I argue that the bad fan gets the actual design of these series wrong.[80]

The bad fan discussion seems to shift the focus slightly back towards morals, although it appears to be the viewer's morals and not the character's moral values here. The debate is surprising as Raney already concluded in 2004 that not necessarily all moral values displayed or violated by a character affect a viewer's response.[81] Arguing that there are bad fans carries the danger of leading back to a discussion about the worth of media genres, and the correctness of responses to such narratives. Therefore, I will not include the bad fan debate in my study. Plantinga dismisses Nussbaum's "laments" on bad fans as not useful to bring the discussion about mass narratives forward.[82] Plantinga takes on the bad fan discussion in his essay *Bad Fans, Bad Protagonists, and Ethics* (forthcoming), but moving it way from judging reactions towards characters as wrong or right and focusing instead on the overall ethical reaction entailed in reacting well to evil heroes. Plantinga concludes that "ethical worries are justified. The phenomena [sic] of bad fans and bad protagonists is complicated and troublesome."[83] Bad fan discussions open up a whole new field for theoretical approaches and investigations that are not the focus of my study.

Even though the discussion of morals, ethics, and values is every so often brought forward in the debates on engagement with evil heroes in total, the focus has moved away from it to make room for other concepts. Scholars such as Eisele try to widen the debates further by suggesting that the current focus on backstories and the presentation of a bad character's daily life is too narrow. Her arguments are convincing, especially since she investigates three evil characters with hardly any backstory and, thus, proves her point.

In addition to Plantinga's and Eisele's contributions to broadening the focus of research of character analysis, I propose to also consider how further factors, such as how nonverbal actions can support a presentation of an evil hero as complex and can foreground characteristics to which the audience can relate and overlook or justify moral shortcomings.[84] Such factors can help even out the characters' morally questionable actions. Bodily cues are occasionally mentioned by, for instance, Eder and other researchers, but not explored fully. One of the most detailed descriptions of nonverbal actions is provided by Bruun Vaage through observing a scene from the television serial *Hannibal* (2013–2015), in which Bruun Vaage highlights the

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80 Bruun Vaage, *The Antihero in American Television*, 16.
81 Arthur A. Raney, "Expanding Disposition Theory: Reconsidering Character Liking, Moral Values, and Enjoyment," *Communication Theory* 14, no. 4 (2004): 356.
82 Plantinga, *Screen Stories*, 29.
83 Plantinga, "Bad Fans, Bad Protagonists, and Ethics." 20.
84 Janicke and Raney, "Modeling the Antihero Narrative Enjoyment Process," 536.

calming effect of Hannibal's movements and facial expressions.[85] Bruun Vaage might not seek to analyse nonverbal actions, yet she provides a suggestion that Hannibal's motions carry a soothing and calming effect and thus, through his body language, the threat Hannibal presents is decreased, which makes it easier for the viewers to remain on his side. Bruun Vaage does not follow her observation further in her study, nonetheless, she demonstrates that nonverbal actions can affect a character's perception. Plantinga also argues that viewing the human body and its motions influence viewers.[86]

One study focusing on body language in literature is Barbara Korte's *Body Language in Literature* (1997). Literature depends on the readers' imagination and does not have as many options of portraying nonverbal actions as visual media does. Nonetheless, Korte suggests that there are ways to foreground a character's nonverbal actions through the presentation in the text.[87] Korte emphasises that body language, including postures, gestures, and facial expressions, is a tool to provide the reader with information about a character's relationships, mental state, or personal traits.[88] Korte observes that body language, starting with factors such as the character's physique, has influenced literature since antiquity.[89] How a character looks and moves affects how he is responded to, even in literary works and "[a]ll non-verbal behaviour can be significant in the sense that, apart from its direct practical purpose, a further level of meaning can be attributed to it."[90] Korte's study provides the only large investigation of nonverbal cues in literature. The detection of nonverbal influence was already highlighted for theatre but remains largely ignored for literature and is only occasionally touched on in forms of visual media such as movies and television.

Nonverbal actions and their influences are of interest outside and inside academic fields. For daily life, several books and guidelines on nonverbal actions have appeared in recent years. In these the authors share their personally observed and gained experience of nonverbal influence. Despite the difference in types of publications, there is some overlap between non-academic insights and scholarly findings. As nonverbal actions influence human interaction daily, it has also long been an interest in research. Practical studies explore which influences bodily cues have in different situations. Findings show consistently that people favour warm and welcoming nonverbal actions. Such bodily cues

85 Bruun Vaage, *The Antihero in American Television*, 95.
86 Plantinga, *Screen Stories*, 206.
87 Barbara Korte, *Body Language in Literature* (Toronto/Buffalo /London: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 103.
88 Korte, *Body Language in Literature*, 6.
89 Korte, *Body Language in Literature*, 4.
90 Korte, *Body Language in Literature*, 36.

can enhance rapport, which describes that two persons "connect" with each other.[91] Common fields of research are how body language can positively influence the outcome of job interviews,[92] how nonverbal actions affect people's view of politicians during public appearances,[93] or how power structures in work environments mirror and affect bodily cues.[94] Communication scholar Peter A. Andersen outlines the high stakes that bodily cues hold in communicating and forming relationships. In *Nonverbal Communication. Forms and Functions* (1999), he argues that nonverbal actions such as gaze, touch, facial expression, and appearance have a direct effect on others. Body language, moreover, can capture attention, communicate power, and send cues of warmth and liking – or disliking – from one person to another.[95]

Some experts took their studies and experiences as a basis to compose books not explicitly addressed to an academic or research interest audience, for example, Amy Cuddy with *Presence. Bringing Your Boldest Self to Your Biggest Challenges* (2015).[96] Former FBI experts Joe Navarro and Jack Schafer both wrote their books, *What Every Body is Saying. An Ex-FBI Agent's Guide to Speed-Reading People* (2008) and *The Like Switch. An Ex-FBI Agent's Guide to Influencing, Attracting, and Winning People Over* (2015), respectively, together with psychology PhD graduate and management professor, Marvin Karlins.[97] Their publications also target the average person as reader, yet their findings are based on long-standing experience and/or research. Even non-scholarly literature on body language, often provided by every-day 'experts' who draw on their own experiences rather than on studies, highlights the influence of the same movement, gestures, or postures in line with scholarly findings.

Inviting positive responses towards a person, or eliciting a liking for someone, is closely interlinked with body language. How someone is liked or disliked affects the relationship

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91 Jack Schafer and Karlins Marvin, *The Like Switch: An Ex-FBI Agent's Guide to Influencing, Attracting, and Winning People Over* (New York/London/Toronto/Sydney/New Delhi: Touchstone, 2015), 161.

92 Denise Frauendorfer and Marianne Schmidt Mast, "The Impact of Nonverbal Behavior in the Job Interview," in *The Social Psychology of Nonverbal Communication*, eds. Aleksandra Kostić and Derek Chadee (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 227.

93 Fridanna Maricchiolo, Mario Bonaiuto, and Augusto Gnisci. "Body Movements in Political Discourse," in *Body - Language - Communication: An International Handbook on Multimodality in Human Interaction*, eds. Cornelia Müller, Alan Cienki and Ellen Fricke, vol. 2 (Berlin/Boston: DeGruyter, 2014), 1401.

94 Mario Bonaiuto, Stefano DeDominicis and Ulberta Ganucci Cancellieri, "Gestures, Postures, Gaze, and Movement in Work and Organization," in *Body - Language - Communication: An International Handbook on Multimodality in Human Interaction*, eds. Cornelai Müller, Alan Cienki and Ellen Fricke, vol. 2 (Berlin/Boston: DeGruyter, 2014), 1350.

95 Andersen, *Nonverbal Communication*, 273.

96 Amy Cuddy, *Presence*: *Bringing Your Boldest Self to Your Biggest Challenges* (New York/London: Back Bay Books, 2015).

97 Joe Navarro and Marvin Karlins, *What Every Body is Saying: An Ex-FBI Agent's Guide to Speed-Reading People* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008); Schafer and Karlins. *The Like Switch*.

created with that person.[98] Motions and bodily cues like eye contact, smiling, open gestures, and eyebrow flashes can enhance the chance for a positive response from another person.[99] A more detailed outline of the creation of liking and the impact of nonverbal actions is given in chapter 5.

In this chapter, key literature around character engagement has been charted, and fundamental themes positioned against debates that this study addresses. While a large amount of scholarly literature has been written on character engagement heroes, there are gaps in the literature, particularly around how factors lying beneath the plot's surface influence viewer reactions towards characters, and regarding evil hero contextualisation within literary tradition. In the following chapters, I deepen the theoretical background on characters, viewer reactions, Satan and Byronic heroes, and body language, as these areas are central for the analysis carried out in chapters 8–10. The methodological approach used in conducting the analyses is introduced in the following chapter.

98 Susan S. Hendrick and Clyde Hendrick, *Liking, Loving and Relating*, 2nd edition (California: Brooks/Cole, [1983] 1992), 19.

99 Frauendorfer and Schmidt Mast, "The Impact of Nonverbal Behavior in the Job Interview," 221–2.

3 Methodology

Through a sample analysis with a close reading, this thesis explores the characters James Flint and John Silver from the television serial *Black Sails.* Focus in the case study are Flint's contextualisation with literary history, and how both characters nonverbal actions can increase a positive viewer reaction. In investigating these questions, I explore a not yet largely researched aspect of character engagement.

To conduct my case study and allow a close reading to be carried out, I use qualitative data, gathered from the quality television serial *Black Sails.* Close reading, as the term implies, is a method closely connected with written texts. As I explain in the following, it can also be transferred to screen stories. Focusing on a qualitative data enables an in-depth analysis of the collected material, which consists of extensive notes on *Black Sails* concerning Flint's characteristics aligning with John Milton's Satan, the Byronic hero in Byron's *The Corsair*, and the positive nonverbal actions carried out by Toby Stephens and Luke Arnold whilst portraying Flint and Silver. Introducing two new research aspects in my thesis, an emphasis on *Black Sails* offers the best approach to achieve sustainable results. A detailed analysis attains a generalisable method and knowledge that can then be transferred to other serials. To be able to integrate several fields of research and combine different findings, I use a multidisciplinary method, informed by the key factors of related and relevant research areas such as cognitive media theory, literary and film theory, and movie analyses, supplemented by research on nonverbal communication and reactions to it between humans that come from fields such as neuroscience, communication studies, psychology, and sociology. In the following section, I explain the applied methodology. I start by outlining my method of data collection, then I introduce my methods of analysing the gathered data and finally focus on the assumed viewer type within my study.

The data for the analysis was collected in several steps. First, I engaged with relevant literature on Milton's Satan, the Byronic hero, and on nonverbal communications. Then I identified criteria constituting Satan and the Byronic hero that are repeatedly mentioned within scholarly examinations of *Paradise Lost* (1667) or Byronic hero explorations. These factors consist of being an outcast, the question of why the characters are cast out, the status in their original and new society, the 'crimes' they committed, and their refusal to reintegrate with society. I use these criteria as a basis to examine whether the *Black Sails* character James Flint aligns with Satan and the Byronic hero, of which I use Byron's Conrad from *The Corsair* (1814) as an example.

For my second research question, I selected nonverbal criteria that people likely respond well to, as such nonverbal behaviours and habits are preferred by humans. Carrying out such nonverbal motions can subtly invite the audience to respond positively towards John Silver and James Flint. The nonverbal actions I examine are extracted from existing research on body language. These classifications contain the characters' appearance created through the look of the actors, make up and costume, and warm nonverbal actions such as wide and inviting gestures and genuine smiles. I also focus on motions that can make the characters appear confident as well as weary and uneasy as I argue that such contradictive bodily cues can help enhance the characters' complexity.

With the standards on Satan, Byronic heroes, and nonverbal actions in mind, I monitored the characters' behaviour regarding where it does and does not match the characteristics of Satan and Conrad. I gathered my observations into a file, writing them down episode for episode with cross-references that enabled me to draw connections and build up my argument. Moreover, I observed in detail the nonverbal actions displayed by the two chosen characters and took notes according to my criteria. For example, I noted movements, aspects of physical appearance, behaviours, facial expressions, and habits matching with my categories, but did not transcribe the whole serial. If quotations were needed to serve as an example or clarify an argument, I transcribed the required sequences of selected scenes. I compiled the data in a Word file to enable searching for keywords such as "smiles", "eyebrow flash", and "violence." This file forms the basis for the following analysis.

I applied a close reading to the serial. 'Close reading' in this study is oriented towards the use of the term by literature scholar Jonathan Culler. Culler notes that a close reading consists especially of attention to how meaning is created, and which strategies are used to achieve "what the reader takes to be the effects of the work or passage."[1] English literature scholar Anette Federico adds that a close reading opens the door to a better, deeper, and more critical understanding of a particular work,[2] which aligns with the set aim for my thesis regarding *Black Sails*. Even though I applied the close-reading technique to a screen story rather than a text, it is an appropriate method for my approach as it focuses on strategies to create effects for the audience. Moreover, researchers use the notion 'serial text', which means that the structure and narrative of a screen story can be analysed with methods originating from literature analysis.[3] With a thematic approach, in which I examined one category after another, I analysed the questions of how the character of Flint aligns with Satan and Conrad and of how Flint's and

1 Jonathan Culler, "The Closeness of Close Reading," *ADE Bulletin* 149 (2010): 22.
2 Federico, *Engagements with Close Reading*, 9.
3 Gormász, *Walter White & Co*, 221.

Silver's nonverbal actions might enhance a positive viewer reaction through levelling out their morally questionable actions and through conveying character complexity. To conduct my close reading of the serial, I selected meaningful examples, re-watched them closely, and built my argument in bringing my findings from the scenes together with the theoretical background.

The close reading was conducted within an interdisciplinary framework, informed by the key factors of the related research areas of literature studies, cognitive media theory, literary and film studies, and movie analyses. I supplemented this analytical research with findings on nonverbal communication and the human response that come from the fields of neuroscience, communication studies, psychology, and sociology. Using an interdisciplinary approach allowed me to transfer findings on nonverbal actions into character studies, as literature scholar Barbara Korte notes,

> interdisciplinary research (conducted in the areas of psychology, social psychology, sociology, anthropology, and linguistics) has supplied more precise categories for analysing natural body language than its predecessors such as rhetoric or expression psychology.[4]

Drawing on empirical research concepts rather than theory alone appears to be a suitable approach to the interdisciplinary analysis of nonverbal communication in fiction. Humans react directly and intuitively to nonverbal signals. Therefore, an approach informed by pragmatic fields of research appears appropriate in discussing viewer reactions towards a character's bodily cues. Thus, I follow Korte's example in my thesis and use a close reading method combined with an interdisciplinary approach. Assuming viewers' awareness of seeing fiction and yet reacting to characters in a comparable way to real persons is, as I highlight in chapter 5, a widely used scholarly argument on which my analysis also builds.[5] I use the concepts of "twofoldness" and "doubleness" as an initial point for my analysis of the characters' nonverbal actions and their effects. As stated in the introduction, I use the terms in the sense of Carl Plantinga's and Bruce McConachie's work, which state that audiences simultaneously experience a character as fictional and 'real', and blend actor and character together into one image.[6]

In the analytical part of this study, I start with the comparison of Flint with Satan and Conrad to provide a representative historical contextualisation of an evil hero. Following the outlined features of the characters, I introduce relevant literature, and compare each character with the criterion in question and decide whether the character aligns with that feature. A detailed juxtaposition with Satan and Conrad is enabled by following the individual criteria I compiled

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4 Korte, *Body Language in Literature*, 241.
5 Plantinga, *Screen Stories*, 31.
6 Plantinga, *Screen Stories*, 31; McConachie, *Engaging Audiences*, 42.

as traits for both characters. As the three characters originate from different times and media, I focus on the character traits rather than the time period, genres, or media to which the characters belong. The three characters are connected through character complexity. Such a complexity enhances positive responses towards the characters as depth and complexity allows the fictional beings to appear more relatable. For the analysis of the characters' nonverbal behaviours, I firstly analyse the inviting and appealing nonverbal actions carried out by the actors whilst portraying the characters. I introduce relevant literature, describe selected scenes used as examples, and build an argument of how and why the present nonverbal actions may influence the audience towards responding positively to the characters. The selected examples are largely drawn from the first episodes of the serial as viewers have likely formed their first response to and built a relationship with a particular character after a small number of episodes. I selected scenes which provide significant examples of the nonverbal actions I am looking at in order to allow a clear argumentation. Movie scholar Kathi Gormász argues that at the end of the first season viewers will have established an image of how a character is and sounded out their relationship toward the character.[7] Screenwriter and movie expert Christopher Vogler concurs, also highlighting the importance of the early stages of the story for audiences to relate well to the character.[8] I include examples from later episodes where they serve to illustrate the characters' habits and outline their development. After establishing the characters' positive nonverbal actions, I highlight how other, even contradicting, nonverbal actions can further increase character depth, convey complexity, and therefore add more accessible traits to the characters. Providing characters with complexity can make it easier for viewers to engage with them in a positive way, as depth and complexity can help to create an image of "characters who are like us", for the viewers.[9] Screen writing expert Linda Seger emphasises in her guide to creating compelling characters that "[h]uman nature being what it is, a character is always more than just a set of consistencies."[10] Characters need to show intricacy to appear convincing and realistic. Thus, giving depth to the characters likely allows the evil heroes in *Black Sails* to appear more like human personalities with different layers and shades. Through using complexity for the characters and harnessing contradicting traits, positive character features counteracting negative behaviour might be established and reinforced. Nonverbal actions can be harnessed as a tool to underline and foreground character depth. On a level beyond the plot, bodily cues can help to show the characters' states of mind, illustrating doubts, worries, and

7 Gormász, *Walter White & Co*, 141.
8 Vogler, *The Writer's Journey*, 40.
9 Seger, *Creating Unforgettable Characters*, 174.
10 Seger, *Creating Unforgettable Characters*, 32.

emotions in general. Thus, I argue how allowing the character to appear as confident, vulnerable, and uneasy may enhance such a complex presentation.

Evil heroes are complex character types that may kill other likable characters or act violently against a character the audience likes, thus, without reinforcing a positive response throughout the serial, the audience might disconnect from an evil hero. More shades are added to an evil hero's personality throughout the narrative that can help to achieve the audience ignoring issues about which they otherwise might turn away from the character. Being aware of the morally questionable actions that evil heroes repeatedly carry out, I suggest that the early established image of an evil hero is formed but that it needs to be reinforced as the story proceeds.

I assume a viewer influenced by western culture, as *Black Sails* mainly aired in westerncountries or countries with elements of western culture integrated in their own.[11] The viewers I assume watch screen stories as entertainment and for enjoyment in their free time without the aim of largely analysing any of the content watched. Literature scholar Enrique Cámara Arenas argues that "[w]riters and moviemakers rarely write or film for psychologists, or for any specialized elites."[12] Thus, the viewer who I assume is meant to represent the average watches television as a method of enjoyment and as a pastime. I do not assume that the viewers aim to participate in any analytical engagement while watching *Black Sails*. Thus, I presume that the viewers are influenced largely subconsciously by familiar character types, character traits, and displayed nonverbal actions. It is common for people to react on a subconscious level to nonverbal actions; thus, it can be assumed that viewers likewise react subconsciously to characters' movements. Carl Plantinga, building on Janet Staiger's work, names this type of viewer a "typical" or "competent" viewer.[13] Having such a viewer type in mind is suitable for my approach. *Black Sails* is likely to be watched by a range of people with different backgrounds who are not trained or motivated to analyse the serial's structure and design, or to pay close attention to integrated literary concepts and nonverbal actions. I assume an average person as viewer of *Black Sails*. Since *Black Sails* appears not to be designed for a particular gender and was rated well by both males and females, and keeping in mind Ang's argument that gender is not necessarily a reliable indicator for viewing behaviour,[14] I do not focus on how gender affects possible viewer reactions.

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11 IMDb "Black Sails. Release Info." Accessed January 08. 2021. https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2375692/releaseinfo?ref_=tt_dt_dt.

12 Enrique Cámara Arenas, "Villains in Our Mind: A Psychological Approach to Literary and Filmic Villainy," in *Villains and Villainy: Embodiments of Evil in Literature, Popular Culture and Media*, eds. Anna Farhaeus and Dikmen Yakalı-Çamoğlu (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2011), 17.

13 Plantinga, "Spectatorship," 250.

14 Ang, *Living Room Wars*, 93.

As it is impossible to reflect on all possible audience members, their backgrounds, and their reactions, I align with Bruun Vaage, who states that assuming a theoretical viewer type is a common methodological approach when analysing screen stories.[15]

When I write about the viewers, I am conscious that my analysis is influenced by a western gaze. As *Black Sails* is an American production, it is likely to be tailored for viewers influenced by western culture, such as music, books, screen stories, and games. As most research on nonverbal actions is carried out with a western focus and I personally cannot offer a view from a different culture myself, it appears unsuitable to apply a gaze informed by a different cultural background on *Black Sails* as it would not lead to reliable results in the scope of this thesis. Additionally, the research on body language is largely carried out in a western environment and, therefore, mostly has a western-set focus. Milton's Satan and the Byronic hero were also created with a western audience in mind. Thus, I leave the analysis of the impact of a television serial on an audience with a non-western-influenced background to scholars who have proper insights into such a cultures.

Overall, the methodology used is not unusual and allows my findings to be integrated into the existing range of research regarding character engagement. Having outlined my methodology, I establish the definition of main terms in the following chapter.

[15] Bruun Vaage, *The Antihero in American Television*, xiv.

4 Key Definitions: Evil, Characters, and Viewer Reactions

This chapter focuses on evil, characters, and audience responses to characters. It starts by providing definitions of the terms 'character' and 'evil' for this thesis. Hereafter, I introduce distinct types of characters. In existing research, there is frequently no consistent use of terms describing bad main characters. Morally questionable-acting main characters are, for instance, labelled as 'antihero', 'villain', 'bad protagonist', 'antagonist', or 'ambiguous character.' I introduce my term 'evil hero' as an update to 'antihero'. 'Antihero' is largely used to describe the current protagonists of television serials but can also label a character's function in a story as opposing the hero and lacking heroic qualities. To ensure a precise use of terms, I start by discussing the 'antihero' term, followed by 'protagonist', 'antagonist', 'dark character', 'ambiguous character', and 'villain.'

The last part of this chapter engages with nuances in audience responses to characters. I define the terms 'positive response', 'likable', and 'liking', and provide the reasons for choosing to use these terms in my analyses. I also briefly introduce and evaluate the commonly used terms 'engagement', empathy', 'sympathy', 'identification', and 'allegiance', and explain why they are less suited for my study.

4.1 Defining Evil, Characters and 'Evil Heroes'

'Evil' and 'character' are terms commonly used inside and outside scholarly research, yet they are often used without clear definitions, which can make investigations vague. Hence, in this section, I explain how 'evil' is to be understood in the present thesis, define how the term 'character' is applied, and distinguish between different types of characters.

Characters form the core element of a narrative. Media-overlapping characters are described as fictional agents with person-like traits. In his contribution to *The Living Handbook of Narratology,* Fotis Jannidis defines a "character [as] a text- or media-based figure in a storyworld, usually human or human-like."[16] The humanness of a character includes traits similar to the ones a person possesses, like an inner life.[17] When consisting of humanising aspects, it does not matter if the characters are presented by an actor, an animal, or an animation for the audience to be able to identify them as characters and form a bond with them. Whether the characters inhabit a world created through words or a motion picture does not affect their core of "humanness", either. A consensus in scholarship, moreover, is that readers' and viewers' reactions towards characters are largely alike for literary as well as film characters.

[16] Fotis Jannidis, "Character," in *The Living Handbook of Narratology,* accessed January 26, 2020, https://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/node/41.html.

[17] Eder, *Die Figur im Film,* 63.

Literature scholar Fotis Jannidis and film scholar Jens Eder agree on the basic features of a character and propose that "[a]t the prototypical core of the concept of character, then, is a recognisable fictional being, to which the ability to think and act is ascribed."[18] While a story develops, attributes can be added to characters to make them more complex and allow the audience more insight into their minds and actions. Characters lead readers and viewers through a story and may leave deep impressions on people. Even when the details of the plot fade into memory, characters are often still remembered.[19] Characters' ability to create a lasting impact foregrounds the power inherent in fictional beings and their function to 'carry' a story. Characters serve a function within a story as, for instance, 'protagonist' or 'antagonist'. The antagonist functions as an opponent to the protagonist, who usually serves as main character.

Besides being defined through their narrative function, characters can be defined based on the characteristics they are given. An antagonist, for example, is not required by his function in the story to be bad; he simply needs to obstruct the protagonist. Nonetheless, antagonists are often rendered as bad through their behaviour and characteristics.

Eder and Jannidis argue that humans' reactions to these character traits of fictional beings do not differ substantially to the way they would respond to the real people they encounter in their lives. This similarity between reactions towards characters and humans, which is a cornerstone for my investigation, is discussed in chapter 5.

Evil is a human-defined and man-made concept used to label unapproved behaviour and to provide and support a framework of social rules. Regulations and definitions of evil can vary from society to society and have changed with time. Nonetheless, basics that condemn killing, robbery, or violence are at the core of most human groups.[20] 'Evil' was – and still is – used to label divergence from the standard behaviour and unexplainable things.[21] As a construct, evil and what it entails underlies constant changes and adjustments. Compliant and independent from time or purpose of use, 'evil' refers to bad and unwanted actions. In fiction, good and evil are categories commonly used to classify characters.[22] 'Bad' is another commonly used term in both social and narrative contexts, but bad differs from evil. One of evil's main features in a narrative is that it intends to harm, whereas bad simply opposes good.[23] Part of the aesthetics

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18 Eder, Jannidis and Schneider, "Characters in Fictional Worlds," 10.

19 Fotis Jannidis, *Figur und Person: Beitrag zu einer historischen Narratologie*, (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2004), 1.

20 Norbert Bolz, "Der Megatrend zum Bösen," in *TopTrends: Die wichtigsten Trends für die nächsten Jahre*, ed. Ulrich Becker, Norbert Bolz, et al., (Düsseldorf/München: Metropolitan Verlag, 1995), 85.

21 Theo R. Payk, *Das Böse in uns: Über die Ursachen von Mord, Terror und Gewalt* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 2008), 14f.

22 Plantinga, *Moving Viewers*, 101.

23 Pamela Jaye Smith, *The Power of The Dark Side: Creating Great Villains, Dangerous Situations & Dramatic Conflict* (Los Angeles: Michael Wiese Productions, 2008), 15.

of evil, Alt notes, is that evil is not only defined through ethical, legal, and religious ways of thinking alone but that it receives its meaning from poetic invention and the framework of (mostly) narrative order and structural models.[24] In my thesis, 'evil' is determined as acting morally questionably, being greedily, selfishly, and willingly accepting of the harming and/or hurting of others knowingly and unnecessarily.

To label protagonists combining traits of hero, villain, and antihero, I suggest using the term 'evil hero' as a descriptor rather than the more common 'antihero' to properly outline what kind of character is referred to and to avoid vagueness and misunderstandings in the discussion. An evil hero, as I define the term, is a character who serves as the audience's favoured protagonist of a narrative but acts in a morally questionable way. Evil heroes are responsible for evil actions, such as killing and/or harming others, often without need and taking willingly into account that others get hurt. Moreover, they show character traits such as being selfish, greedy, and devious. This definition differs from that of the common narrative term 'antihero' when defined as a central but unheroic character who "lacks the qualities of nobility and magnanimity expected of traditional heroes and heroines."[25] Such a description does not fully match the bad and dubious-acting protagonists in current television serials anymore. Evil heroes are more complex than antiheroes.

'Antihero' is commonly used in two ways: firstly, for describing negative character traits and secondly, in terms of *lacking* conventional heroic attributes. For example, scholars such as Bruun Vaage,[26] García,[27] Janicke and Raney,[28] Mittell,[29] and Shafer and Raney[30] apply 'antihero' to refer to protagonists whom I name 'evil hero', liked but morally dubious-acting main characters. In their use, the antihero is defined based on the characteristics he shows rather than on his function. Secondly, the 'antihero' can also be defined through his function in a story as a character lacking the heroic traits, such as courage, to qualify as the story's protagonist. This definition is reflected in the prefix 'anti'. The entry for the lemma 'antihero' in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* furthermore advises not to confuse the antihero with 'antagonist' or 'villain', which describe different types of characters.[31] This appeal to use clear terms appears justified, as confusion can be found and various uses of 'antihero' in different

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24 Alt, *Ästhetik des Bösen*, 13.

25 Chris Baldick, "Antihero," in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 2nd ed., ed. Chris Bladick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 13.

26 Bruun Vagge, *The Antihero in American Television*, 267.

27 García, "Moral Emotions, Antiheroes and the Limits of Allegiance," 53.

28 Janicke and Raney, "Modeling the Antihero Narrative Enjoyment Process," 533.

29 Mittell, "Lengthy Interactions with Hideous Men," 74.

30 Daniel M. Shafer and Arthur A Raney, "Exploring How We Enjoy Antihero Narratives," *Journal of Communication*, no. 62 (2012): 1028.

31 Baldick, "Antihero," 13.

contexts create a blurriness in the term's specification.[32] Vogler further adds to the inconsistency in definitions through explaining the 'antihero' in terms of his social status and potential audience responses:

> [s]imply stated, an Anti-hero is not the opposite of a Hero, but a specialized kind of Hero, one who may be an outlaw or a villain from the point of view of society, but with whom the audience is basically in sympathy.[33]

Being a special sort of hero seems, at first glance, to align with the new types of heroes, to whom I refer as evil heroes. A closer look, however, reveals that Vogler's two main antihero categories, the "wounded hero" and the "tragic hero",[34] do not describe an evil hero, nor do they clarify the term 'antihero'. For the wounded hero, Vogler defines a hero who might be an outlaw from society's point of view but who is supported by the audience, like Robin Hood. However, such a character, especially given the example of Robin Hood, is commonly a Noble Outlaw and not largely lacking heroic attitudes or 'nobility', thus Vogler's example connects even more character types with 'antihero' rather than clarifying it. In current television serials, and obviously in *Black Sails*, which centres around a pirate crew and society, the characters could be considered outlaws. However, as I argue in chapter 7, the *Black Sails* pirates defy expectations because they do not align with the character type of the Noble Outlaw.

The second type of antihero that Vogler detects is the tragic hero. The tragic hero, so Vogler argues, can be charming, but his flaws prevail in the end and destroy him.[35] Such a hero type could, for instance, resemble the Byronic hero, or even a villain, which is another character type altogether. The characters Vogler describes as "wounded heroes" may be antiheroes as well but do not inevitably need to be. Neither of the antihero types presented by Vogler do fully match the bad, often greedily and morally questionable-acting protagonist who populates current quality television serials. Evil heroes might share some traits with Noble Outlaws and other types of heroes and villains, but they do not match each other entirely. Vogler's suggestion of different hero types and ways to define a character under the one term 'antihero' illustrates the difficulty of explicitly defining and using this term.

More recent discussions on the antihero term do not, however, necessarily contribute to its clarification. One factor for unclear definitions is the insufficient demarcation between defying characters according to their functions in a story, or according to the character traits the fictional beings are given. Movie experts Richard Barsam and Dave Monahan, for instance, give as the

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32 Vogler, *The Writer's Journey*, 45.
33 Vogler, *The Writer's Journey*, 45.
34 Vogler, *The Writer's Journey*, 45–6.
35 Vogler, *The Writer's Journey*, 45–6.

paradigm for antiheroes in their introduction to movies that antiheroes are: "[s]eemingly unsympathetic protagonists chasing less than noble goals".[36] Their definition impedes a sharp distinction between the characteristics and narrative functions of antihero, antagonist, and villain. Furthermore, pursuing dishonourably aims might apply to some of the current evil heroes but putting them in the pigeonhole of being generally unsympathetic can lead to misunderstandings because research and the success of television serials show that such characters can be liked. Due to the potential confusion that could arise from the inconsistent use of the term 'antihero', I use 'evil hero' in my study to label a protagonist who is liked although acting morally questionably.

My choice of term aligns with Plantinga's observations. He recently largely writes about "bad" or "evil" protagonists rather than antiheroes.[37] Moreover, Plantinga's notion of "screen stories" indicates the need to refine words in the discussion of the continuously evolving medium of motion picture and the characters within. A qualification of terms is necessary to emphasise the focus on characters who are the story's protagonists and act in a way that violates common moral values at the same time. Most current television serials do not follow the traditional Hero's Journey concept of good protagonist-versus-antagonist, or protagonist-versus-villain setup anymore.[38] Instead, characters acting in dubious ways are harnessed as protagonists. The existing narratology terms do not seem to fully cover the concept of liked evil acting protagonist which has evolved in the past 20 years. Bad characters are not simply bad anymore and Enrique Cámara Arenas concurs with Poore when observing that even villains, the predestined 'bad guys' have become more complex in recent years, an observation that will be discussed further in section 4.3.2 below.[39]

4.2 Different Character Types and the Functions they Fulfil

In terms of characteristics, there is a general consensus that characters are humanlike fictional agents with the ability to think and act. Characters are also distinguished in terms of their function in a storyline. The main types are 'protagonists', 'hero', and 'antagonists' which I introduce in the following part. Evil heroes function as 'protagonists' of their narratives.

'Protagonist' refers to the main character of a narrative, which also describes its function in the narrative. Usually, the audience is on the protagonist's side and follows them through the story.[40] For media, Rib Davis emphasises in his guide to *Creating Compelling Characters for*

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36 Richard Barsam and Dave Monahan, *Looking at Movies,* 5th edition, (New York/London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016), 128.
37 Plantinga, *Screen Stories*, 18.
38 García, "Moral Emotions, Antiheroes and the Limits of Allegiance," 54.
39 Cámara Arenas, "Villains in Our Mind," 19.
40 David S. Miall, *Literary Reading: Empirical & Theoretical Studies* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 19.

Film, TV, and Radio that the protagonist is the strongest character in terms of audience interest,[41] which aligns with the description of a protagonist in literary contexts. 'Protagonist' is a neutral term to label that a character is the main character. 'Hero' is often employed to identify a similar type of character with a similar function in the storyline: hero and protagonist serve as the main characters. Yet 'hero' can also be a definition referring to generally positive characteristics in defining the character. A hero defined through characteristics "is willing to sacrifice his own needs on behalf of others, like a shepherd who will sacrifice to protect and serve his flock."[42] The hero in this sense is characterised by selflessness, bravery, and goodness. A protagonist can show such traits too but does not need to do so. The protagonist can fulfil his narrative function without being characterised as a hero at the same time. Heroes, then, are likely to be protagonists but do not necessarily have to be (as 'villains' may also fulfil such a function). 'Hero' as a term describing a character entails features such as nobility, 'protagonist' is a more neutral term to label that a character is the main character. A protagonist, however, can be a bad character as well, whereas a 'hero' traditionally is rendered as being good, following the right moral choices and common values. When I use the terms 'protagonist' or 'hero' in this thesis, I do it in the sense of Davis, foregrounding that it is the character the audience is likely most interested in; I do not state that the hero follows a good cause or has high moral standards.

In opposition to the 'protagonist', the 'antagonist' is placed as an enemy, burden, or difficulty for the story's protagonist. The person, force, being, or creature who obstructs the protagonist's actions is the antagonist.[43] Since it is the antagonist's narrative function to hinder the protagonist, the antagonist is unlikely to be favoured by the audience. Yet an antagonist does not necessarily represent evil. Screenwriting expert Linda Seger clarifies the distinction between a neutral antagonist and a wicked villain:

> [v]illains are usually the antagonists, although not all antagonists are villains. Antagonists won't be villains, for example, if they oppose the protagonist not out of bad motives but because it's their function in the story.[44]

The antagonist can oppose the protagonist without intending harm if he, for instance, is an animal or represented by a force of nature. An antagonist is opposed to the protagonist and through his opposition provides the protagonist with a problem, challenge, or difficulty which

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41 Rib Davis, *Creating Compelling Characters for Film TV and Radio*. 2nd edition, (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 126–127.
42 Vogler, *The Writer's Journey*, 39.
43 Barsam and Monahan, *Looking at Movies*, 132. Original emphasis.
44 Seger, *Creating Unforgettable Characters*, 137.

the protagonist must overcome. Usually, dealing with a challenge is a cornerstone for every narrative and thus the antagonist is essential to allow a story to proceed and unfold.[45]

4.3 Different Types of 'Evil' Characters

Characters who act evilly, selfishly, greedily, or ambiguously are part of many narratives. For this character type, lack of clarity of terms, functions, and of how terms and functions are connected can be noted in the literature, as already explained above for the term 'antihero.' Besides 'antihero', the terms 'ambiguous character' and 'villain' are often used to label characters as bad. In the following section, I introduce both character types.

An ambiguous character oscillates in between different traits, withstands clear judgement, and therefore can be assessed in separate ways. Ambiguity is also a characteristic of an evil hero as he is, as outlined above, liked but does act in morally questionably ways. Ambiguity contains a "'plurisignation' or 'multiple meaning' ",[46] which implies that a clear categorisation of a character equipped with ambiguity is difficult. An ambiguous character is likely to simultaneously align with two categories, such as 'good' and 'bad', but he matches none of those categories fully as he possesses traits of both. Thus, an ambiguous character can serve several functions in a narrative and be defined by numerous characteristics. Related to character responses, ambiguousness indicates that it is possible to slightly like and dislike the character, agree and disagree with him to some extent, and see him partially as both hero and villain. This vagueness in character traits makes it difficult to classify such a character because he is neither truly good nor truly evil. Byronic heroes, for instance, might be ambiguous. Plantinga argues that with an ambiguous character the audience is pulled towards the character and simultaneously pushed away from him when forming their stance to the character.[47] Eisele's 'Entgrenzte Figuren' and her proposal that audiences respond with an "as-well-as" reaction rather than a more determined "if–or" reaction in the audiences' stance towards fictional beings aligns with Plantinga's observation of a pull-and-push reaction.[48] Plantinga's argument and Eisele's proposal of an 'as-well-as' response in viewers highlight the complexity of ambiguous characters. An evil hero can be perceived as ambiguous, which adds to his complexity and the different possibilities to react to him.

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45 For a discussion of the basic elements of a story, see Campbell's *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*; or Vogler's *The Writer's Journey*.

46 Chris Baldick, "Ambiguous," In *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 2nd edition, ed. Chris Baldick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 7.

47 Plantinga, *Screen Stories*, 203.

48 Plantinga, *Screen Stories*, 203.

A villain is often labelled as the bad character of the story.[49] They traditionally serve as the evil force through both his function in the narrative and the defining characteristics. Functioning as the 'bad guy' does not limit the villain's ability to serve his function in distinct roles; simultaneously to being evil, a villain may be an antagonist or even the protagonist of a narrative. Poore, who uses 'villain' in a similar way to my use of 'evil hero', highlights that "[v]illains are now big business in modern media fictions."[50] Villains are, as discussed in chapter 2, trending in modern entertainment. In contemporary narrative, villains have to be more complex and given more nuances, and cannot simply be wicked. Modern villains "blur the line between good and evil."[51] Poore emphasises the complexity of current villains, which I outlined above in my proposal for the term 'evil hero.' Poore's explanation of the term 'villain', moreover, underlines the difficulty in labelling contemporary characters as 'villains' since they do not necessarily serve the villain functions in their narrative nor have only villainous characteristics. Evil heroes are more complex than the villain, who is mostly drawn as acting badly. The villain, as commonly defined, is characterised through being bad. Thus, using the unqualified term 'villain' can create misunderstanding. Using the term in the way Poore does is, of course, possible. Yet even if the term is used in the way Poore does, the implied meaning needs to be explained for a clear interpretation. Thus, I do not take on Poore's use of villain within this thesis.

4.4 From a Positive Response to Liking Characters

In this section, I introduce different nuances of responding positively to characters. I start by outlining that characters are supposed to be liked. Then I introduce my choice of terms, 'positive response', 'likability', and 'liking' regarding viewer reactions toward characters. I introduce commonly used concepts such as 'engagement', 'empathy', 'sympathy', and 'identification, and establish why I decided against using one of these notions.

Creating liked characters is essential for narratives. Raney emphasises this necessity for screen stories as liking a character allows the audience to enjoy what they see.[52] Only when liking, and thus enjoyment, occurs can viewers truly take delight in a program and continue watching.[53] This is particularly important for a long-running serial format and serial creators are likely to employ different techniques, in the story and aesthetical presentation, to create a 'likable' character to maintain audience interest. Serials stand out here from other media

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49 Chris Baldick, "Villain," in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 2nd edition, ed. Chris Baldick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 272.
50 Poore, "The Villain-Effect," 10.
51 Poore, "The Villain-Effect," 11.
52 Raney, "Expanding Disposition Theory," 348.
53 Raney, "Expanding Disposition Theory," 349.

because not watching the next episode is an easy step to take. If a book has already been purchased, or a movie ticket has been bought, the impact of the audience not liking the character and, for example, not finishing the book, is smaller. When a serial loses viewers, however, it might be cancelled altogether. As 'liking a character' and caring what happens to him is connected with the audience's desire to keep watching, ensuring that a character is liked is vital for a quality television serial's success.

Evil heroes may cause tension between the audience liking them and the characters' morally questionable behaviour. Thus, the creation of a 'liking' for an evil hero can take longer than, for example, with a traditionally good and easy-to-classify hero like Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) in *Star Wars* IV–IX (1979–2019). Evil heroes might be ultimately responded positively to, but the audiences can take longer to establish their opinion about the character or to decide if they truly like or dislike him. Eisele's proposed as-well-as reaction towards morally questionable-acting characters comes into account here. In television serials, the decision of how well a character is liked may be revised by viewers due to a large cast containing mostly morally questionable-acting characters. Hence, the bond between character and audience needs to be constantly refreshed.

I argue that there are nuances in an audience's reaction towards characters. A final response is not immediately formed and stances taken can be reconsidered more easily due to the characters' morally questionable actions challenging an earlier positive audience response. Together, these nuances accumulate and lead to what I call 'liking' of a character. Overall, I employ the terms 'positive response', 'likability', and 'liking' within my argumentation. How viewers react to a character is shaped by different influences. Most researchers pay close attention to the plot. As outlined in chapter 2, factors like character traits such as being charming, caring, or loving, and plot-related context like understanding a character's reasons, showing a character as suffering, and presenting him in his daily life may invite positive reactions towards a character. Factors beyond the plot, however, such as bodily cues, a character's appearance, how a character stands, how they gesture, how often they smile, can also influence positive or negative responses. Since audio-visual media have more influence on viewers than what is narrated at the plot level, such factors also need to be considered when investigating reactions towards characters.[54] As I demonstrate in chapters 9 and 10, factors beyond the plot's surface can help convey and support elements narrated on the plot level. The fabric of motion pictures is woven from many threads, of which the plot is a single one. Besides nonverbal behaviour, another factor that can increase positive reactions towards a character is

[54] Plantinga, *Screen Stories*, 206.

a familiar character type. Such schemes help to identify a character quickly, for instance, as a superhero like Thor, a representant and defender of what is morally right like Ethan Hunt (Tom Cruise, *Mission: Impossible*, since 1996), James Bond, a Noble Outlaw like Robin Hood, a Byronic hero like Angel (David Boreanaz, *Buffy the Vampire Slaye*r 1997–2003; *Angel* 1999–2004) or Mr Rochester (*Jane Eyre* 1847). Even if viewers might be unable to name particular character types, such frequently used character types nonetheless can enhance the creation of a positive response. Thus, the historical contextualisation of characters comes into account for viewer reactions too.

I argue that there are different facets of responding positively to a character. I suggest that viewers start with a 'positive response' towards a character. A 'positive response', as I use the notion, describes a reaction in which the audience responds openly and with well-meaning interest to a character. If an audience responds positively toward a character, the character is not yet liked, but also not rebuked by the viewers and the audience shows interest in the character and his fate in the story. 'Likable' takes the audience's stance towards the character a step further and means the audience sees something positive within the character and viewers tend to be on the character's side. When a character is experienced as 'likable', the audience is pulled towards the character. From experiencing a character as 'likable', the viewers can then come to 'like' the character. When 'liking' occurs, the viewers truly root for a character and want him to 'win' at the story's end and are fully on the character's side.[55] As I outline below, there are difficulties connected with the vagueness of terms and concepts, such as 'empathy, 'sympathy', and 'identification' when it comes to the description of viewer reactions towards characters. Plantinga tries to unravel the blurriness in notions for responses towards characters and identifies different stages of attachment toward them. Part of the table given in his 2010 Essay "'I Followed The Rules, and They All Loved You More': Moral Judgment and Attitudes toward Fictional Characters in Film" illustrates different categories:

* Liking	Positive affect directed at a character for any number of reasons, from similarity to appearance.
* Sympathy	Concern for a character rooted in the perception that the character is suffering or has been treated unfairly. Usually accompanied by congruent emotions. May be weaker and shorter in duration than allegiance.
* Allegiance	Strong "pro" stance extended through large portions of a narrative. Often taken toward the protagonist and usually involving sympathies. Tends to be governed by moral judgment and/or the promise of moral improvement. [56]

In my study, the factors of creating a 'positive response' and 'likability', which eventually can establish a 'liking' for the character, are of main interest. 'Allegiance' comes close to my use

[55] Plantinga, *Screen Stories*, 195.
[56] Plantinga, "I Followed the Rules," 43.

of ‘liking’, and Plantinga argues that “[w]e have likings and sympathies for major or minor characters, but allegiances are typically reserved for protagonists or other major characters.”[57] ‘Allegiance’, the “strong pro” reaction connects the viewer closely with the protagonist. ‘Allegiance’, however, contains the factor of moral approval of a character’s actions. In this thesis, I do not presuppose a moral approval for the evil hero’s actions within the audience. Thus, ‘liking’ appears to be the most appropriate term for my study. When using the term ‘liking’, I also have a “strong pro” reaction for the evil hero in mind. Thus, my use of ‘liking’ is oriented towards ‘allegiance’ but excludes moral judgement or approval for the character’s actions. In my analysis, the terms ‘positive response’ and ‘likability’ occur more often than ‘liking’, as I am looking at extracts from Silver’s and Flint’s behaviour patterns. I assume that the characters’ nonverbal actions can invite positive responses and likability when seen in extracts, and, when seen as a whole, may merge into a liking of the character.

For a character to carry a story and elicit emotions, a connection needs to occur between the fictional being and the audience. When the audience likes a character, they root for the character, take his side, and support him through the story. In this thesis, I do not aim to offer nuanced classifications in which way viewers react to the characters in *Black Sails*. I assume a positive audience reaction towards the characters but do not go into the details of how to categorise such a response and whether the audience imagines themselves in the characters’ positions or if they react with a particular emotion to what happens to the characters in the serial. Hence, I do not use the common terms of ‘empathy’, ‘sympathy’, ‘allegiance’, or ‘identification’, as neither of these notions fully covers my use of ‘liking’ within the thesis. Moreover, these concepts argue how viewers feel for or with a character, which I do not. I assume a positive reaction towards the characters and viewers being on the characters side, but I do not conclude which feelings a viewer might share with or have for a character. However, since these terms still can be found in scholarly discussions, however, I introduce the concepts below.

‘Engagement’ is largely used in a neutral way to describe a connection between a fictional being and a recipient of the narrative. Plantinga expresses his preference for the term as it “is broader and more neutral, better able to embody the wide range of experiences that characterize our orientation toward characters, ranging from adulation to active dislike, from affective mimicry to revulsion.”[58] ‘Engagement’ as a theoretical notion encompasses a wide range of

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57 Plantinga, *Screen Stories*, 202.

58 Carl Plantinga, “The Scene of Empathy and the Human Face on Film,” *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion*, eds. Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith (Baltimore/Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 244.

reactions towards characters. As a viewer reaction, engagement is "highly complex. It refers to all and any elements of spectatorial experience that are based on or relate to characters."[59] 'Engagement', however, does not further outline how the viewers relate to a character. As I assume a positive viewer response, I therefore do not use the term 'engagement' to describe the presumed viewer reactions. The concept of engagement, that a viewer connects to a character, paves the way to other aspects in reactions to a character. Such as feeling 'empathy', 'sympathy', and 'identification' with a fictional being.

'Empathy' describes the understanding and sharing of someone else's feelings and emotions, and the term is common in scholarly discussions about character engagement in movies or literature. Empathetic viewers try to imagine how they themselves would feel in the character's situation.[60] Being empathetic is achieved through picturing being in someone else's shoes and empathy for a character entails taking on the character's perspective.[61] The notion of empathy carries the assumption that a reader or viewer shares a character's feelings. Coplan, however, stresses that viewers:

> maintain a clear sense of my own separate identity. In other words, although I am deeply engaged in what he or she—the target of my empathy—is undergoing, I never lose my separate sense of self.[62]

When empathetic, audience members comprehend and access what a character is experiencing, but the self-other differentiation remains intact and they do not underly the illusion of being the character.[63]

'Sympathy' describes that someone feels for someone else or is concerned about someone else. Sympathy is closely related to empathy and the term is also commonly used to describe viewer or reader reactions witch characters. Nonetheless, both concepts need to be distinguished. Coplan defines that "[b]ecause sympathy is a concern or feeling *for* another and his or her well-being, it typically involves an impulse or desire to help the other."[64] While 'empathy' means imagining oneself in someone else's position, 'sympathy' implies, for example, reactions like getting angry because a character is treated badly or unfair, but without sharing the experience or the actual feeling.[65] Not all scholars use the term 'sympathy' in the same way, which brings difficulties to the debates as misunderstandings can occur. Robert

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59 Coplan, "Empathy and Character Engagement," 97.
60 Coplan, "Understanding Empathy," 9.
61 Suzanne Keen, "Narrative Empathy," *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. Accessed February 10, 2020, https://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/node/42.html.
62 Coplan, "Empathic Engagement with Narrative Fictions," 143.
63 Coplan, "Empathic Engagement with Narrative Fictions," 144.
64 Coplan, "Empathic Engagement with Narrative Fictions," 145–6. Original emphasis.
65 Coplan, "Empathic Engagement with Narrative Fictions," 145.

Blanchet and Margrethe Bruun Vaage, for example, use the notion comparable to 'liking'.[66] Such a use of sympathy might be influenced by a definition based on the German 'Sympathie', which means having a positive feeling towards someone, and to like someone. Whether a viewer experiences sympathy or empathy appears to be difficult to judge and seems to need experimental arrangement in which how a viewer reacts is measured.

'Identification' is a concept often used to describe a connection between character and audience. 'Identification' is linked with 'empathy' because "empathy will very often be the consequence of a prolonged cognitive identification."[67] Berys Gaut, who researches the philosophy of film and film theory, is an advocate of the idea of 'identification' occurring within a viewer. Gaut argues that the concept of 'identification' is used to describe how a viewer cares for a character.[68] Tan also points out that, through identification, viewers understand the character's plans, and adopt the character's goals.[69] 'Identification' relates to how a viewer may care about a character and take their side. Janicke and Raney see 'identification' as crucial because 'identification' with a character enables a viewer to enjoy the narrative.[70] In their use of the term 'identification', Janicke and Raney bring it close to a synonym for 'liking a character' as I employ the notion. Identification used in such a way fleshes out the importance of a character to the audience, thus viewers or readers care about what happens next to the character. Both Janicke and Raney's and Gaut's use of the term represent a common use in scholarly discussions. Yet 'identification' has also been discussed in a critical light. Eder et al. argue against the concept of 'identification', as it indicates that spectators believe the actor to be the character. Instead, they suggest the use of "more encompassing umbrella terms like 'engagement', 'involvement' or 'parasocial interaction'."[71] The difficulties with 'identification' highlighted by Eder are concerns of other researchers too. Mittell, for instance, clarifies that "[…] viewers do not literally think of characters as standing in for them within the storyworld or imagine themselves as being characters, as implied by 'identification'."[72] Although 'identification' is a misleading term, it lingers in the scholarly debates and is, as outlined above, still frequently used. Eder et al. might provide alternative proposals, but these are open to

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66 Robert Blanchet and Margrethe Bruun Vaage, "Don, Peggy, and Other Fictional Friends?" Engaging with Characters in Television Series," *Projections* 6, no. 2 (2012): 27.

67 Grodal, *Moving Pictures*, 93.

68 Berys Gaut, "Identification and Emotion in Narrative Film," in *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition and Emotion*, eds. Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith, (Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 202.

69 Ed S. Tan, *Emotion and the Structure of Narrative Film: Film as an Emotion Machine* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1996), 173.

70 Janicke and Raney, "Modeling the Antihero Narrative Enjoyment Process," 533.

71 Eder, Jannidis and Schneider, "Characters in Fictional Worlds," 47.

72 Jason Mittell, *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 129.

interpretation too, as it is not specified if 'involvement' is to be understood and used in the same way as 'engagement'. 'Parasocial interaction', then, opens up a whole new field of argument and difficulties as it can indicate that viewers experience a feeling of friendship or personal relationships with the characters they see,[73] which creates a definition problem quite similar to 'identification' to which 'parasocial interaction' is meant to offer an alternative. Weighting the different scholarly terms and the difficulties and vagueness they can carry, the terms 'positive response', 'likability', and 'liking' seem the best and most neutral choices or words for the allocated scope of this thesis.

Different techniques can be used by serial creators to prompt viewers to respond positively to a character. In the next chapter I focus on the relationship between viewers and characters and also outline how nonverbal actions affect people's reactions towards others.

[73] Blanchet and Bruun Vaage, "Don, Peggy, and Other Fictional Friends?", 21–22.

5 Relationship Between Viewers and Characters

The previous chapter ended with the concepts of 'empathy', 'sympathy', 'identification, and 'allegiance', which describe how viewers may engage with characters. In this chapter, I expand towards a deeper analysis of the reactions themselves. A cornerstone for my thesis is the scholarly assumption that viewers react to characters comparable to individuals they encounter in real life.[1] For my analysis such an assumption allows me to transfer scholarly findings on people's reactions to nonverbal actions onto viewers' reactions to characters' body language. In the first section of this chapter, therefore, I focus on introducing the argument of a similarity in reactions to characters and humans, which is repeatedly used in studies on character engagement. I then move to aspects of viewers intuitively reacting towards characters through applying folk psychology. Folk psychology, as I outline later, is believed to be subconsciously used by humans to understand others and their behaviour better. Therefore, it strengthens the assumptions of a comparable reaction towards characters and humans. That viewers respond in an intuitional and subliminal manner to characters is a vital foundation for my analysis of viewers' possible reactions to the characters' nonverbal cues. Characters can have strong effects on audiences and influence viewers' thoughts and memory. After introducing the similarity in reaction to characters and real-life individuals, I argue that similarities, the viewers' feeling of having something in common with a character, enhances a liking for characters. Reactions to nonverbal actions are central for my analysis. The impact of viewed bodily motions is underpinned by the notion of mirror neurons, which I also introduce within this chapter.

Mirror neurons in the human brain help to understand others' behaviour and emotions. Scholars like Eder and Plantinga are aware of possible influences of mirror neurons in character engagement. Therefore, I introduce mirror neurons briefly in this chapter. Like folk psychology, I will not use mirror neurons in my argument. The effect of both mirror neurons and folk psychology cannot be examined within the allocated scope of this thesis. Nonetheless, these concepts are likely to have an influence on character engagement, thus it appears suitable to briefly introduce them to provide broad background knowledge. Moreover, introducing mirror neurons and folk psychology foregrounds that viewers react in complex ways to screen stories, which highlights how essential it is to not simply focus on the plot. Yet the effect of mirror neurons underlines an intuitive reaction to characters on screen. After arguing for an intuitive and subliminal reaction towards characters, the following section of this chapter focuses on nonverbal behaviour. Body language largely influences how people react to one another and

[1] Eder, *Die Figur im Film*, 36.

can also invite positive responses. Nonverbal cues hold a large stake in how people react to each other. Positive and inviting nonverbal behaviours, such as smiles or warm nonverbal actions like eyebrow flashes, head tilts, and open gestures are favoured by people in interaction and are answered with intuitive positive responses. I introduce positive nonverbal actions, and establish the effect of the first impression and outward appearance in general.

The last part of the chapter focuses on actors and the influence of actors, their stardom and appearance might have on viewers. Actors bridge the gap between the influence of the visual and the character as it is actors portraying the characters. Although viewers tend to blend actor and character into one image, largely putting the actor's persona in the background, the actor is presenting the character's traits and carrying out the character's nonverbal actions. Therefore, I briefly turn to the role of the actor and his possible effect on spectators. In doing so, I provide the theoretical background for the analysis of Silver's and Flint's bodily cues in chapters 9, and 10.

To a certain extent, people's responses toward fictional characters are comparable to responses towards other human beings. I state that the reaction is limited to an extent or degree because, as I discuss below, viewers are aware of the difference between fictional characters and real-life individuals, and therefore the reaction to characters and humans is not the same but still comparable. In a semiotic approach, Umberto Eco contends that responding to fictional entities has a long-standing tradition in human history.[2] Therefore, it is not surprising that viewers react to characters in a comparable way to their reactions to persons. For my analysis, such an assumption allows me to transfer scholarly findings on people's reactions to nonverbal actions onto viewers' reactions to characters' body language. Other researchers support similarities in the responses to persons and characters. Cognitive psychologist Steven Pinker aligns with Eco's view, reasoning that "[i]t would be surprising if fictional experiences didn't have similar effects to real ones because people often blur the two in their memories."[3] Arguing for an intermixing of fictional and real experiences highlights the human brain's difficulties in drawing clear lines between fiction and reality. That the brain may blur fictional and real encounters, however, does not mean that it is lost in fiction, as I outline below. In relevant fields of literature and media research, comparability in reactions towards fictional characters and human beings is accepted. Howard Sklar points out for narrative theory

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2 Umberto Eco, "On the Ontology of Fictional Characters: A Semiotic Approach," *Sign System Studies* 37, 1/2 (2009): 94.

3 Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: A History of Violence and Humanity* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 711.

> that characters that are rendered realistically can be considered similar to people we might encounter in life – indeed, life-*like* – and that readers frequently regard them and respond to them as such.[4]

Although *Black Sails* narrates a pirate story, the characters, as is discussed in chapters 9 and 10, are equipped with characteristics that viewers can relate to. Thus, the pirates can be seen as characters rendered realistically. Eder brings forward the idea of assimilable reactions between characters and real-life individuals in media studies, arguing that fictional beings are in many ways experienced comparably to real people.[5] Characters can be apprehended as potential friends, enemies, mentors, or lovers and love interests; possibilities, necessities for actions, evaluations of ongoings, and emotional reactions are connected with characters.[6] Eder's suggestion of comparable reactions toward fictional beings and real-life individuals does, however, not imply that people believe that characters are real or cannot distinguish between fictional beings and persons. Nuancing his observation, Eder highlights that viewers know that they see characters on screen.[7]

Researchers in cognitive media studies and cognitive psychology advocate the idea of comparable responses to characters and persons. Plantinga, for instance, posits for the death scene of Jack (Leonardo DiCaprio) in *Titanic* (1997, James Cameron) that viewers respond to Jack's lover Rose (Kate Winslet) as if she were a real person by having an intuitive sense of what she feels in dealing with the loss of a loved one.[8] Plantinga also stresses the complexity of such a reaction. Viewers and readers know when they encounter a fictional story. Yet, the human brain was not designed for interacting with visual media. Therefore, the brain may be aware of seeing a fictional story but still reacts in ways that are comparable to real-life encounters.[9] Thus, a motion picture creates a "twofoldness", a dual response in which characters are simultaneously experienced as 'real' and as fictional beings.[10] It appears to be Schrödinger's cat transferred onto characters; at the same time the viewer's brain is and is not aware of a character being a fictional entity, but the brain's 'basic' wiring leads to a reaction comparable to one towards other humans. Bruce McConachie, expert for arts and performance studies, argues for a "doubleness" of actor and characters in which audiences blend character and actor together into one image.[11] McConachie's observation aligns with what Plantinga refers to as

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4 Howard Sklar, *The Art of Sympathy in Fiction: Forms of Ethical and Emotional Persuasion* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2013), 9. Original emphasis.
5 Eder, *Die Figur im Film*, 36.
6 Eder, *Die Figur im Film*, 271–2.
7 Eder, *Die Figur im Film*, 220.
8 Plantinga, "Folk Psychology for Film Critics and Scholars," 26.
9 Plantinga, *Moving Viewers*, 117.
10 Plantinga, *Screen Stories*, 31.
11 McConachie, *Engaging Audiences*, 42.

"twofoldness", as "doubleness", and the blending of actor and fictional being into one also indicates that no clear line is drawn between real person and character. Mittell, moreover, emphasises that fictional beings can take up a lot of space in people's minds even when one is not watching and not actually seeing the characters:

> [i]f you immerse yourself within the fictional lives of Dexter Morgan or Tony Soprano, you are likely to think about their behaviours even while you are not watching television, perhaps positing how they would handle a situation in your own lives or imagining what they might be doing between the episodes.[12]

Mittel's argument that spectators keep thinking about characters strengthens the conjecture that the reactions towards fictional beings are comparable to real humans and also the blending together of character and person. Murray Smith notes that "[w]e can talk for long stretches about characters using exactly the same language as we do in relation to persons."[13] Like Mittel, Smith aligns the reactions towards characters closely to the reactions towards other humans, which supports the assumption from different fields of research that viewers experience fictional beings – to a certain extent – as they would real people. Bruun Vaage additionally notes that television serials activate similar mental processes within viewers as do encounters with individuals from real life.[14] Such a similarity in responses can be stirred wilfully or be used intuitively when making and responding to screen stories.

Plantinga suggests that audiences and filmmakers intuitively apply folk psychology when engaging with movies.[15] Filmmakers use different techniques to elicit viewer responses. Viewers respond to movies and the characters therein. Plantinga reasons that folk psychology is intuitively employed in both processes.[16] Humans intuitively apply folk psychology to explain, understand, and anticipate others' behaviour. Folk psychology entails the "ascription of mental states and the resulting description, explanation, prediction and justification of behaviour, action and the internal states of persons."[17] Folk psychology helps people to process encounters of daily life. The use of folk psychology regarding fiction leads to an understanding of characters as persons.[18] Although Plantinga argues for it, the assumed use of folk psychology within viewers is still controversial in scholarly approaches on screen stories and is not applied in this investigation. Although I do not investigate the use of folk psychology, it appears

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12 Mittell, "Lengthy Interactions with Hideous Men," 80.
13 Murray Smith, "Foreword: Consorting with Characters," in *Screening Characters: Theories of Character in Film, Television, and Interactive Media*, eds. Johannes Riis and Aaron Taylor (New York/London: Routledge, 2019) xii.
14 Bruun Vaage, *The Antihero in American Television*, vxii.
15 Plantinga, "Folk Psychology for Film Critics and Scholars," 27.
16 Plantinga, "Folk Psychology for Film Critics and Scholars," 27.
17 Tetens, "Folk Psychology," 1593.
18 Plantinga, "Folk Psychology for Film Critics and Scholars," 39.

reasonable to assume that viewers do apply it subconsciously. Therefore, Plantinga's observations on folk psychology can also emphasise a subconscious reaction towards character nonverbal actions. The viewer I assume in my analysis is likely then to show such an intuitive reaction towards the *Black Sails* characters and their nonverbal behaviour. Plantinga's conjecture of intuitive responses towards characters appears plausible considering that movies are generally made for an average audience rather than for experts or psychologists.[19] An instinctive harnessing of folk psychology in response to fiction, furthermore, supports the presumption that the mind does not always distinguish sharply between reality and fiction.

An intuitive reaction towards media makes it reasonable to suggest that viewers are likely to subconsciously react to a characters' nonverbal actions comparably as they would to humans. Thus, how a character looks, moves, gestures, and how often he smiles influences viewer response to the fictional being. The character's nonverbal actions merge with the impression evoked on the plot level. Together, an overall attitude and response towards a fictional being is created.

How much a person perceives another person as similar to oneself can enhance a positive response. The more similarity is experienced, the more positively the reaction to someone else will be. The influence of relatability can be transferred to the reactions towards fictional beings. As established in chapter 2, researchers agree that the creation of familiarity is a method to bring viewers closer to characters. Eder postulates that experienced similarity enhances interpersonal attraction and liking.[20] His position is strengthened by the observation of other researchers. Black et al., who understand the term 'identification' as comparable to my use of 'liking', for instance, emphasise that identification includes "understanding their [the characters'] point of view, empathizing with their plight, and/or finding them similar to the viewer/reader."[21] If audiences can find similarities between themselves and a character, a positive response towards the fictional being is more likely. Plantinga thus lists similarity as one of the factors that can elicit a liking.[22] Characters who are responded to best are "characters who are like us. We identify with them because they share our same flaws, our same desires and goals."[23] If a character appears relatable, audiences are likely to perceive the character positively.

Watching *Black Sails*, however, it is likely that the characters' perform actions that the viewers would not, such as committing crimes, killing, and hurting others. Such behaviours

19 Cámara Arenas, "Villains in Our Mind," 17.
20 Eder, *Die Figur im Film*, 639.
21 Black et al., "Who can Resist a Villain?", 2.
22 Plantinga, "I Followed the Rules," 42; see also Plantinga, *Moving Viewers*, 110.
23 Seger, *Creating Unforgettable Characters*, 174.

might repel the viewers. Yet, the story can work to bring the characters closer to the audience, despite the characters' actions. From an visual and aesthetic point of view, a character's nonverbal actions can support the creation of a feeling of similarity[24] between viewers and characters because "[i]f a source's nonverbal behaviors are immediate and likeable, we may be particularly motivated to hold attitudes similar to those that the source expresses."[25] Welcoming and friendly body language strengthens the motivation to find similarities with a person because that person appears to be pleasant, as I argue in chapter 9. If the use of nonverbal actions is very similar between two persons and they, for instance, use the same gestures whilst talking, a feeling of similarity is brought forward. Thus, a character's bodily cues can affect his perception by the viewer. Moreover, nonverbal actions can support the expression of what a character may be experiencing, thinking, or feeling. If a character is, for example, trembling, hunching his shoulders, and keeping his arms close to his sides, his nonverbal actions express fear. No spoken words are needed to convey the character's state of mind. Bodily motions can help to illustrate sadness, exhaustion, joy, fear, happiness, and so on. Thus, bodily cues can strengthen similarity experienced with a character by showing situations or feeling viewers can relate to and through expressing character emotions viewers are likely to have experienced themselves. Nonverbal actions and experienced similarities are important to reacting to characters as well as reacting to real-life individuals.

In personal interaction and reaction to others, "[n]onverbal behaviors are essentially viewed as a fundamental means by which people infer similarity with another person."[26] Such similarities refer to shared attitudes, knowledge, values, backgrounds, or even habits of talking.[27] More factors could be added as similarity is an elusive term and can differ from person to person. If someone is a passionate horse rider, she might see a similarity with a character who likes his horse where others don't feel they have something in common with him; if someone is a parent, this might trigger different feelings of similarity than for someone who does not have children. Finding something in common with someone else thus increases the chance for a positive response and rapport to develop. Sharing attitudes, ideas, beliefs, experiences, or in general "[f]inding common ground (similar interests, backgrounds, jobs, etc.) is the quickest way to develop rapport and kick your friend-making process into higher gear."[28]

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24 Judee K. Burgoon, Norah E. Dunbar and Chris Segrin, "Nonverbal Influence," in *The Persuasion Handbook: Development in Theory and Practice*, eds. James P. Dillard and Michael Pfau (Thousand Oaks/London/New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2002), 447.

25 Burgoon, Dunbar and Sergin, "Nonverbal Influence," 447.

26 Burgoon, Dunbar and Sergin, "Nonverbal Influence," 447.

27 Burgoon, Dunbar and Sergin, "Nonverbal Influence," 446. Original emphasis.

28 Schafer and Karlins, *The Like Switch*, 65.

If someone is seen as very similar to oneself, a positive response is more likely to evolve.[29] Behavioural experts emphasise that the creation of a liking is supported through experienced similarities because people feel vindicated in their own self-concept.[30] The self-concept entails the ideas and beliefs people have about themselves and who they are. If someone else shares viewpoints or has similar opinions, such experienced similarities with another person connect with a pleasing feeling and thus enhance a liking for each other. In interacting with others, humans favour other humans to whom they can relate, as we know from experience, and who show similarities to themselves.

5.1 The Influence of the Visual in Creating Reactions Toward Others

One factor affecting reactions towards characters can be mirror neurons. Mirror neurons are believed to support one person understanding another. Research agrees on the impact of nonverbal cues on how people interact and react to one another. Since the analysis of body language is an essential part of this thesis, in the following section, I introduce its importance and influence in human interactions.

Mirror neurons are believed to have a large share in influencing people's reactions to other people's motions. Mirror neurons allow people to comprehend others' actions as if the viewed motions were the onlookers' own acts. In allowing a reaction of comprehension, mirror neurons support a better understanding of the other person. I am aware that mirror neurons were only discovered in 1992 and have still not been fully explored. I do not build my argument on mirror neurons as my study does not aim nor have the technical facilities to examine the influence of mirror neurons in watching screen stories. But, as mirror neurons are already mentioned in the works of movie experts such as Plantinga[31] and Eder,[32] it is appropriate to introduce mirror neurons briefly as they are likely influencing how viewers react to characters. Mirror neurons also hold a stake in reacting to bodily movements and affect how people react towards others. Thus, they are likely to subconsciously influence character engagement too.

Eder, for instance, argues that mirror neurons allow the audience to feel the character's action almost as if they were the viewer's own;[33] and Plantinga outlines that mirror neurons affect how the spectators' reactions towards fictional beings will be.[34] Literature scholar Brian Boyd posits

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29 Hendrick and Hendrick, *Liking, Loving and Relating*, 19.
30 Burgoon, Dunbar and Sergin, "Nonverbal Influence," 446.
31 Plantinga, *Screen Stories*, 206.
32 Eder, "Ways of Being Close to Characters," 6.
33 Eder, *Die Figur im Film*, 205.
34 Plantinga, "I Followed the Rules," 48.

that mirror neurons help to understand somebody else's intentions and feelings.[35] Neuroscience scholar Marco Iacoboni underlines that mirror neurons influence people's reactions towards movies and movie characters.[36] Iacoboni highlights that mirror neurons influence reactions to real humans as well as reactions towards fictional entities. He exemplifies how mirror neurons are a key factor in reading and understanding others' actions: "[w]e achieve our very subtle understanding of other people thanks to certain collections of special cells in the brain called mirror neurons."[37] Mirror neurons enable humans to read and understand others' bodily movements and facial expressions without having to actively think about these nonverbal actions. With the example of tennis professional Roger Federer, Iacoboni illustrates that viewers understand a motion, playing tennis in the Federer example, even when they have never carried out the motions of a tennis match themselves.[38]

Applied to screen stories, the closeness between viewer and character might be strengthened because of firing mirror neurons. When someone moves on screen, mirror neurons are activated in a similar way they are when their own body stirs; even if most of the other's motion is invisible, the mirror neurons fire.[39] Mirror neurons reproduce a movement mentally; and even if the movement is carried out by characters, mirror neurons help to understand the emotions and intentions of that character.[40] Mirror neurons can support the establishment of an emotional bond or rapport.

The research on mirror neurons underpins that viewing someone and seeing how their body moves has a significant impact on the reactions toward others. Furthermore, it becomes even more plausible why humans intuitively react toward fictional characters – to a degree – as they would to real humans; the brain is wired to automatically read, mirror, and respond to other bodies and their motions. Eder notes: "[t]he behaviour of a character can thus [through mirror neurons] be mentally 'mirrored' and be felt compassionate."[41] The automatic reaction of mirror neurons allows viewers to participate in the characters' actions and enhance an understanding of the character. Understanding a character is crucial to creating liking. Mirror-neuron reactions to movements appear therefore to support the elicitation of liking. That mirror neurons may

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35 Brian Boyd, *On The Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction* (Massachusetts/London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2009), 104.

36 Marco Iacoboni, *Mirroring People. The New Science of How We Connect With Others* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2008), 4.

37 Iacoboni, *Mirroring People*, 4.

38 Iacoboni, *Mirroring People*, 5.

39 Iacoboni, *Mirroring People*, 259.

40 Iacoboni, *Mirroring People*, 5.

41 Eder, *Die Figur im Film*, 205. Original quote: "[d]as Verhalten der Figuren kann dadurch [Spiegelneuronen, K.F.] mental «gespiegelt» und mitempfunden werden."

enhance a liking does, however, not mean that they can enforce a positive response or even liking. Pinker notes that mirror neurons are only one part of the puzzle in reacting to others:

> [m]irror neurons notwithstanding, empathy is not a reflex that makes us sympathetic to everyone we lay eyes upon. It can be switched on and off, or thrown into reverse, by our construal of the relationship we have with a person.[42]

Mirror neurons alone do not create liking or disliking, yet they have a share in the overall development of a liking or disliking for someone else. Thus, the staging of a character, his nonverbal actions, and aesthetic presentation become even more important if the firing of mirror neurons has the effect scholars currently suppose.

Evoking positive reactions towards a character is based on targeting emotions. Nonverbal actions come into account here and Plantinga notes that

> [b]ody language, including the use of facial expression, posture, and gesture, is one of the primary means of communicating emotion both in social reality and in the motion pictures.[43]

My study concentrates on 'motion' and engages with the question of how particular motions may invite a positive response in character engagement.

Humans naturally decode others' motions.[44] Understanding others' bodily cues is essential for successful communication. Numerous scholars agree on the importance of nonverbal actions in social interaction.[45] Body language is a form of language that every species uses to communicate. Humans may use the spoken word most of the time but body language is an old feature and remains part of the communication process. How someone expresses nonverbal cues has an immediate impact on the response toward that person – or character. Humans prefer smiles, open gestures, and kindly expressions that do not indicate threats. Whether someone is taken seriously or not can also be influenced by nonverbal actions.[46] Psychology scholar Bella DePaulo emphasises the variety of nonverbal actions:

> [n]onverbal cues are a motley crew. Examples include such diverse behaviors as facial expressions; bodily orientations, movements and postures; vocal cues (other than words); aspects of physical appearance; interpersonal spacing; and touching.[47]

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42 Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, 713.
43 Plantinga, *Moving Viewers*, 121–122.
44 Flückiger, "Emotion Capture," 403.
45 E.g. Bonaiuto, DeDominicis and Ganucci Cancellieri, "Gestures, Postures, Gaze, and Movement in Work and Organization," 1350.
46 Burgoon, Dunbar and Sergin, "Nonverbal Influence," 447.
47 DePaulo, Bella M. "Nonverbal Behavior and Self-Presentation," *Psychological Bulletin* 111, no. 2 (1992): 205.

Bodily signs assemble from a large variety of movements, behaviours, use of voice, and limbs. Researchers posit that nonverbal actions are even more important in communication than the spoken word.[48] Andersen, for instance, emphasises that: "[n]onverbal communication is more meaningful and is the primary vehicle of interpersonal and relational communication."[49] Cuddy adds that body language and emotional expressions through different cultures have strong similarities.[50] In direct interaction with others, communication works best and uncomplicatedly if the involved nonverbal actions are decoded correctly, otherwise misunderstandings can occur. To prevent misinterpretation, human brains automatically decipher the bodily cues of others. Many individuals are likely not aware of their usage and reading of body language and do so automatically.[51] A prominent example of intuitive use of nonverbal actions is gesturing while the interlocutor is not even present, for instance, during phone calls. Even if applied subconsciously, nonverbal actions influence generating an opinion towards others as, for instance, Frauendorfer and Schmid Mast observe on the example of job interviews:

> [a]pplicants' nonverbal behavior seems to have a remarkable impact on the job interview outcome. The more immediacy (or positive) nonverbal behavior the applicant shows during the job interview, the more positive recruiter evaluations of the applicant are.[52]

Positive and inviting body language is answered with positive responses. Positive bodily cues include smiles, eye contact, nods, and open gestures.[53] Schafer moreover detects a quick raising of the eyebrows, also known as eyebrow flash, head tilts, and jutting out of the chin as internationally understood "friend signals."[54] Such "friend signals" are generally decoded as a friendly and non-threatening gesture and therefore responded to well by others. How someone moves, stands, and looks are vital for the creation of liking on a subtle but effective level. As nonverbal actions are processed automatically in nearly every situation, how fictional characters apply bodily cues, how they look, stand, and how often they smile can subtly affect viewers of a screen story and shift their attitude towards a character in a positive or negative direction. In reacting towards another person, nonverbal behaviour holds a large stake. Drawing on Eder's, Plantinga's, Coplan's, and others' insights that reactions towards fictional beings can be

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48 Even the trend of using emojis in written messages shows that an urge to support or qualify written messages with an additional decoding device, especially because the tone of voice to classify the context is missing.

49 Andersen, *Nonverbal Communication*, 29.

50 Cuddy, *Presence*, 36; see also her example about athletes from different cultures acting the same after winning or losing a competition, 153.

51 Schafer and Karlins, *The Like Switch*, 19.

52 Frauendorfer and Schmidt Mast, "The Impact of Nonverbal Behavior in the Job Interview," 227.

53 Bonaiuto, DeDominicis and Ganucci Cancellieri, "Gestures, Postures, Gaze, and Movement in Work and Organization," 1351.

54 Schafer and Karlins, *The Like Switch*, 3.

compared to those towards a human, it appears reasonable to say that nonverbal actions influence reactions towards fictional beings too.

Characters are also subject to the first impression they make on a viewer. The first impression paves the way for the initial reaction towards a character. Davis claims that the impact of the introduction of a character to the audience has been long known as "[f]irst impressions are tremendously important in drama, as they are in life, and Shakespeare knew the truth of this."[55] How someone is perceived at a first meeting can have a lasting impact on the developing relationship. Communication expert Kilian Soddemann points out how essential that famous first impression is: "[i]f the first judgment toward an unknown person is positive or negative [it] has often far-reaching consequences."[56] First impressions may influence what attitude is given to someone, and how well a relationship starts. A first impression can, of course, prove false or may need to be reconsidered, however one's initial idea of someone else's personality is built very quickly and, once formed, it tends to be firmly lodged in the mind. First impressions are powerful, but Hendrick and Hendrick emphasise that initial thoughts about someone else do not last forever. Feelings towards others can be adjusted and changed with more information added to a personality.[57] In comparison, Andersen implies: "[w]hat's really bad about first impressions is that they truly stick."[58] It is, of course, possible to revise a first impression, but it appears that once an impression is settled and positive (or negative) emotions are elicited and an initial liking or disliking is established, it becomes harder to change these ideas and attitudes regarding someone else, although it is possible. How quickly an impression changes within a person depends on the individual personality, previous experiences with others, and the circumstances under which the first meeting took place.

Creating a positive response, or liking, is necessary to bring people over to one's side.[59] As outlined before, that characters are liked, that the audience is on their side, is essential for the success of a narrative. If a positive emotional bond is achieved, people are likely to maintain the decision they made and to condone nasty habits or actions in others. This is not to say that an emotional bond will prevent a change of mind, but the character's behaviour, even if morally questionable, might be "excused with a tolerance that is quite remarkable."[60] Evil actions are

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55 Davis, *Creating Compelling Characters for Film TV and Radio*, 114.

56 Kilian Soddemann, *Sympathie und Kommunikation: Wie Sympathieurteile Einfluss auf das Zustandekommen, den Verlauf und den Erfolg interpersonaler Interaktionen nehmen* (Aachen: Shaker Verlag, 2013), 77. Original quote: "[o]b das erste Urteil gegenüber einer fremden Person positiv oder negativ ausfällt, hat weitgehende Konsequenzen."

57 Hendrick and Hendrick, *Liking, Loving and Relating*, 25.

58 Andersen, *Nonverbal Communication*, 32.

59 Robert Cockroft and Susan Cockroft, *Persuading People: An Introduction to Rhetoric*, 2nd edition (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, [1992] 2005), 55.

60 John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema: Television: Video* (London: Routledge, [1982] 1985), 139.

therefore "justified" by the audience, as Janicke and Raney consider necessary in enabling a positive response to evil hero characters.[61]A positive basic attitude towards a character, once achieved, grants that character more tolerance from the spectators. Such tolerance may run out eventually, but with an established positive response it is likely to take longer to be dismissed. Often the focus on how such a positive response or liking can be created is set on the plot. Yet, screen stories are a complex network of different influences and cinematic techniques working together and creating the narrative as a whole. Therefore, nonverbal influences too, not only the plot, must be considered in evoking audience responses.

Part of forming the first impression is the looks of someone, which also belongs to the field of nonverbal actions. Former FBI Agent Joe Navarro summarises how wide and complex body language is:

> [n]onverbal communication, often referred to as nonverbal behavior or body language, is a means of transmitting information – just like the spoken word – except it is achieved through facial expressions, gestures, touching (haptics), physical movements (kinesics), posture, body adornment (clothes, jewelry, hairstyle, tattoos, etc.), and even the tone, timbre and volume of an individual's voice (rather than spoken content).[62]

The overall appearance does influence another's reaction. Clothing belongs to appearance and gives a first idea about a person; the better the clothes are, the better their owner may be received, as Argyle and Trower state: "[f]ashionable and smart clothes are associated with good qualities, and well-dressed people have been found to get more information and cooperation from complete strangers."[63] Quality in clothing is associated with quality in personality. Jewellery, hairstyle, and other outwardly noticeable items likewise play a part in the initial impression. A person's overall appearance influences the qualities at the start connected with that person.

Beauty is an additional factor in generating the first impression. Hendrick and Hendrick state: "[b]eauty is treated by our society as a valuable commodity."[64] Beauty is associated with favourable attributes throughout society. Thus, someone perceived as beautiful is often immediately assumed to be a pleasant and qualified person. What is considered beautiful is subject to personal preferences to a degree, yet media, advertisements, actors, models, musicians, and people featured in public life set a benchmark of what to consider as beautiful in western cultures. The media influence is likely to, subconsciously, affect what humans

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61 Janicke and Raney, "Modeling the Antihero Narrative Enjoyment Process," 536.
62 Navarro and Karlins, *What Every Body is Saying*, 2–4.
63 Argyle and Trower, *Person to Person*, 79.
64 Hendrick and Hendrick, *Liking, Loving and Relating*, 43; see also Viren Swami, and Adrian Furnham, *The Psychology of Physical Attraction* (London/New York: Routledge, 2008), 10.

perceive as beautiful and what is not. Television serials can use such a general agreement on what is beautiful to their favour through casting actors who match with the current trend for beauty. Serial creators may also use costume and mask to shape the physical appearance of their characters. Moreover, techniques like lighting and camera settings can highlight beautiful features of an actor. Someone who is ascribed a pleasant outward appearance gets kinder and more positive reactions. Psychologist Kevin Dutton observes that a good-looking defendant has better chances of a mild judgement in a trial.[65] Being considered as handsome can also lead to positive outcomes in other areas of life. Social-perception scholar Daniel E. Re and psychologist Nicholas O. Rule explain that beauty has a positive impact on how someone is perceived: "[i]n fact, attractive people are viewed more positively in general, a phenomenon which is known as the *attractiveness halo effect*."[66] The halo effect contributes to people being judged affirmably and to a degree they become detached from their abilities or actions. The overall impression is that the outside of a person, or character, is significant for audience perception, as the body mediates a message regarding its 'owner' how the body looks and is presented that affects the elicited reaction.[67] Physical appearance is closely intertwined with nonverbal actions and influences reactions towards others. For screen stories, Davis proposes: "[a]s appearance matters to us in 'real-life', so similarly it must matter to the script writer, the creator of characters."[68] How people move and look has an enormous impact on how others perceive them.

Hence, in a serial like *Black Sails*, the outward appearance of the evil heroes can be influenced in a way that highlights features viewers are likely to find pleasant; in doing so, the spectators may subtly be motivated to take a positive stance towards the characters and see them as likable. The use of warm nonverbal actions that are favoured by people, such as smiles, inviting and open gestures, head tilts, or a friendly raising of the eyebrows can have positive effects on the audience perception of the characters.

In the previous sections, I established how the visual components in interactions and body language affect people's reactions towards others. In this final section of this chapter, I turn to actors and their possible influence on viewers. In actors, visuality and nonverbal actions come together; and actors are a central element for screen stories featuring human beings. In

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65 Kevin Dutton, *Gehringeflüster: Die Fähigkeit, andere zu beeinflussen*, 2. Auflage (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, [2010] 2011), 55.

66 Daniel E. Re and Nicholas O. Rule, "Appearance and Physiognomy," in *APA Handbook of Nonverbal Communication*, ed. Hyisung C. Hwang and Mark G. Frank, (Washington D.C: American Psychological Association, 2016), 221. Original emphasis.

67 Hendrick and Hendrick, *Liking, Loving, and Relating*, 60.

68 Davis, *Creating Compelling Characters for Film TV and Radio*, 30; see also Grawe, *Neue Erzählstrategien in US-amerikanischen Fernsehserien*, 22.

portraying James Flint and John Silver, the actors' Toby Stephens and Luke Arnold shape the characters analysed here, while carrying out the nonverbal motions of the characters. Therefore, I briefly outline first the influence that actors may have on the audience, followed by the potential response of the audience towards characters in the following.

The influence of well-known actors is presumably larger as there are many previous roles that can be related to them. However, any actor is likely to affect the viewer's response as he has a physical appearance which, as shown in the previous section, influences the reactions of humans towards others. In portraying the *Black Sail*s evil heroes James Flint and John Silver, the actors Toby Stephens and Luke Arnold carry out the nonverbal actions of the characters that are analysed in detail in chapters 9 and 10, and the actors are interlinked with the characters and the characters' characteristics and perception. Characters, as outlined in chapter 4, are fictional beings with an inner life and the ability to think and act. Characters are in the centre of every screen story. If a screen story features humans, actors are performing the roles of characters, giving "substance to the psychological lives of characters."[69] Actors are vital to bringing characters to life and letting the viewers form a bond with them. When characters are not animated but portrayed by real-life individuals, the process of "doubleness" comes into account in the audiences' rection towards the characters.

McConachie points out the process of "doubleness", in which the audience blends actor and character into one image.[70] McConachie makes this same argument for theatre but notes that it is not limited to the stage as sports spectators, for instance, show similar reactions. As "doubleness" refers to a cognitive process, it appears reasonable that viewers of screen stories automatically apply "doubleness" likewise to "'blend' the actor and the character together into one image or one concept of identity, to enable their affective immersion in the performance."[71] McConachie specifies that in the process of blending,

> spectators take knowledge from three different mental concepts – certain qualities from the conceptual primitive 'actor' (that he/she is alive, can move, has certain vocal characteristics, etc.) some knowledge of the 'character' (that he/she has a certain past, faces specific situations in the present, etc.) and the cognitive concept of 'identity.'[72]

McConachie's observation already states that the actor holds a stake in the process of "doubleness" and, therefore, necessarily influences the viewers. For film, Barsam and Monahan summarise that:

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69 Richard J.Gerrig, *Experiencing Narrative Worlds: On the Psychological Activities of Reading* (New Haven/London: Westview Press, [1993] 1998), 37.
70 McConachie, *Engaging Audiences*, 42.
71 McConachie, *Engaging Audiences*, 42.
72 McConachie, *Engaging Audiences*, 42.

> [s]creen acting [...] is an art in which an actor uses imagination, intelligence, psychology, memory, vocal technique, facial expressions, body language […] to realize […] the character created by the screenwriter.[73]

The visual component of the actor's presence, body, and appearance becomes even clearer here. Consequently, actors do, to a degree, affect character engagement and how spectators react to what they see. Moreover, audiences may be interested in actors or watch certain screen stories because a certain actor appears therein. Winterhoff-Spurk notes that elevated interest in which actors play a particular role for film audiences can be detected from the early 20th century. The reason for the elevated interest is based on the fact that from 1912 more and more evening-filling movies were produced.[74] From an initial interest, actors quickly rise to publicity, fame, and even stardom. In *Playing for Real*, researcher Tom Cantrell and theatre and film expert Mary Luckhurst interviewed actors to explore the question of how they approach roles of playing real people. One of the actors interviewed was Jeremy Irons. Cantrell and Luckhurst note that "Irons acknowledged that audiences probably came more to see him perform Macmillan than for the playwright's representation of Macmillan."[75] This quote illustrates that the choice of actor can motivate the audience to watch a screen story and may be more important for an initial interest in the play, movie, or serial, than its actual topic or the characters within it. Employing a well-known actor appears to draw the attention more to the actor than to the character. Thus, stars are likely to be more in the spotlight than the characters they are portraying. Plantinga, however, reminds us that "[s]tars fascinate us audiences, but spectators hardly lend their allegiance to stars automatically."[76] Plantinga seems to contradict Cantrell, Luckhurst and Irons here on the first glance. But on the second glance, both observations seem to actually belong together. Irons notes that spectators came to see him in the first place and the play in the second place. Stars do attract audiences and the first reaction towards the character played by the start might be on a more positive level due to the star playing it. Plantinga then adds to this observation by highlighting that stars do "fascinate us audiences", but he also points out the influence of the fictional character. Allegiance, which Plantinga uses in a nearly similar way as I do 'liking', does not occur automatically simply because a star is playing a certain character. If spectators do not like the fictional character, the allegiance is likely not be achieved. Plantinga's observation teases out the importance of other factors supporting und

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73 Barsam and Monahan, *Looking at Movies*, 272.

74 Peter Winterhoff-Spurk, *Kalte Herzen: Wie das Fernsehen unseren Charakter formt* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2005), 64.

75 Tom Cantrell, and Mary Luckhurst. *Playing for Real. Actors on Playing Real People* (London/New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 2010), 13.

76 Plantinga, *Moving Viewers*, 108.

underpinning positive responses towards characters. The actors' appearance also comes into account here.

If an actor is considered good looking, a romantic interest might arise that can affect the spectator reactions toward the character and shift their stance towards the character slightly in a more positive reaction. Kreutzer et al. observe that an erotic curiosity might arise in the audience for stars.[77] Aligning with Kreutzer et al., Eder asserts that romantic dreams can be directed towards a star.[78] Kathrina Glitre, for instance, argues that a star like Cary Grant "would add romantic value"[79] to the movie he appears in and that such a romantic value of the character is connected directly with the actor Grant. Murray Smith, however, highlights that for current characters and television serials common explanations for positive responses towards characters are not adequate anymore as

> these shows defeat any simple response of either sympathy or antipathy, pleasure or revulsion, toward their protagonists, cultivating instead a complex and profound ambivalence toward them.[80]

A romantic interest may be directed towards a certain actor, but as Smith outlines, screen stories have evolved and shows and characters within screen stories have become much more complex since *Arsenic and Old Lace* (1994) featuring Cary Grant. Thus, a romantic interest can create an initial interest and enhance an initial positive reaction, yet it is no guarantee to elicit a positive response towards a character. Due to complex character design and actors not necessarily being focused on one type of character they play, a romantic interest becomes even more difficult to judge. A positive reaction can also occur independently from a romantic interest, especially because women can consider other women as good looking and men other men – without necessarily having a romantic interest, and reactions toward screen stories and characters therein are not necessarily connected to gender.[81] However, as I show in chapter 9.1, someone who is considered good looking is likely to be judged less harshly, even if his actions are morally questionable. Romantic interest in conjunction with stardom and good looks may support a more positive audience response.[82] Of these factors, being considered good looking, appears to be, as I outline in chapter 9.1.1, a higher influence than romantic interest. Presumably

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77 Oliver Kreutzer, Sebastian Lauritz, Claudia Mehlinger and Peter Moormann, *Filmanalyse* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2014), 268.

78 Jens Eder, *Gefühle in Filmen und Fernsehen* (Habilitation, Fakultät für Geisteswissenschaften. Fachbereich Sprache, Literatur, Medien, Universität Hamburg,(2010), 9.

79 Kathrina Glitre, "Character and the Star Vehicle. The Impact of Casting Cary Grant," in *Screening Characters: Theories of Character in Film, Television, and Interactive Media,* eds. Johannes Riis and Aaron Taylor (New York/London: Routledge, 2019), 40.

80 Smith, "Foreword: Consorting with Characters," xv.

81 Ang, *Living Room Wars*, 93.

82 Plantinga, "I Followed the Rules," 42.

it happens more frequently that someone is considered as good looking by several people than the developing of a romantic interest would occur. Developing a romantic interest seems to require a deeper connection and more engagement than simply stating that someone is good looking. Moreover, considering someone as good looking is not bound to gender boundaries or sexual orientation.

Stars and their appearance may attract viewers and their interest in a program. If a star is involved whom the viewers like, the reaction to the character portrayed by the star might be responded to more positively because it has an 'actor bonus.' In a wider context, the word 'star' in both Eder's and Kreutzer's observations might simply be replaced with the word 'actor'. Even if an actor is not known to the audience beforehand, their performance, looks, and body can still affect the spectators' reactions.

In *Black Sails*, Toby Stephens and Luke Arnold had a different level of popularity and stardom before shooting the serial. Whilst Luke Arnold mostly played characters appearing in television shows in one or two episodes, Toby Stephens played larger roles, including the James Bond villain, Gustav Graves, in *Die Another Day* (2002) and Mr Rochester in a 2006 BBC production of *Jane Eyre*. It is, therefore, more likely that he is the *Black Sails* actor whom audiences meet with a certain expectation and connection to previous roles in mind. For example, they may expect the actor Toby Stephens to play an ambivalent role right away because of him portraying a Byronic hero and a James Bond villain before.

The actors influence the perception of the characters and the characters influence the perception of the actors. In chapter 6, I introduce *Black Sails* as a quality television serial. Some of the characteristics of such a serial are its ongoing story development and its long-term narrative. *Black Sails* ran for four seasons. It appears reasonable, then, to assume that viewer expectations regarding an actor playing a character due to previous roles is replaced by the way he interprets the developing character within the serial and starts overwriting the associations with the actor's real-life persona, replacing them with character traits instead.

Hence, the character of James Flint might initially benefit from the roles and expectations connected with the actor Toby Stephens as a skilled actor likely to play a complex and interesting character and generating diverse audience interest and expectations because of previous roles. As Jeremy Irons points out for his performance of Macmillan quoted above, the initial audience interest for *Black Sails* and particularly Flint could be actor-focused rather than character-related.

However, as I show in the case study analysis, James Flint fulfils both the Byronic hero characteristics of characters such as Mr Rochester and the villainous traits of a villain, such as

those featured in James Bond movies. How Stephens plays Flint could potentially cater to diverse audience interests as Flint combines some character traits of a Bond villain, and, as I show in chapter 8, also aligns with the Byronic hero including more sensitive and vulnerable aspects as well. If spectators have an expectation about the actor Toby Stephens portraying a character that is likely to be ambiguous, the presentation of James Flint is likely to quickly underline this point of view. Character complexity and the character's nonverbal actions additionally help to invite positive viewer responses. Even if viewers do know the actor beforehand and have a well-intended first reaction because of being familiar with him, the actor's influence and reputation is unlikely to influence the character engagement for a long time but just for an initial point. Since Flint is an evil hero who acts violently, cruelly and recklessly (see chapter 7.3), techniques to avoid early viewer disconnection from the character and to encourage viewer flexibility in their response towards a character are of importance.

For Luke Arnold, viewer expectations are likely to be less influenced by their prior knowledge of the actor because he was not deeply linked to a certain role before *Black Sails*. As my analysis shows, he is presented as a greedy and selfish impostor at the beginning of the serial, which highlights the importance of factors underneath the plot in evoking a more positive response towards him too.

While the above assumptions provide some insights into potential audience expectations based on their knowledge of the actors and their prior roles, an in-depth study would require an empirical study and can thus not be accommodated within the scope of this thesis. Within the framework of this thesis, the brief exploration of actor–character relationships and their impact on potential audience reactions merely aims to create an awareness of potential audience dispositions as an additional factor that could create positive responses. In summary, both characters are portrayed by two human beings and their looks, movements, and perhaps even previous appearances in screen stories can subconsciously affect how viewers react to the characters portrayed by Toby Stephens and Luke Arnold. As the serial progresses and audiences focus more on the characters in *Black Sails* rather than on the actors' prior roles, the impact of 'actor-based' reactions could subside and the character in *Black Sails* is likely to move to the foreground as he is the person of interest in the narrative and story development of *Black Sails.*

6 *Black Sails* as Quality Television and Quality TV Characteristics

In the previous chapter, I established the relationship between spectators and fictional beings. I also stated the influence visual effects may have on the viewers' responses towards characters. In this chapter, I introduce the characteristics of quality television. In chapter 2, I noted that the term 'quality' is controversial and not to be understood as a quality label. I employ the term 'quality television' as it is largely used within scholarly research, and to avoid confusion in the distinction between 'normal' and 'quality' television programs. I begin this chapter by introducing the terms of 'series', and 'serial', which are often used to distinguish between 'normal' (series), and 'quality' (serial) television. Then I elaborate on the quality television characteristic of overlapping episodes and plot lines.

Due to a slow style of narrative, called "slow-burn-narration",[1] or "long-term narration",[2] episodes in serials are not closed; serials present an ongoing story that continuously unfolds itself. The slow-burn narration is a basal feature for quality television on which all the other characteristics can build because a slow way of narrating entails giving events and characters time to develop, even over several episodes. Serial producers do not need to rush through the story but can allow it to unfold slowly. Therefore, a major characteristic of quality television is that events or developments can stretch out over several episodes rather than being solved within one. Building on the slow-narration style are the characteristics of the character arc and character backstories, which I discuss next. The character arc describes the development of characters' bridging, archlike, over the serial and several episodes. Moreover, character's backstories are used and characters can have complex features. As a result serials tend not to focus their narrative perspective on a single hero but give the points of view for several characters. Through this technique, viewers can experience characters and story with different facets and form a more nuanced response to characters because the audience becomes familiar with how the action is experienced through several protagonists. The next section establishes that serials tend to focus on darker topics than the often more easy-going series; moreover, serials often have evil heroes in their centre, which adds to a darker mood within the narrative. The last section of this chapter engages with serial audiences that can be specifically targeted. Through the distribution via streaming, it becomes possible for shows and audiences to come together in a niche about a special interest. Such an interest may be a topic, pirates for example, or a style, or a genre. Introducing the specific characteristics of quality television here provides

1 Mohr, *Slow-Burn-Narration,* 5.

2 Margrethe Bruun Vaage, "Blinded by the Familiarity: Partiality, Morality, and Engagement with Television Series," in *Cognitive Media Theory,* eds. Ted Nannicelli and Paul Taberham (New York: Routledge, 2014) 275.

the necessary background knowledge for the discussion of the *Black Sails* characters James Flint and John Silver in chapters 9 and 10. Since *Black Sails* is a serial, being familiar with the specific way of narrating creates a more rounded picture of the show and arguments made in the analytical part of the present thesis.

In serials, events occurring during an episode have a lasting impact on the plot and are relevant in the next episode(s). The audience is thus encouraged to follow the story constantly, otherwise, viewers may lose the thread of the proceedings in the plot.[3] Conversely, in a series, the events occurring in each episode have none or only little effect on characters and story and events from one episode are mostly erased when the next starts.[4] What happens in one episode hardly affects the next. Few changes in the initial situation take place in a series and each episode has mainly the same initial point.[5] A good example of a series is sitcoms, like *How I Met Your Mother* (2005–2014), which generally starts every episode with roughly the same preconditions as the previous one. The specific notion 'double episode' is sometimes used in series to highlight that an episode is not closed as it would normally be. Thus, 'double episode' is used to describe the occasional special when the plot is stretched over two episodes. One episode then often ends with a cliffhanger as the narrative is not finished after one episode as usual. Such double episode cliffhangers often happen between two seasons to encourage viewers to keep their interest in the story and the show. Despite clear differences between the two formats, the borders between 'series' and 'serial' oscillate, and the two narrative types are seen as ideals.[6] Serial and series influence each other and do not appear in pure form,[7] and numerous shows also embed traits of the other format.[8]

Most series also include elements of evolving of their protagonists. In *Roseanne* (1988–1997, and 2018), or *Married with Children* (1987–1997), for example, audience and producers had to deal with the fact that the children were growing up, which necessarily had a lasting effect on the show. Even in an animated program like *The Simpsons* (since 1989), some changes remain in the serials story line and are nor 'erased' by the end of an episode. For example, such as the death of Bleeding Gums Murphy, and Lisa Simpson becoming a vegetarian and a Buddhist. The US production *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995–2001) offers a good example of a mixture of both structures. The overall story is about the *USS Voyager*'s search for a way back to Earth from the Delta Quadrant where the ship was trapped. This quest is regularly mentioned

3 Mittell, "Film and Television Narrative," 164.
4 Thompson, *Television's Second Golden Age*, 33.
5 Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, 125. See also Thompson, *Television's Second Golden Age*, 33.
6 Mohr, *Slow-Burn-Narration,* 21."
7 Mittell, "Film and Television Narrative," 164.
8 Blanchet, "Quality TV," 38.

but not every episode centres around it. Often single episodes follow the traditional *Star Trek* idea and concentrate on the adventures the crew has in outer space, regularly without one encounter influencing the next episode. It is possible to watch several episodes of *Voyager* without the predominant problem being mentioned. However, in a serial, the influences of events or developments within the story world are more sustainable. Lisa Simpson becoming a vegetarian has no crucial impact on the storyline (except for a few episodes); in contrast, Debra discovering that her brother is a serial killer in *Dexter* (2006–2013) influences the ongoing of the whole story, as does Tommy Shelby's affair with the spy Grace in *Peaky Blinders* (since 2013).

Integrating two storylines appears more nuanced in serials, where usually two or more plot lines are interwoven. Serials are more comparable to novels in their setup, where the writers can give the story time to unfold, come back to earlier narrated events later on, and, due to the long-term narrative, integrate more than one plot line. One plot line in a serial often contains the plot of the very episode, the other follows a character and/or the overarching narrative which traverses the whole serial. Armbrust clarifies:

> [m]ost of the contemporary shows mix aspects of closed and open dramaturgy: they cover per episode a closed storyline, but the main characters are additionally integrated into ongoing storylines that slowly move on from episode to episode […].[9]

Serials can encompass a shorter and closed path of narrative every week as well as an ongoing long-term one. García illustrates this "double narrative structure" with the example of *Hannibal*.[10] *Hannibal* uses a crime that needs to be solved in every episode as a case of the week. This García calls the "anthology plot", which lets the serial resemble a weekly crime series, as the 'crime-of-the week' is solved within the anthology plot. Simultaneously, however, the serial also has a "running plot", the ongoing narrative, which focuses on revealing Hannibal Lecter's criminal activities.[11] Solving one case in every episode of *Hannibal* complies with viewers' anticipations for a crime show and the long-lasting plot maintains their curiosity. *Dexter*, for example, uses a specific enemy per season whom Dexter has to overcome and whose crimes form the major case for Dexter's police department to solve.

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9 Armbrust, "Serielle Perspektiven auf Patienten und Ärzte," 106. Original quote: "[d]ie meisten zeitgenössischen Serien vermischen dabei Aspekte geschlossener und offener Dramaturgie: Sie behandeln pro Episode einen abgeschlossenen Handlungsbogen, die Hauptfiguren werden jedoch zusätzlich auch in langfristige Handlungsbögen eingebunden, die von Episode zu Episode nur langsam voranschreiten […]."

10 Alberto N. García, "Aesthetic Enjoyment and Repugnance in *Hannibal*: Character Engagement, Temporal Prolongation and Mise-en-scène," *Cuadernos.info* 44 (2019): 215.

11 García, "Aesthetic Enjoyment and Repugnance in *Hannibal*," 215.

Other serials like *Black Sails, Peaky Blinders,* or *Star Trek: Picard,* however, do not follow the concept of the disclosure of one plot thread per episode anymore as *Hannibal* does with the weekly crime story. Those serials are not crime-based shows and thus abandon the weekly crime-solving part of the plot. The serials mentioned above do not use a closed thread within the ongoing narrative and focus simply on the developing overall plot. All serials, however, are generally composed of an ongoing narrative where events or storylines can stretch over several episodes without being disclosed in a time foreseeable for the viewers. Such a plot design increases the need to watch every episode to not lose track of the plot. In *Black Sails*, therefore, an earlier event might influence another event that only comes up much later in the serial. A reminder at the beginning of every episode sums up the most important events. These recaps, however, are not part of the actual storyline. Aligning with the necessary devotion to a serial, Greg M. Smith underlines that serial viewers tend to be loyal to their favourite show.[12] Most importantly for this study, the overlapping storylines and episodes enable a detailed character presentation and give room for character development, another characteristic of quality television.

Long-term narrating can help to deepen the relationship between viewers and characters as it enables nuanced characterisations and different insights into characters. The creators of a serial can design more detailed characters with different and even contradicting features. The slow-burn narration enables a nuanced character introduction without being confusing through giving too much information at once. Instead, the information about a character can be presented bit-by-bit to the audience. Serial creators can use different techniques to convey information about characters. A deeper knowledge of serial characters, for instance, is enabled through different perspectives on them throughout the serial:

> the more we know about a character through revelations of backstory, relationships and interior thoughts, the more likely we will come to regard them as an ally in our journey through the storyworld.[13]

Mittell's naming of the character as an "ally" of the viewer illustrates that more knowledge about the character may help the viewer form a bond with the character and to truly be on the character's side. The slow style of narrating gradually allows attributes and features to be added to characters little by little.[14] Additionally, serial characters can learn from, or must deal with,

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12 Greg M. Smith, "How Much Serial Is in Your Serial?" in *Serielle Formen: Von den frühen Film-Serials zu aktuellen Quality-TV und online Serien*, eds. Robert Blanchet, Kristina Köhler and Julia Zutavern (Marburg: Schüren, 2014), 98.

13 Mittell, "Lengthy Interactions with Hideous Men," 76.

14 Mohr, *Slow-Burn-Narration*, 103.

the consequences of previous actions (episodes). How characters deal with events and how it affects them adds deeper shades to their traits; furthermore, how characters react to or are influenced by incidents or ongoings around them congregates and eventually creates a character arc. The character arc names the developing of a character in the context of the narration.[15] Serials "offer, due to their extensive duration, the ideal ground to characterise people in detail."[16] In *Black Sails*, for instance, the character of James Flint is presented with more and more detail during the serial. In chapter 8 I show how Flint struggles between two identities which adds complexity to his character. Characters introduced with several nuances can affect the audience's response. Because serial creators can design characters who are provided with the character arc and the possibility to develop and change, the audience's attitude towards the characters might change likewise. In a serial, it appears that the character–audience relationship is less stable than, for example, in a series.

A feature harnessed in creating nuanced characters throughout a serial may be introducing the backstory. The backstory describes what happened to a character before the narrative starts.[17] The backstory provides additional information about characters and can help to understand their aims, ideas, and behaviour. Bruun Vaage notes that humans tend to like what they know best,[18] and the backstory can help let the audience know the characters better through revealing more and more information about their past. Knowing the characters' past might also affect how their actions in the present time of the serial are seen and judged. Character actions or habits might become more understandable through the backstory. Quality television serials offer their creators an ideal foundation to introduce characters nuanced from different points of view allowing information regarding them to be revealed more and more. Thus, the serial format can feature evil heroes and yet invite positive responses towards morally questionable-acting protagonists through using character complexity. *Black Sails* shows the past of James Flint in great detail spread out over the narrative. It is narrated with great awareness of why he became the notorious pirate captain he is as the serial starts and the catastrophes and tragedies overshadowing his life, which I further explain in chapters 8 and 10. A feature enabling serials to narrate backstories without appearing redundant is the ongoing narrative including several storylines. The relevance of backstories is mentioned in *Black Sails* itself when captain Flint

15 Smith, "How Much Serial Is in Your Serial?", 107.

16 Armbrust, "Serielle Perspektiven auf Patienten und Ärzte," 105. Original quote: "Serien bieten aufgrund ihrer umfangreichen Gesamtdauer einen idealen Raum für die ausführliche Charakterisierung von Menschen." See also Wolfgang Hagen, "Dexter on TV: Das Parasoziale und die Archetypen der Serien-Narration," in *Serielle Formen: Von den frühen Film-Serials zu aktuellen Quality-TV und online Serien*, eds. Robert Blanchet, Kristina Köhler and Julia Zutavern (Marburg: Schüren, 2014), 253.

17 Davis, *Creating Compelling Characters for Film TV and Radio*, 23.

18 Bruun Vaage, *The Antihero in American Television*, 44.

explains to the young women Abigail Ashe why Billy Bones became a pirate after Billy's parents were killed and he became an orphan. It is not a backstory conveyed through filmic scenes, yet it fleshes out the effect of knowing why someone acted in a certain way and how such knowledge might change or influence a stance taken towards a character. That Flint later in the serial also wants to know Silver's past underlines the importance of backstory – not only for the viewers but also as a basis for judgement used within the serial itself – once more.

Serials are often created with a multi-perspective narrative, which does not focus on one character and how they experience the storyworld and the happenings therein. Some serials instead change between the viewpoints of different protagonists,[19] for example, *Hannibal*. In the centre are the experiences of Hannibal Lecter, Jack Crawford, and Will Graham. Serial creators introduced events through the different perspectives of their characters, rather than through just one angle. For the audience, such a wide focus enhances the possibility to explore diverse positions on events through the characters' different understandings on what is going on. Introducing different perspectives enables the spectators form a well-informed stance towards a character, and possibly change, their position towards characters. How one character experiences an event differently from another character can be conveyed through a multi-perspective narrative. Seeing the point of view, and possible state of mind, from several characters may increase a flexibility and changeability in the audience's attitude towards the characters. Several viewpoints of one event or story can equip the viewer with more information and new insights into characters, for instance, if a character reacts in a different way than anticipated. A character initially liked in the serial's narrative, therefore, might become a disliked one, or vice versa. The creators of *Black Sails*, Jonathan E. Steinberg and Robert Levine, also use multi-perspective narrative as the show follows different characters and their experiences within the same framing plot line. Next to John Silver and James Flint, who are analysed in chapters 8 to 10, Charles Vane, Jack Rackham, and Eleanor Guthrie are further main characters whom the narrative follows. In *Black Sails*, similar to other serials, at least one main character has a dark or tragic backstory, leading to that character behaving in a morally questionable way in the serial's present. Serial characters often being designed as evil heroes leads to the serial characteristics of having such morally questionable-acting protagonists and narrating an overall darkly and seriously drawn story.

Topics dealt with within a serial are often more serious and darker than in a series.[20] In a series, the humorous component is higher, and a series often focuses on daily-life problems.

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19 Mohr, *Slow-Burn-Narration*, 78.

20 Grawe, *Neue Erzählstrategien in US-amerikanischen Fernsehserien*, 7.

Serials, in contrast, can focus on murderers, crimes, dark forces, or the possible ending of the world. *Black Sails*, for instance, introduces topics such as free will, free love, slavery, trust and betrayal, honesty, and the fine line between friends and enemies. Scenes of torture, murder, and executions are shown in detail with disturbing staging. An example is the death scene of pirate Charles Vane in episode XVII, where Vane is publicly hanged. The serial does not underlie his dying scene with music but rather erases all sounds except for Vane gasping for breath until he finally suffocates. Such a setup makes the scene very intense and illustrates the darker mood and less easy-going attitude in a serial. A serial, however, can include amusing scenes, or dialogues too. The characters may be given moments of love and happiness. Yet, seeing the serial as a whole, the narrative is presented in a darker and more serious mood.

A frequent featuring of evil heroes adds to a gloomier mood in serials too. Mohr observes that in serials the border between good and bad becomes indistinct and binaries are not necessarily in place anymore.[21] Good and evil, like Poore and Alt noted for Victorian literature, are likewise not set categories in serials featuring evil heroes anymore. None of the characters in *Black Sails*, for instance, appears to be good in the sense of a traditional hero who is willing to serve and sacrifice his own needs on behalf of others.[22] The evil heroes in *Black Sails* tend to put their own interests first, even if that harms others. Yet none of the *Black Sails*' main characters is presented as plain evil either. In the entire serial, two characters seem to be entirely villainous and therefore absolutely unliked, Ned Low and Captain Berringer, but both only have a short appearance and do not belong to the main characters. The evil heroes in the story pend between acting morally questionable actions and heroic and loyal behaviour, which makes the border between good and evil in *Black Sails* watery. Which character is 'good' and which one 'bad' can change more than once in a television serial as binaries lose distinction. Serial creators can, due to the slow-burn-narration, also introduce several characters. Because serials are ongoing and narrated slowly, more characters can appear without confusing the viewers.

A large cast is another characteristic of quality television serials.[23] The high number of protagonists facilitates viewers' search for a preferred protagonist. From the several characters, viewers are likely to find one or two they root for. Choosing one or more characters as favourite makes it easier – and necessary – to take up a position toward the other characters. If one of the other characters is disliked, it might strengthen the favoured character if the favoured character has a dispute with a disliked character. The large number of characters also allows revising the choice of favoured character. Since there are several leading characters, it becomes easier to

21 Mohr, *Slow-Burn-Narration*, 319.
22 Vogler, *The Writer's Journey*, 39.
23 Thompson, *Television's Second Golden Age*, 15.

root for another one if the previous liked one loses his positive perception within the audience. Due to their specific features, serials underly more changes than series and thus audiences may need to change their attitude towards a character too. Frank Kelleter, whose research focuses on American cultural and media history, underlines that serials are always in motion.[24] For the audience, the specific design of a serial, its being in motion, means that viewers can never be sure about an event or a character. Protagonists may develop and change, an event can be presented from two different points of view and thus influence the audience's stance towards a character. Hence, forming a set and non-changing opinion towards characters becomes harder for the viewers. In *Black Sails*, for instance, the attitude within viewers towards characters like John Silver, James Flint, or Billy Bones might change on the basis of their actions over time. The characters' actions might enhance a positive attitude and when they change their behaviour and act unkindly towards another character, as Billy Bones, for example, does later in the narrative, a positive reaction might be withdrawn and the stance towards the character might change. Bones is a character likely to be responded well to at the beginning of the narration, he is strong, neat looking, not overly cruel, loyal and involved in some humorous scenes. All factors' audiences respond well to. However, as the narration develops, Billy Bones becomes more avid for power and aims to overthrow captain Flint. Billy turns into a traitor. Since, as I show in chapters 8, 9, and 10, viewers are likely to be drawn onto Flint's side, Billy's actions are likely to cause a change of mind from the spectators regarding the character Billy Bones as he is threatening Flint. I argue that Billy betraying his friends and endangering the character Flint will cause the audience to detach from his character and start to dislike him. Thus, Billy is an example for a serial character to which the audience changes their stance due to events in the long running serial format.

Television serials can target their audiences more specifically than a traditional show running on television. Serials are largely distributed via streaming services, meaning they can be specifically accessed at any chosen time. The more differentiated story outline and narrative form in serials divides the spectators into smaller groups because "there are channels and streaming options devoted to specific audience niches."[25] Distributing the narrative via streaming and on-demand channels allows serials to reach smaller but loyal audiences rather than trying to satisfy a large group of people through stories designed to interest everyone.[26] For *Black Sails*, for example, it is likely that the viewers like pirates, history, and action, hence,

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[24] Frank Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking at Popular Seriality," in *Media of Serial Narrative*, ed. Frank Kelleter (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2017), 14.

[25] García, "Aesthetic enjoyment and repugnance in *Hannibal."* 212.

[26] Smith, "How Much Serial Is in Your Serial?", 98.

the show can target these specific areas and does not need to fulfil other requirements to appeal to a non-specific audience. That serial viewers tend to be loyal, moreover, enhances the possibility for the serial creators to develop their characters.[27] A loyal audience likely means that the audience will watch the serial regularly, following its story closely. Thus, time can be taken to introduce character features, backstory, and character arc. A loyal audience also likely knows and/or remembers information already given about a character. Therefore, the serial creators can continue developing the character without having to recap everything that has happened to him before or information that was revealed about the character in earlier episodes. The developing characters demand certain flexibility in audiences' attitudes and views towards protagonists and the show by the viewers. Thus, the introduced criteria describing a television serial in itself demand certain flexibility in their views.

In summary, quality television is classified by the large cast, the blurriness of the borders between good and evil, and the ongoing narrative allowing the creation of complex characters, which can make it easier for viewers to find something they like within morally questionable-acting protagonists. Viewers get to know the protagonists better and familiarity, being able to relate to a character and find something in common, can enhance the development of a positive response. The way serials narrate and introduce their characters is ideal to invite beneficial reactions towards evil heroes. After introducing the current quality television serial, the next chapter engages with *Black Sails* in the context of literary history and its connection with *Treasure Island*.

[27] Smith, "How Much Serial Is in Your Serial?", 98.

7 *Black* Sails and its Evil Characters in the Context of Literary and Film History

In this chapter I focus on literary history and how *Black Sails* can be contextualised within it. Establishing the influence of literary traditions and character types on the serial is a vital foundation for my analysis of features of Milton's Satan and the Byronic hero within the *Black Sails* character Flint, which I carry out in the following chapter.

After having introduced *Black Sails* as a quality television serial in the previous chapter, here I outline *Black Sails*' connection with Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* to which the serial narrates a fictional prequel.[1] Before turning to *Treasure Island*, I briefly engage with the historical development of evil characters that includes a move towards greater complexity but also shows that ambiguous characters are not a new phenomenon in literature. Following that, I focus on *Treasure Island*, introducing its form of publication, its reception, and its influence in literary and film history. *Treasure Island* had, and still has, a significant impact on screen stories as the novel has been the topic of several movies. *Black Sails* stands in line with various film adaptations of *Treasure Island*. Other than most adaptations, *Black Sails* shares the serialised publication method with the novel. Furthermore, I discuss which 'evil' characters are contained in *Treasure Island* as especially the character of the cook, Long John Silver, has created a myth. Even though Silver is, functionally and through characteristics, the story's villain, he is not drawn as entirely villainous but is given more nuanced shades. Such characterisations can be found in today's evil heroes and also in *Black Sails*, where John Silver is a central protagonist.

From *Treasure Island*, this chapter moves then to *Black Sails*, emphasising its relationship with Stevenson's novel. I also introduce the types of 'evil' characters for *Black Sails*. Other than *Treasure Island*, the serial does not include an entirely good character but then, there are hardly any plain evil characters in it either. *Black Sails* uses many nuances in between good and bad. Awareness of the ambiguousness in the serial's character design here is vital for the following analysis because it is helpful to keep in mind that there is no 'good-versus-evil' scenario set-up when analysing the characters in chapters 8 to 10. After establishing the serial's set-up with ambiguous characters, I argue, as the last part of this chapter, why I do not largely see Noble Outlaw characteristics in the characters I analyse, James Flint and John Silver. Rather, I argue that Flint aligns with Milton's Satan and the Byronic hero character type, for

[1] Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island*, ed. John Sutherland (Ontario: Broadview Editions, 2012).

which I use the example of Byron's Conrad from *The Corsair*. The comparison of Flint, Satan, and Conrad follows in chapter 8.

7.1 The Interest in Character Motivations; Noble Outlaw, and Byronic Hero

Television serials, which I introduced in the previous chapter, are a relatively recent phenomenon. One characteristic of contemporary television serials is that several of those serials centre around evil heroes, morally questionable-acting and yet liked main characters. The evil heroes are provided with complex features rather than being stereotypes. As explained above, such characters are not a new occurrence. While the trend in screen stories to focus on evil heroes as protagonists is hardly 30 years old, in literature the morally questionable-acting protagonists look back on a long tradition. As Poore outlines, the Victorian age strongly bids farewell to the binaries defining villain and hero.[2] Aligning with Alt, who notes the arising interest for the villains' inner life in the Victorian age,[3] Poore highlights that ambiguous characters, those with villainous traits who are responded well to, are no invention of the 21st century.[4] Poore outlines the characters' complexity, stressing that

> it would be an error to presume that Victorian popular entertainment created a black-and-white conflict between hero and villain that the twentieth and twenty-first century then reinterpreted, finding interesting 'shades of grey' in the anti-hero and the sympathetic villain that the Victorians simply hadn't recognised.[5]

From the starting point in the late 18th century,[6] different types of evil characters, such as the romantic villain, the gothic villain, and the Byronic hero, developed and were often responded well to. This fascination with evil characters has persisted and now encompasses even novels for young readers.[7] Children's literature scholar Dominik Becher points to fantasy literature as an example where several evil characters, such as "vampire-lovers, anti-heroes, criminals, demons, wizards, and witches"[8] inhabit stories read by (young) adults frequently. Evil has not lost its attraction, and ambiguous evil still is of genre-overlapping interest. As Poore observes, this attraction has resulted in villains, having become "big business in modern media fictions,

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2 Poore, "The Villain-Effect," 2.
3 Alt, *Ästhetik des Bösen*, 16.
4 Poore, "The Villain-Effect," 2.
5 Poore, "The Villain-Effect," 2.
6 Marlowe and Shakespeare also had ambiguous characters and Milton's Satan is constantly challenging binaries. It is the Victorian age, however, in which the loss of binaries finally flourishes.
7 Dominik Becher, "The Disappearance of Evil? The Anti-Villain as Identification Figure for Young Readers," in *Fictions and Metafictions of Evil: Essays in Literary Criticism, Comparative Literature and Interdisciplinary Studies*, eds. Grażyna M.T. Branny and J. Gill Holland (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013), 151.
8 Becher, "The Disappearance of Evil?", 152.

often displacing the heroic figures for whom they were once a secondary foil."[9] Villains, or evil heroes, have developed to be the main and liked characters of several of today's television serials. Poore emphasises that in their movement across time, genre, and media, villains can be reassessed as protagonists.[10]

Developments in motion pictures largely mirror the earlier shifts in literary interest in evil characters. As motion pictures are a relatively young medium, the development occurred quicker as literature had already introduced subjects, motifs, and character types. Starting with a good-versus-evil scheme, in screen stories an interest for the characters' inner life, motivations, and reasons for their morally questionable behaviour arise and more ambiguous characters occur. Some of the best-known examples for such ambiguous villains are Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer) from Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), who is vividly remembered for his 'tears in rain' monologue at the movie's end.[11] With especially this monologue, Roy is also presented as emotional and empathetic, foregrounding his ambiguousness even more. Another congenial antagonist in Jonathan Demme's *Silence of the Lambs* (1992) is Hannibal Lector (Anthony Hopkins). As I mentioned in chapter 2, Lecter is admired for his wit, sarcasm and humour, pulling the audience to his side; whereas his cruel actions can push viewers away. A third example of an ambiguous character is to be found in Neil Jordan's *Interview with the Vampire* (1994) with the character Lestat de Lioncourt (Tom Cruise). Lestat is torn between the longing for a companion to ease his loneliness and his sadistic cruelty repelling possible companions. These few examples give an idea of villains and antagonists pending between pure evil to rather ambivalent to even likable. Such characters illustrate the trend towards more complex antagonists and villains because they move away from the tradition of plain bad opponents. Poore outlines that in recent years villains' stories tend to be foregrounded in such narratives.[12] The villains are given more complex features to enable them to be liked protagonists.

In television, similarly to literature, a wide range of 'evilness' is present and characters have moved on from being plainly villainous, to evil heroes, such as Hannibal (Mads Mikkelsen), from the television serial *Hannibal*. Poore argues that television serials, due to their long-running format, need to have complex villains who are not simply wicked. Yet, the narratives'

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9 Poore "The Villain-Effect," 10.

10 Poore "The Villain-Effect," 10.

11 "I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain. Time to die." Ridley Scott, Blade Runner, Warner Brothers, 1982, (Los Angeles: Warner Bors/Universal Pictures, Original DVD, 2008), 1 disc.

12 Poore, "The Villain-Effect," 12.

heroes also need to be difficult, darkly shaded, and tormented in order to sustain the story over the several hundreds of hours of running time.[13] This aligns with the features of quality television serials, which I introduced in chapter 6. Evil heroes in television serials can lack the characteristics of being good deep within, misguided, or actually intending to do good.[14] In adult screen stories the characters navigate through dark shades; they are compromised and conflicted and show "an inverted or illegal form of justice."[15] Poore and Alt note that this current iteration of the villain reaches back to the late 18th century literature when romanticism invited a shifting in the binaries of good and evil. Yet, even before the 18th century, there were complex villainous characters. Alt sees these already in early-modern drama in the plays of Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Racine.[16]

Following ambivalent evil in early-modern plays is a character strongly influenced by these but also leading the way to the paradigm shift in romanticism: Milton's Satan from *Paradise Lost*. The focus of this study invites an exploration of Satan and the character type of the Byronic hero in terms of them serving as precursors to selected characters in the quality television serial *Black Sails*. As I argue in chapter 8, the character of James Flint shares significant characteristics with the Byronic hero but especially with Milton's Satan. In the following sections, I introduce the relevant characteristics of Satan and the Byronic hero character type.

The devil doubtlessly is one very old representative of 'evil' behaviour and consequences. In medieval times he was the representation of absolute evil. In Passion Plays, the devil acts as tempter and serves as an example of how not to behave.[17] With Marlowe, Satan came to a different role on stage. Religious studies scholar Burton Russell claims that Marlowe's Mephistopheles also has some psychological depth.[18] However, it is difficult to argue this way because he acts completely without any specific kind of motivation. Marlowe's Mephistopheles does what Faustus asks him to, even trying to make Faustus aware of the consequences for Faustus's soul. The devil here is simply a tool to get the action going and he has lost his malevolent behaviour. One of the most impressive literary satanic figures, and perhaps the one with the most psychological depth, is Milton's Satan in *Paradise Lost*. He is driven by pride, but also by the longing for free will.

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13 Poore, "The Villain-Effect," 11
14 Poore, "The Villain-Effect," 12.
15 Poore, "The Villain-Effect," 12.
16 Alt, *Ästhetik des Bösen*, 12.
17 Passion Plays are still performed in Oberammergau where they started around 1663.
18 Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles. The Devil in the Modern World* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1986), 65.

John Milton's Satan is a memorable character. Burton Russell noted in 1986 that "[t]he deeper power of Milton's Satan raised a long-standing debate as to whether Satan was the real hero of *Paradise Lost*."[19] More recently, English literature expert Mike Edwards agrees with the observation regarding the possibility of Satan being seen as the hero of *Paradise Lost*.[20] In his design of Satan as a character, Milton anticipated the change in clear binaries towards good and evil. He gave his satanic character several characteristics and did not just render him as 'evil'. In the following, I introduce Satan's most critical characteristics as I will draw on a selection of those in the next chapter.

Central for the character of Satan in *Paradise Lost* is his pride, as it is pride that leads to his downfall. Thorslev notes that Milton's Satan shares his "hubris" with Marlowe's Faustus but that it is this very human pride that adds a trace of nobility to the character.[21] Satan's pride denies him from becoming subordinate to Messiah, the son of God. Instead, Satan and his followers rebel against God and are banished from Heaven into Hell. Being an outcast is a vital criterion as it defines and shapes Satan and his actions in the poem. One of the first reactions of Satan to being an outcast is to accept his new status and let go every thought of seeking a reunion with Heaven. Satan formulates his decision with the popular quote "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven."[22] Satan, moreover, is categorised through his eloquence. His speeches contribute significantly to the character's lasting impression. Neil Forsyth notes: "[i]t is especially those speeches to his fellow devils, and later to himself, in the first quarter of the poem that makes Satan such a compelling character."[23] The ability to express himself well, which Milton grants to his Satan, influences other characteristics of the character. One is his status as skilled leader. Through a speech, Satan tears his followers out of their lethargy after their fall from heaven and brings them back to action against God and Heaven.[24] Satan demonstrates his leadership qualities in a military way during the fight in Heaven and later as "director of the Stygian Council."[25] The other feature of Satan influenced by and expressed through his skills as orator is his doubt. On top of Mount Niphates[26] and spotting Eve in Eden,[27] Satan expresses doubts about his past and present actions. Additionally, he is characterised as

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19 Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles*, 97.
20 Edwards *John Milton: Paradise Lost*, 84.
21 Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero*, 189.
22 Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book 1, line 263.
23 Forsyth, "Satan," 18.
24 David Loewenstein, "The Radical Religious Politics of *Paradise Lost*," in *A New Companion to Milton*, ed. Thomas N. Corns (West Sussex, 2016), 377.
25 Frank S. Kastor, *Milton and the Literary Satan* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1974), 58.
26 Paris, *Heaven and its Discontents,* 53.
27 Forsyth, "Satan," 24.

fearless, as he actively lets his fear go.[28] He represents a certain free will as his demons are allowed to speak their minds in Hell,[29] and he shows defiance as he is not willing to give in after he lost the first battle in Hell but is looking for a way of taking revenge. These are the central characteristics of Milton's Satan. In chapter 8, I argue that Satan shows complexity and even has contradicting traits. With his ambiguity, Satan became one of the several predecessors of the Byronic heroes whose development and characteristics I introduce in the following sections.

The Byronic hero is an ambiguous and highly influential character type in literature that amalgamates traits of different predecessors.[30] Byron's narrative poem *Childe Harold* (1812–1818) is often named as the origin of the Byronic hero.[31] The Byronic hero combines traits of villains, antagonists, and heroes as defined above. In creating his own hero, Byron borrowed characteristics from several figures of literary history and blended them into one character type. Not being simply based on one or two inspirations but a wide range of forebears, some heroes, and some villains, some straight-forward acting, some hesitating in their actions, might contribute to the huge and lasting impact of the character type Byron developed and which made him "one of the most recognizable figures in European literature"[32] with a powerful impact on both audience and fellow writers. Having several ancestors likely also contributes to the Byronic hero's ambiguousness and ambivalence.

The admiration for the Byronic hero during Byron's era is evident and made the poet famous.[33] The verse tale centring around pirate Conrad in the bestseller *The Corsair*, for example "sold ten thousand copies on the day of publication […] and in just over a month it had gone through seven editions totalling twenty-five thousand copies."[34] The Byronic hero immediately attracted attention and was well received. Romanticism scholar Sarah Wootton observes that "[t]he genealogy of this cultural archetype has become congested – over-crowded even – with the Brontës' heroes and Bram Stoker's Dracula more familiar today than Byron's protagonists."[35] Lord Byron created a powerful character type, but it was other authors who enabled the Byronic hero to become a literary tradition. Byronic heroes coming to mind quickly

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28 Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 4, 108.
29 Paris, *Heaven and its Discontents*, 19.
30 Adil Jamil, "Manly of Wycherley and the Byronic Hero: Character Prototype and Type," *European Scientific Journal* 13, April (2017): 445.
31 Lois Potter, "Sherwood Forest and the Byronic Robin Hood," in *Robin Hood in Popular Culture: Violence, Transgression, and Justice*, ed. Thomas Hahn (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000), 215.
32 Richard Lansdown, *The Cambridge Introduction to Byron* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 87.
33 Potter, "Sherwood Forest and the Byronic Robin Hood," 217.
34 Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero*, 146.
35 Wootton, *Byronic Heroes in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing and Screen Adaptation*, 2.

are characters like the creature from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1823), Mr Rochester from *Jane Eyre* (Charlotte Brontë 1847), or Eric, Gaston Leroux's *Le Fantôme de l'Opéra* (1909–1910**)**. Wootton's enumeration of popular characters illustrates that the Byronic hero was used by numerous writers and poets. His wide variety of ancestors and characteristics offers writers a large range to develop deep and colourful characters.

The Byronic hero is not an easy character type to judge since he combines heroic and villainous features, making him morally ambiguous. Generally, he is responded to positively by the audience, but he does have dark shades and 'crimes.' Thorslev argues that

> [w]ith Byronic Heroes 'The mind is its own place'; each hero is, in a sense, *jenseits von Gut und Böse*; he creates his own human values, and the 'sins' of which he repents are transgressions of his own peculiar moral codes.[36]

Using a quote from Milton's *Satan* and the title of Friedrich Nietzsche's essay on moral values, Thorslev labels the Byronic hero as beyond good and evil. The character type might function as a story's hero and be viewed positively, yet he is equipped with more ambiguous features and habits than a traditionally good, knightly hero, or even the Noble Outlaw. The "transgressions of his own peculiar moral codes" is, moreover, crucial for a society of outlaws. The example of *The Corsair* and *Black Sails* will show later on how the pirates design moral codes that allow them to hunt down other ships without undertaking a transgression of the moral codes guiding their communities. Being in exile is one of the key features of the Byronic hero, Stein notes that "[t]he Byronic hero is a loner and an outcast; he can be arrogant, contemptuous of human beings, bad-tempered, overbearing, cold, ruthless, and emotionless."[37] The short list Stein gives illustrates that the Byronic hero is not simply infused with noble, pleasant, and gentle features; being egotistic, impatient, and not very sociable can be aspects of this character type too.[38] The Byronic hero contains both dark and more pleasant attitudes, as he might also show love for music and art, courtesy toward women, and a strong sense of honour.[39] Stein labels the Byronic hero as "a creature of extremes"[40] and the wide range of characteristics generates a complex character and gives writers a broad foundation to work with. The Byronic hero assembles traits from his predecessors, merged into one type of protagonist.

His influence continues to the present day, including in television. In scholarly studies, a focus is largely set on television serials. Even if these shows are not discussed as serials, some

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36 Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero*, 152.
37 Stein, *The Byronic Hero in Film, Fiction, and Television*, 2.
38 Stein, *The Byronic Hero in Film, Fiction, and Television*, 2.
39 Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero*, 8.
40 Stein, T*he Byronic Hero in Film, Fiction, and Television*, 20.

of them, as I argue below, show characteristics of serials and their protagonists share traits of evil heroes.

The Byronic hero has not lost his attraction to audiences.[41] Wootton notes that "[a]udiences today are as drawn to the romance of the outlaw as they were in the nineteenth century, vicariously experiencing a powerful autonomy before reaffirming a shared humanity."[42] Outlaws and rebellious figures are still in vogue, the Byronic hero character type complies with the interest in outlaw heroes. The Byronic hero can, for instance, be found in western movies, gangster stories, action movies, and science fiction.[43]

For the presence of the Byronic hero in television and cinema, Atara Stein's *The Byronic Hero in Film, Fiction, and Television* analyses the character's presence in popular culture up to 2004. Stein, however, does not largely discuss the presence of such character types in current television serials. Characters like Mr Rochester, Frankenstein's creature, modern versions of *Dracula*, the vampire series *Angel*, and *The Terminator*,[44] or even Severus Snape[45] from *Harry Potter* are evidence of the Byronic hero's influence and footprint in entertainment history, including a repeated presence today. These characters often have crimes they committed or assisted to be carried out in their past, they are brooding in their presence, and do not fully belong to the society they live in, which gives them a role as outcast.

For contemporary films, Stein argues that the movie *The Crow* (Alex Proyas 1994) delivers a main character who sums up the traits of a Byronic hero: "Eric [Draven] is the quintessence of the Byronic hero. He is dark, tortured, and moody, if not mad altogether."[46] The character of Eric Draven (Brandon Lee) resembles most of the features assigned to a Byronic hero: he has a dark soul, he is super human, he loves music, he is not cruel towards the innocent but shows no mercy towards his enemies whom he hunts down purposefully; he has inner doubts, and shows courtesy towards women. Therefore, as Steins shows, Eric consists of several traits comprising a Byronic hero. Stein does not look into quality television serials but with characters like Q (John DeLancie, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* 1997–1994; *Star Trek: Voyager* 1995–2001) and Angel she investigates characters from shows that display characteristics of a serial. The *Star Trek* format approximates a serial, and *Angel* may even be classified as one. In her analysis of the character Angel, Stein detects Byronic hero traits, such as "[h]e [Angel] is beset

41 This goes for the Noble Outlaw as well.
42 Wootton, *Byronic Heroes in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing and Screen Adaptation*, 6.
43 Stein, *The Byronic Hero in Film, Fiction, and Television*, 1; see also Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 142.
44 Stein, *The Byronic Hero in Film, Fiction, and Television*, 1–2.
45 Jamil, "Manly of Wycherley and the Byronic Hero," 445.
46 Stein, *The Byronic Hero in Film, Fiction, and Television*, 55.

by melancholy, guilt, and what the other characters tend to refer to as 'brooding'."[47] The Byronic hero traits found in Angel are convincing and a little surprising. However, Stein also highlights Angel's ambiguity, which is illustrated through flashbacks in his past as a notorious vampire, which present him as a sadistic torturer of his victims,[48] and in the present of the show in 2000, Angel violates moral norms likewise when he leaves two men to be killed by vampires.[49] Such characters show that Byronic heroes can be found in popular culture and in evolving media formats. As *Angel* has a string of serial characteristics, Stein's observation illustrates that serials can centre around evil heroes. Moreover, through his occasionally morally questionable actions, Angel shares features with the evil hero. Thus, evil heroes may originate from Byronic heroes.

While the presence and influence of the Byronic hero in film and television has been considered, for Milton's Satan such an in-depth investigation has not yet been carried out. Thus, in chapter 8 I will give a sample comparison of Satan and his characteristics that can be found in the contemporary serial character of *Black Sails*' James Flint.

7.2 *Treasure Island* and its Influence on the Assessment of 'Evil' Characters

Treasure Island gained its success and influence when it was published as one volume rather than its initial publication as serialised parts in a juvenile magazine. The character of Long John Silver and his complexity, dark shading, and cruelty is, as shown below, a possible explanation why *Treasure Island* was not initially successful. After Stevenson's death, however, the story became, together with *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), the author's literary legacy and influenced largely how pirate stories were told. In the next part, I highlight how, after a difficult start, *Treasure Island* gained influence, and emphasise the type of evil character Long John Silver represents.

Although a coherent adventure novel is the form in which Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* is commonly known, the story was first released in weekly parts and not as one volume. Under the pseudonym of 'Captain George North', Stevenson published *Treasure Island* as a serialised story in the weekly halfpenny magazine. Between 1881 and 1882, Stevenson's pirate narrative appeared in 18 parts in *Young Folks*.[50] Scottish literature scholar Jason A. Pierce notes that "[t]he September 24 issue of *Young Folks* contained a notice that '*Treasure Island* ... a deeply interesting romance of sailors in the olden style' would appear in

47 Stein, *The Byronic Hero in Film, Fiction, and Television*, 213.
48 Stein, *The Byronic Hero in Film, Fiction, and Television*, 214.
49 Stein, *The Byronic Hero in Film, Fiction, and Television*, 215.
50 John Sutherland, "Introduction," in *Treasure Island* (Ontario: Broadview Editions, 2012), 22.

the following number."[51] Although published every week and advertised within *Young Folks* itself, in its first attempt in the weekly magazine *Treasure Island* did not go beyond average success and did not increase the sales of the magazine.[52] In *Young Folks*, *Treasure Island* never came to be a lead item and only the first chapter contained illustrations,[53] which highlight the visibility of a story. Researchers agree that story, publication form, and audience did not align. English literature scholar Robert P. Irvine notes that *Treasure Island* should be read as an adventure free from engagements with social categories.[54] Even though *Treasure Island* is an adventure novel, the narrative of said adventure might have been too complex, psychologically deep, and disturbing for the readers of the weekly halfpenny magazine.[55] Instead of being a juvenile romance, *Treasure Island* addresses adult readers. Pierce states:

> *Treasure Island* has many of the basic accoutrements of the 'boys' adventure story' genre - the young protagonist, the crew of villains, the exotic setting - yet the story's moral ambiguity suggests a more mature audience. Having developed his writing style in such overtly literary periodicals as the *Athenaeum*, *Temple Bar*, and the like, Stevenson was unable to adapt his technique to oblige the tastes of *Young Folks*' audience. As a result, those most impressed by *Treasure Island* were not the juveniles who subscribed to the periodical but the *literati* who could appreciate the author's style and the story's complexity.[56]

Stevenson's style and the story's theme might have been too advanced for most of the *Young Folks* readers; Sutherland even labels the story as "too disturbing" for young readers at the time of its publication in the late 19th century.[57] Although *Treasure Island* was, initially, aimed at not quite the right audience, it later gained a lasting impact in literary and film history.

Eventually, *Treasure Island* obtained a remarkable influence and prevailed long over other pirate stories which did not leave a lasting or influential impression, as, for instance, Walter Scott's *The Pirate* (1822) or Captain Marryat's novel, also named *The Pirate* (1836).[58] Stevenson was not the only author in the 19th century engaging in the theme of piracy, yet other pirate stories did not bring it to such popularity, and while other concurrent pirate narratives fell into oblivion, Stevenson's story won and maintained a large influence.[59] *Treasure Island*

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51 Jason A. Pierce, "The Belle Lettrist and the People's Publisher; Or, the Context of "Treasure Island's" First Form Publication," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 31, no. 4 (1998): 361.
52 Sutherland, "Introduction," 17.
53 Sutherland, "Introduction," 22.
54 Robert P. Irvine, "Romance and Social Class," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. Penny Fielding (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 31.
55 Sutherland, "Introduction," 17.
56 Pierce, "The Belle Lettrist and the People's Publisher," 365.
57 Sutherland, "Introduction," 17.
58 Alex Thomson, "Stevenson's Afterlives," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. Penny Fielding (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 149.
59 Thomson, "Stevenson's Afterlives," 149.

contributed largely to introducing the idea that pirates in stories might be admired.[60] Literature scholar Alex Thomson argues that *Treasure Island* presents a reformation of pirate stories for the 20th century.[61] Stevenson moved admiration into the centre of his story by letting his young protagonist Jim Hawkins look up to one of his travel companions on the *Hispaniola*, in particular, the ship's cook Long John Silver. In admiring Silver, the story's protagonist Jim Hawkins applauds a pirate. In giving room for looking up to a pirate and an ambiguous character in his story, Stevenson shifts, as Thomson emphasises, the view on pirates.[62] Long John Silver remains a morally questionable-acting character, yet he is not portrayed as completely bad but is equipped with ambivalent traits. His narrative function is being the antagonist of Jim Hawkins, the Squire, the Doctor, and the Captain, and Silver is also the story's villain. Nonetheless, he is not created as entirely villainous but with careful nuances and features added to his personality. Thus, Stevenson paved the way for the creation of pirates who serve as the actual heroes of their stories, as, for instance, in the movie *The Crimson Pirate* (1952), instead of being antagonists and/or villains in the stories.

Treasure Island is part of the collective European literary memory and developed a folkloric status.[63] Penny Fielding, expert on Scottish writing in the 18th and 19th centuries, notes that both texts, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *Treasure Island*, appear to be disembodied from their author because they are in a constant process of regeneration due to retellings and adaptations in novels, theatre, or film.[64]After first being turned into a motion picture by the *Vitagraph* Studios in America in 1908, many versions of *Treasure Island* followed.[65] Thomson counts 40 film versions in 2010 which seems too low, as to date, in 2020, the international media database lists over 200 results for the keyword of *Treasure Island*.[66] Although the story moved on from its originally intended juvenile audience, the movies do not lose sight of these roots completely and include productions for children such as a 1987 anime version, the Muppets version from 1996, or Disney's 2002 *Treasure Planet*, a futuristic adaptation of the story. The majority of the *Treasure Island* movies, however, are produced for a mature audience. The American television serial *Black Sails* is not another version of *Treasure Island*, as it narrates the imaginary background on how the treasure was originally won and turns John Silver into the

60 Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero*, 67.
61 Thomson, "Stevenson's Afterlives." 149.
62 Thomson, "Stevenson's Afterlives." 149.
63 Sutherland, "Introduction," 29.
64 Penny Fielding, "Introduction," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. Penny Fielding, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 1.
65 Thomson, "Stevenson's Afterlives," 150.
66 IMDb "Treasure Island." Accessed March 11. 2020. https://www.imdb.com/find?q=treasure%20island&s=tt&ref_=fn_al_tt_mr.

juvenile but scheming, cunning, and selfish protagonist of the narrative. Therefore, *Black Sails* is largely inspired by *Treasure Island*.

Treasure Island presents a motley crew of greedy pirates who do not shy away from using violence. Whereas most of these pirates, however, make no memorable impression, their leader, Long John Silver, remains extremely memorable. The complex character presentation of the story's villain likely had an impact on the lasting success of *Treasure Island*. English literature scholar Adrian Poole writes:

> Long John is a different matter, the first of the mesmeric outlaws who raise Stevenson's best fiction to the level of myth or legend. Silver can be mistaken for another father-figure but he is more an irregular double, a more violent, calculating, and shameless version of Jim's youthful recklessness.[67]

Silver's name is closely connected with the narrative, presumably even more than that of Jim Hawkins, the adolescent hero of the story; and, next to James Matthew Barry's Captain Hook (*Peter Pan*, 1904/1911), John Silver is likely to be one of the most famous literary pirates ever created. Silver's type of villain is hard to grasp. He does not align with the Noble Outlaw; he may show some Byronic hero traits but overall, he does not match that character type fully either as he does not appear to have tragic crimes in his past or lost a love, feel guilty about something, or show brooding traits, all of which are, as established above, characteristics of the Byronic hero. Silver's use of severe violence when needed,[68] moves him away from the character types of the Noble Outlaw and the Byronic hero which are infused with nobility and avoidance of violence. Silver is presented as a darkly shaped character who threatens the gentleman's authority and only uses gentlemanliness to disguise his true personality,[69] which also disconnects him from the Noble Outlaw and Byronic hero. Nonetheless, Long John Silver is not drawn as a stereotypical villain, as Fielding concludes:

> [a] complex study of power, Silver is charismatic and duplicitous, a dubious role model for Jim, who finds his company more stimulating than that of the official forces of social order, the squire (Trelawney), the doctor (Livesey) and the captain (Smollett).[70]

Silver is, at least for a while, more appealing to Jim any other crew member travelling on the *Hispaniola*. Jim is the only juvenile on the journey and Silver is the adult to whom he mostly looks for guidance and advice. In the story, Silver is designed to be cunning in hiding his true

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67 Adrian Poole, "Robert Louis Stevenson," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Novelists*, ed. Adrian Poole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 261.

68 Thomson, "Stevenson's Afterlives," 159.

69 Irvine, "Romance and Social Class," 29.

70 Penny Fielding, "Robert Louis Stevenson," in *The Cambridge Companion to Scottish Literature*, ed. Gerard Carruthers and Liam McIlvanney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 167.

intentions, which Jim Hawkins only overhears by chance. Silver can be charming and attentive, and has a profound nautical knowledge. Silver is given intelligent features rather than drawing him as a stupid villain. Leaving out the figure of Captain Smolett, Sutherland lists the men Jim Hawkins interacts with according to their function: "[o]ne (Squire Trelawney) rules men, one (Dr Livesey) cures men, one (Long John Silver) kills men."[71] Silver does show ruthlessness and Poole labels him as "bewildering."[72] Silver is created in a way that is designed not to let the reader suspect his true nature until Hawkins discovers it for himself. Silver is closely linked to danger, cruelty, and death, but also to knowledge and safety as he knows how to sail the ship, and acts as a protector of Hawkins against the other pirates. Silver remains, however, the dark force that eventually needs to be overcome in order to provide a good ending for the story. In *Black Sails* the perception, and function, of the pirates has changed even more.

7.3 *Black Sails*: Its Characters and Relationship with *Treasure Island*

Black Sails integrates clues from *Treasure Island* into the plot that are more nuanced than borrowing names and a storyline from Stevenson's novel. The form of serialised publication aligns with the original release method of *Treasure Island* in a weekly magazine. Neither story offers completed sections in each chapter or episode but rather an ongoing narrative. In the following section, I outline *Black Sails*' relationship with *Treasure Island*, give a brief overview of the types of morally acting characters within the story, and emphasise that *Black Sails*, other than *Treasure Island*, does not contain any plain good characters. Then I briefly explore to which extend the Noble Outlaw matches with the *Black Sails* pirates.

Black Sails narrates a fictional prequel to *Treasure Island*. The serial tells the story of how the *Walrus* crew around the feared Captain Flint originally wins the treasure from the Spanish ship *Urca de Lima*, and how and why the plunder is eventually hidden away on Skeleton Island. Skeleton Island is the location Hawkins and his companions sail for in *Treasure Island* in an attempt to find Flint's treasure chest. The creators of *Black Sails* have been inspired by a mix of the literary pirates thought up by Stevenson, such as James Flint, Long John Silver, Billy Bones, and Benjamin Gunn, and real buccaneers like Charles Vane, Edward Teach (Blackbeard), Jack Rackham, and Anne Bonny. *Black Sails* includes details from *Treasure Island* in the plot; the black spot, an ill omen among pirates, for instance, is used by Billy Bones in *Black Sails* to threaten dissident pirates who do not support Captain Flint's fight for the pirates' lair Nassau. In *Treasure Island*, chapter III is named 'The Black Spot' and the fear of

[71] Sutherland, "Introduction," 21.
[72] Poole, "Robert Louis Stevenson," 261.

the black spot causes the death of Billy Bones in the novel.[73] Another clue embedded in *Black Sails* is Long John Silver's falling in love with Maroon Princess Madi. In *Treasure Island* it is noted that his wife "is a woman of colour",[74] which matches with his relationship with Madi as a Person of Colour in the serial. With finer nuances than simply borrowing names and a plot idea, the *Black Sails* creators relate their story to *Treasure Island;* even the episodes are numbered with roman numerals like the chapters in the novel.

In the way of narrating, being a television serial, *Black Sails* aligns more with the original way *Treasure Island* was published, in serialised form. Both stories describe the hunt for a treasure and have a protagonist in their middle who is in the process of adjusting to an unknown world and growing up therein. In *Treasure Island* it is Jim Hawkins, in *Black Sails* John Silver becomes the juvenile outsider entering the rough pirate world. Additionally, good and evil are unclear categories as both narratives play with, and challenge binaries about, right and wrong containing at least one, in the case of *Treasure Island*, or several, in *Black Sails*, morally questionable protagonists who are not classifiable as 'true' and pure evil villains. Yet, other than *Treasure Island* with, for example, Jim Hawkins or Dr Livesey, *Black Sails* does not have a purely good protagonist either. Nonetheless, *Black Sails* has a strong relationship with *Treasure Island* and draws on the novel in more ways than just borrowing the outline for a story.

Being pirates, and therefore criminal outcasts, it is worthwhile considering that the characters in *Black Sails* resemble a Noble Outlaw, a Robin Hood on the seas story, but I posit that they do not. The only character who shares a relevant trace with the Noble Outlaw is James Flint who was forcefully removed from the society in which he was established. However, the trait of being repelled from society can likewise be found within Satan and the Byronic heroes. Hobsbawm, who uses the term 'noble robber' instead of Noble Outlaw, notes in his rules for the Noble Outlaw*:*

> [f]irst, the noble robber begins his career of outlawry not by crime, but as the victim of injustice, or through being persecuted by authorities for some act which they, but not the custom of his people, consider as criminal.[75]

Noble Outlaws have a complex personal backstory leading to their outlaw lives. Besides James Flint, none of the *Black Sails* characters is provided with a detailed past. Missing a past makes it difficult to state why the characters live their lives as pirates. If and why they have been

[73] Stevenson, *Treasure Island*, 62–63.
[74] Stevenson, *Treasure Island*, 82.
[75] Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 47.

expelled from society or if they choose to become an outlaw themselves cannot be disclosed. Additional criteria of the Noble Outlaw also do not match with the characters presented in *Black Sails*. Further observations such as the Noble Outlaw "'rights wrongs' […] 'takes from the rich and gives to the poor' […] 'never kills but in self-defence or just revenge'"[76] does not align with the *Black Sails* pirates. They are not largely interested in injustices in society or the question of how to correct it and they do not right wrongs. Flint and his crew, for instance, act for personal revenge, not for just revenge. Noble Outlaws tend to kill only in self-defence, which does not align with Flint and his crew as they, for instance, specifically hunt magistrates down and execute them. Violence and killing are accepted methods for the *Black Sails* characters thus, it does not match them to say that they do not kill but in self-defence. Admittedly, self-defence often is a reason to kill someone else in the story, but it is not the only one. The *Black Sails* characters, moreover, do not take from the rich and give to the poor; they are not created in a Robin Hood-style. The pirates attack every ship that appears to be a target worth considering, they do not examine who owns the ship, what it carries, or to whom the cargo belongs. The characters take plunder to gain profit for themselves and their crews, but they do not care about the wellbeing of other society members or hand out goods to the needy. Noble Outlaws tend to wait for a chance to rob someone, the *Black Sails* pirates actively hunt their victims down. The picture drawn here is broad and different behavioural patterns can be detected for different characters. For the fictional beings at the centre of my investigation, John Silver and James Flint, however, neither of them is created enough in the style of the Noble Outlaw to build up a viable argument that he stands in the tradition of the Noble Outlaw. Instead, the *Black Sails* protagonist James Flint overlaps largely with Satan and the Byronic hero. A detailed discussion with nuanced characteristics of Satan and Byronic hero is provided in chapter 8.

Black Sails centres around morally questionable-acting evil heroes. Being a recent television serial, *Black Sails* adopts the trend of having various main characters that are shaded differently. The show does not offer, as the usual two-coloured Jolly Roger flag flying on pirate ships may let viewers assume, a distinction between black and white, good and evil, hero and villain, but instead provides several facets of grey. None of the main characters is entirely good, yet none of the main characters appears plain evil either. The serial is designed to bring the viewers on the side of the pirates but, because the story follows several characters, which evil hero is preferred may differ from viewer to viewer. If, for instance, someone roots for Charles Vane, they may see Flint as the darker character when Flint tries to interfere with Vane's plans or the

[76] Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 47.

other way around. If one likes Billy Bones the best, Billy's assumed death might, for a while, affect the perception of Flint as a more villainous and less-liked character. The scheme of a good hero against an evil villain is suspended in *Black Sails* as most of the main characters are provided with villainous moments, greedy behaviour, and selfish actions; but also with heroic and selfless ones. An example is Charles Vane who, in episode XVII, takes over Flint's ship, the *Walrus*, while Flint is ashore in Charlestown. Vane intends to leave with his rival's ship and captured crew but changes his mind as word is given that Flint has been arrested and is sentenced to be executed. Now, Vane alters his opinion and, instead of leaving, he comes to Flint's rescue to prevent a feared pirate captain dying, and society losing its angst of pirates due to seeing Flint being hanged. From having a nasty plan against Flint, Vane changes into a hero here who comes to Flint's rescue instead. *Black Sails* offers no stability about the question on whose side a character is on and what his next action will be. Characters like the friendly looking old pirate Benjamin Hornigold, the harmless-appearing *Walrus* accountant Mr Dufresne, or loyal *Walrus* boatswain Billy Bones turn into traitors, and, likely, for the viewers from liked characters into disliked characters.

Even characters who represent the antagonists of the pirates, like British Governor Woodes Rogers, are not rendered as bad or as villains. In a scene where Rogers offers Flint a meeting at a beach, for instance, he threatens Flint, but he remains polite in his speech, respectful in the interaction, and does not set a trap for the pirate. The viewers' perception of Rogers is likely to change as he kills the pirate Edward Teach unnecessarily cruelly in episode XXXI using the naval punishment method of keelhauling. Before that, Rogers might be the antagonist in the story, but he is not motivated by hatred or cruelty right from the start, which likely makes it difficult for the viewers to be entirely opposed to him. I argue that the main reason to be opposed to him, when he first appears, is his function as antagonist and the threat he presents to the pirates, but not necessarily his character features. Characters, moreover, are often humanised by offering the viewers glimpses into their pasts, personalities, or worries and doubts. Even the hardly likable British Navy officer, Captain Berringer, who has nasty character traits, seems to be driven by a hunger for power, threatens the show's evil heroes, and gives the society in Nassau a hard time, is provided with a necklace containing a picture of his wife that he clutches as he dies in episode XXXI. Presenting a slight hint towards his private life and the love for his wife does not make Berringer likable retrospectively, but it adds a human element to him and may ease the negative reactions towards him a little. In sum, none of the characters in *Black Sails* is drawn as absolutely good or absolutely evil, instead, the characters are more complex and harder to judge than, for example, in a James Bond movie where the good protagonist has

to fight off the bad villain.[77] In chapters 9 and 10, I argue that the characters' nonverbal actions might support a positive reaction towards the evil heroes, although the characters often hurt and harm others. With the uncertain attributions of who wants and does what, when, and why, who is in a positive light, who in a negative one, the characters can hold different narrative functions at once. The ambiguous and complex character design provides the evil heroes with characteristics of other character types as well.

Before I provide a detailed analysis of the characters in the following chapters, I establish in the following part in more detail why John Silver and James Flint can be seen as evil heroes, based on their actions. *Black Sails* narrates the story of pirate captain James Flint, played by Toby Stephens, who aims to hunt down the Spanish ship *Urca de Lima* to capture the treasure the vessel is carrying. A second protagonist in the story is John Silver, depicted by Luke Arnold, who becomes a member of Flint's crew on the *Walrus* by chance. After the first two of the four seasons of *Black Sails*, the main goal of the protagonists changes from hunting down the treasure to using it for financing a war against the English Navy to secure the pirate port of Nassau. In the narrative, Flint and Silver are presented as evil heroes.

In the first episodes of *Black Sails*, Silver kills, lies, betrays, and is driven by greed. He is shown as an opportunistic character who kills a cook out of greed as Silver senses the opportunity to bring a potentially valuable page out of the cook's possession into his own.[78] Silver then even steals the cook's identity. As the narrative continues, Silver watches one of his associates being threatened without interfering. Moreover, Silver cunningly plays different members of the *Walrus* crew against one another and is likely indirectly responsible for at least one death as a consequence of his actions. As the serial never truly reveals if the men, Mr Morley and Billy Bones, were killed or attempted to be killed by Captain Flint, Silver's part in their assumed (Billy survives his fall from the *Walrus*) death cannot be conclusively decided. Nonetheless, Silver willingly accepts a bad outcome for Billy Bones and Mr Morley through his greed-driven behaviour.

Flint can be classified as an evil hero too. Flint is more easily identifiable as such as he acts straightforwardly, in comparison to Silver who tries to disguise his doings. Flint abducts men who do not want to engage in his planned endeavour of finding the gold carried on the Spanish *Urca de Lima*; he pushes his crew to their limits, risking their lives wilfully to get what he desires. Flint's acts are ruthless, calculating, and self-centred. During the narrative he executes

[77] There are some exceptions in the serial. The most prominent one is pirate captain Ned Low who shows no humanising or remotely likable feature.

[78] The page describes the course of the *Urca de Lima*, which carries a Spanish treasure. Flint had been hunting this information for months. Silver does not know what the page truly is at this stage of the serial.

men and women in order to emphasise his point of view. He orders an entire ship sunk, including crew, to not endanger his reputation; additionally, he shoots two defenceless members of his crew out of frustration. Thus, he fulfils the schema of an evil hero. After establishing that Flint and Silver are evil heroes, the following parts of the thesis turn to analysing how positive viewer responses to these particular two characters may be invited. The next chapter, therefore, investigates Flint's relation to literary ancestors and argues for character complexity.

8 Satan and the Byronic hero – Historical Contextualisation of the Evil Hero Flint

Evil characters are not new but embedded in literary and cultural history. In this chapter, I explore two prominent predecessors to the evil hero, Milton's Satan and the Byronic hero, specifically Byron's corsair Conrad. Progressing from the term 'antihero', chapter 4 introduced the term 'evil hero'. I argue that the complex characters in current television serials denote a new type of character and therefore terms such as 'antihero' and 'villain' are no longer adequate descriptors. Evil heroes are greedy and selfish, harming, hurting, and killing other characters often without just cause. Yet these characters are the main protagonists of their stories and audiences respond favourably towards them. While pirates can be associated with Noble Outlaws, I argue in chapter 7 that the *Black Sails* characters do not show enough Noble Outlaw attributes to be classified as such. The pirates in *Black Sails* largely focus on their own needs and lack a social side – they do not take from the rich and give to the poor, like Noble Outlaws tend to do.[1] As flawed main characters, evil heroes in contemporary quality TV have literary predecessors, yet no historical contextualisation has been done in depth. John Milton's Satan from *Paradise Lost* and the Byronic hero such as *Manfred* (1817), Conrad from *The Corsair*, or *Cain* (1821) are two of those ancestors. Traces of both of these character types are present in the *Black Sails* character James Flint.

The Byronic hero itself is influenced by several earlier characters and character types and shows a particularly strong connection to Milton's Satan.[2] McGann labels Byron's heroes as "gloomy and problematic."[3] They often have criminal pasts or guilt loads upon themselves and are haunted by "sorrows and disasters" in the present of their narratives.[4] Milton's Satan shows these characteristics too. From him, these traits move to the Byronic hero where they appear even more differentiated. Based upon the characters Lord Byron himself created, more fictional beings develop. Yet, as established by Stein, Byronic heroes nowadays still largely consist of the original characteristics and are haunted by sorrow and disaster. As Stein establishes, Byronic heroes populate fiction today in various forms.[5] Focusing on the *Black Sails* character James Flint, I investigate his links with Milton's Satan and the Byronic hero character type.

1 Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 47.
2 Alt, *Ästhetik des Bösen*, 118.
3 McGann, "Milton and Byron," 20.
4 McGann, "Milton and Byron," 22, 26.
5 Stein, *The Byronic Hero in Film, Fiction, and Television*, 1.

Satan, the Byronic hero, and Flint are all complex characters,[6] plagued by inner torments, doubts, and contradictions. Although Satan, the Byronic hero, and Flint originate from different times, literary genres, and media they nonetheless share many characteristics. I focus on these character traits rather than the time period or genres or medium that the characters belong to. Satan and Flint even both reveal two conflicting identities, a private one showing when the character is alone, and a public one showing when in the company of others. I argue that Flint's complexity invites positive viewing responses, despite his often violent and ruthless actions that could otherwise cause viewers to emotionally detach from him. I analyse selected examples from the characters' narratives and when looking at the Byronic hero character type I use Conrad from Byron's *The Corsair* (1814) as an example. Satan and Byronic heroes exhibit several defining features such as being leaders of a loyal crew, representing new social codes of behaviour, and refusing to return to their society of origin. The inner doubts and torments creating their complexity, however, seem to originate from their status as an outcast and 'crimes' they have committed in their past.

'Crimes' is a term largely used in literature for establishing that the characters did something wrong in their past or have flaws. It does not necessarily refer to actual crimes that would be pursued by law. I use the term in the same way. These 'crimes' committed by the characters create a sense of sadness and melancholy[7] that haunts the characters, and the following analysis focuses on such traits. I start by examining the status of the characters as outcasts, their standing in their former and current societies, and the question of why they have been expelled. Flint and Satan both introduce notions of change and challenging hierarchies and are, therefore, cast out by father figures representing these hierarchies and the social norms within the narratives. Satan, the Byronic hero character type, and Flint all act in a way that leads to their banishment from their social milieus. Following that I turn to the sorrows and disasters of the characters, exploring how their past crimes affect their present. I establish the doubts and contradictory attitudes within the characters arising from competing states of mind, ideas, and aims within the characters. Satan's and Flint's inner contradictions even lead to two conflicting identities, a public one and a private one. I also focus on the role that their new society and the characters' status within the society play within their stories as Satan, the Byronic hero, and Flint all appear to prefer exile rather than their former homes.

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6 I am aware that for characters to be experienced as complex, they do not necessarily need to exhibit contradicting traits or good and bad characteristics. Characters who are either bad or good may be experienced as complex as well. However, analysing the evil heroes from *Black Sails*, I argue that, for these specific characters, complexity and character depth are largely created through giving them contradicting features.

7 Alt, *Ästhetik des Bösen*, 500.

8.1 Outcast Status

Satan, Byron's corsair Conrad, and the *Black Sails* pirate James Flint are all outcasts. They are banned from their original societies and live in different, often alternative, milieus that they tend to prefer over their original surroundings. This section engages with the characters' outcast status. I investigate the reasons for their banishment, their relationship with their original societies, and if there is any motivation to overcome their expatriation.

Satan, the oldest of the characters investigated here, is a social outcast, as are the Byronic hero Conrad and the *Black Sails* Captain Flint. The Byronic hero tends to occupy the position of an outcast from the outset. Byron's corsair Conrad, for instance, is the established leader of a pirate crew at the tale's beginning. For Byronic heroes, how and why they were expatriated from their original society is not always revealed. Why Conrad lives as a corsair, for example, is never disclosed in the tale. The poem gives some hints to a falling out between Conrad and society such as that he is "[w]arped by the world in Disappointment's school", and also "[f]eared – shunned – belied – ere youth had lost her force",[8] yet no more details of what exactly happened in Conrad's past are given. Payne notes that

> Conrad is also a fragment. Instead of a being given a fully rounded characterization he is presented with darkness as the central aspect of his being, and as a hero, he draws his power to act from his fragmentary nature.[9]

Byron makes clear that his corsair leads an outcast life from the very beginning of the tale. The reasons for Conrad's exile, however, remain unclear. Whether he was wronged or committed a crime himself is not revealed. In relation to later Byronic heroes, such as vampire Angel, the details of their lives prior to becoming an outlaw are sometimes, but not always told.

Like the Byronic hero, Satan and Flint are already cast out when the narrative begins, with their backstory revealing later how and why they were expelled from their societies of origin. Exploring the characters' positions in their original society needs to be considered as their standing and rank influence the reasons for their banishment. Palfy points out that Byronic heroes tend to have a high social standing as a standard.[10] The observation of a commonly held high level of social standing in the Byronic hero here refers to the character's society before he became an outlaw. Focusing on characters created by Lord Byron himself, Palfy does not specify if her observation is valid only for the Byronic hero's outcast society or also for his

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8 George Gordon Noel Byron, *The Corsair*, in *Lord Byron. The Complete Poetical Works*, volume III, ed. Jerome J McGann (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981) Canto I, 253; 261.

9 Payne, *Dark Imaginings*, 185.

10 Cora Palfy, "Anti-hero Worship: The Emergence of the 'Byronic hero' Archetype in the Nineteenth Century," *Indiana Theory Review* 32, 1–2 (2016): 171.

society of origin. She gives the noble birth of Childe Harold and Manfred, and the wealth of Don Juan, as examples for her argument.[11] At least for Manfred and Don Juan, the "high social standing" already applies in their society of origin. However, the "standard" Palfy detects may not apply to all Byronic hero characters because not all Byronic heroes have their past disclosed and some contemporary Byronic hero characters, like Angel, do not necessarily occupy a high rank.

In relation to Flint, the audience gets to know his position in his original society well via the dialogue of other characters such as Flint's long-time companion and lover Miranda Barlow, or through crewmen on Flint's pirate vessel *Walrus* like Mr Morley. The serial creators also use flashbacks to Flint's past to present his time as a naval officer based in London. In *Black Sails*, flashbacks break the linearity of the narrative to take the audience directly into Flint's past rather than having it conveyed through dialogue.[12] In this way, this technique of analepsis is a powerful tool for illustrating the character's point of view and for providing the reader or viewer with a more complex understanding of events and Flint's motivation in the narrative's present. Exploiting the character's point of view can invite a more positive response towards the evil hero because his actions become more comprehensible.[13]

Flint's past circumstances are conveyed in detail. In episode IX, information about Flint's backstory is first introduced via the technique of a flashback, whereby the audience is taken to Flint's past in London. His wearing of a naval uniform, together with the content of the dialogue, makes it clear that James McGraw, who becomes Captain Flint, is a Navy officer. His occupation may equip him with a respectable position, but the "high social standing" cannot be found. Flint's family history is briefly mentioned, identifying McGraw as the son of a carpenter, but also a "rising star" of the Navy. McGraw is respected by his friend (and later lover) the nobleman Thomas Hamilton, by Thomas's wife Miranda with whom McGraw/Flint also has an affair, and by the British nobleman Peter Ashe. These three can be counted as his companions in London; they value his opinion and ideas on political issues. In their company, he can speak freely even though he does not share their social position. However, James McGraw neither directly influences social or political circles, nor is he wealthy or of noble birth. Ashe and Hamilton, in comparison, are both affluent and are members of parliament, which gives them social power. There is no high social standing for Flint in his society of origin. He is a self-made man, and here he differs from literary predecessors, such as Milton's Satan. Satan was

11 Palfy, "Anti-hero Worship,"171.
12 Susan Hayward, *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts*, 5th edition (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2018), 177.
13 Eder, "Ways of Being Close to Characters," 9.

created by John Milton in 1667 as apostate in Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*. Following the biblical myth, Satan rebels against God and is, consequently, cast down to Hell. But Milton does equip Satan with nuances in his personality, such as inner contradictions and eloquence.[14] Milton's design of Satan subsequently influenced other poets in creating their characters, and the Byronic hero character type shows strong characteristics that can also be found in Satan. Milton paves the way for a humanistic reading of his Satan and lays a foundation for the binary shift and increased interest in characters' inner life in the late 18th century. Satan demonstrates the high social standing Palfy detects in Byronic heroes. Like Flint, he is known by a different name in his original society, that of the angel Lucifer. Lucifer is God's favoured angel and of high rank.[15] Yet crucially, he has no influence on God, his superior. He can influence some fellow angels into rebelling against God, but the latter is not initially interested in Lucifer's opinion. Thus, Lucifer has a high social standing but lacks actual influence. Eventually, Lucifer is degraded in rank and replaced by God's son, Messiah. In these cases, both characters' standing within their society of origin has some impact on their later banishment.

As mentioned above, the backstory of Byron's Conrad is not disclosed in *The Corsair*, which makes it impossible to determine Conrad's original social affiliation before becoming a pirate. Similarly, why Conrad is an outlaw is never clearly told, which differentiates him from Satan and Flint, whose reasons for being outcasts I investigate in the following section.

Satan's reason for being cast out is no surprise as Milton follows the biblical myth: Satan and his fellow angels rebel against God. Therefore, the apostates face war, lose the battle against the heavenly forces, and are cast down to Hell. Regarding Satan's past, Milton also 'shows' the events in Heaven through an analepsis to the readers as the uprising of the angels and their war is narrated in detail rather than just summarised. However, there are nuances to Satan's rebellion. Paris has quite a controversial opinion of God in *Paradise Lost*, stating that "[o]ne might imagine that Heaven would be a place of harmony and bliss, but apparently this was not the case even before the anointing of the Son precipitated a revolt."[16] Paris refers to a rather selfish and harsh ruler of Heaven here who created angels to fulfil his need of being worshipped and pressures his creations to obey him.[17] Although there are many competing readings and interpretations of Milton's poem, Paris's argument is convincing. Renaissance literature expert David Hopkins supports the perception of Milton's God as cruel and self-defensive, and Satan

14 Edwards, *John Milton: Paradise Lost*, 92.
15 Paris, *Heaven and its Discontents*, 17.
16 Paris, *Heaven and its Discontents*, 11.
17 Paris, *Heaven and its Discontents*, 11.

as the "unacknowledged hero" of the poem.[18] One reason for Satan's status as an outcast is his disagreement with how things go in his original society and his longing for more than he is given as he aspires to be on equal terms with God.[19] Satan's wish for equality leads to the second reason for his banishment: pride. Edwards even counts Satan's pride as the first of all sins.[20] Satan's pride is violated when God anoints his son and Lucifer loses his position as the favoured angel, which triggers the latter's rebellion. Lucifer is trying to change things on a larger scale and does not accept rejection.

Like Satan, *Black Sails*' James Flint is known by a different name in his society of origin, in London, he is the Navy officer James McGraw. For unwelcome behaviour, a romantic relationship with Thomas and Miranda Hamilton, progressive political ideas, and for offending Thomas's father, Earl Hamilton, by ordering the Earl to leave his own house, McGraw (Flint) is expelled from the Navy's service and English society. What McGraw has done is, in society's eyes, as his Navy superior Hennessy articulates, "too loathsome to be dismissed" and could easily bring McGraw to the gallows. Flint is ordered to leave London "quietly and […] [is] neither seen nor heard from again."[21] Thus, the reasons for both characters being cast out are similar. Both Satan and Flint criticise the status quo, introducing notions of change and challenging hierarchies. The superiors of both characters do not react well and cast them out. Lucifer does not leave without a fight, whereas McGraw obeys the order to leave England. Nonetheless, Flint later fights against the English influence in his new home, the pirate harbour Nassau.

Pride plays a role for both too. McGraw is self-assured and proud when instructing Earl Hamilton to leave his own home in episode XII. McGraw's intention appears to be supporting his lover and friend, Thomas, against an encroaching father, but his pride is also involved when he and Thomas plot how to deal with the pirates in Nassau. Bring proud of the idea not to kill the pirates but to reintegrate them with society and defending this idea provokes McGraw's reaction towards Earl Hamilton. Like Satan, he cannot accept a 'no' to what he is proposing, and such resistance eventually leads to his downfall. Flint's and Satan's positions overlap in their status as outcasts. What further connects them is how both characters are directly or indirectly cast out by a father figure. These father figures represent the dominant social order

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18 Hopkins, *Reading Paradise Lost,* 25. This way of reading *Paradise Lost* refers to William Blake's famous assertion that "Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels and God, and at liberty when of Devils and Hell, […] because he was a true poet, and of the Devil's party without knowing it." William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (The Trianon Press for The William Blake Trust, 1960) plate 6, line 6.

19 Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 5, 785–795.

20 Edwards, *John Milton: Paradise Lost,* 9.

21 *Black Sails*, episode XIII.

established in the particular society of the narrative. Before they cast them out, the father figures either create the character or provide guidance for the character. God and Flint's superior, Hennessey, directly represent the norms and rules that both characters violated. Satan loses his war against the Messiah, but the battle was ordered by God. Additionally, Satan was created by God, which foregrounds the role of God as a father figure towards Lucifer. McGraw's banishment is initiated by the father of his lover Thomas, and implemented by McGraw's Navy superior Hennessey, who, in previous scenes, presents as a man McGraw trusts and looks up to. Hennessy can thereby be understood in terms of a father figure.

8.2 Preference of the New Society

After they have been banned from their original societies, Lucifer and McGraw change their names, illustrating their new identities. For both characters, their former 'crimes' and rebellion against established social and cultural norms are the initial motivations for their new identities. Lucifer becomes Satan in Hell, through the banishment; God creates the new identity for Satan. As I outline below, James McGraw decides more actively to become James Flint. As for the Byronic hero, his society of origin is mostly not revealed, and he does not change his name throughout the narrative. Nonetheless, Satan, the Byronic hero character type, and Flint all prefer their new societies over their old ones. None of them actively aims to be re-united with society. Satan states his decision early in the famous quote "Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n"[22] and underscores his opinion in the Stygian Council as he and his fellow apostates discuss how to deal with being cast out. In the case of the Byronic hero, Potter concludes that the latter has no wish to be reintegrated into his original society and generally despises kings.[23]

Conrad in *The Corsair,* for instance, does not express a desire to re-enter society. On the contrary, the first 40 lines of the poem establish the pirates' isle as their preferred home where they are free.[24] A little later Byron introduces the stance of his corsair towards society in more detail. The poem reveals that Conrad "hated man",[25] thus, together with the earlier introduction of the pirates' preference for their outlaw life, Conrad's thoughts revealed here convey clearly that he has no wish to re-join his former society or settle his queries with 'civilisation'. Above I mentioned the pride of Satan and Flint and how it factors in their downfall. For Conrad, pride is one of the reasons for preferring his pirate isle over 'civilised' society, as he is "[t]oo firm to yield, and far too proud to stoop."[26] Conrad's pride links him with Satan and Flint, for all three

22 Milton, *Paradise Lost,* 1, 263.
23 Potter, "Sherwood Forest and the Byronic Robin Hood," 215.
24 Byron, *The Corsair,* Canto I, 1–43.
25 Byron, *The Corsair,* Canto I, 262.
26 Byron, *The Corsair,* Canto I, 255.

characters their pride leads them to their role as an apostate and/or lets them prefer their new society to their old one as they are all too proud to seek forgiveness.

In *Black Sails,* one exemption can be found. The character of Flint expresses a one-off willingness to be reintegrated with society. However, it is not a wish originating from the character himself, but from his companion, Miranda Barlow. In episode VI, he articulates his unwillingness to apologise to England as Miranda tries to negotiate a pardon for him. Refusing to seek forgiveness also shows Flint's pride, a trait he shares with Satan and Conrad. Later, Flint travels to the Carolina colony, Charlestown, where he is finally willing to tell his life story in order to recreate a relationship with society's representatives. But again, Flint acts on the bidding of Miranda. As his trust is violated and Miranda is killed in Charlestown, Flint rejects the idea of re-joining society immediately, reinstating his role as an outcast. In episode XIX, Flint refuses all offered pardons – and talks his crew into a similar rejection. Flint rather risks losing ship and crew in a raging storm than taking a pardon and being reintegrated with society. He insists on Nassau engaging in war and fighting against the English influence there. In so doing, he has let go of the idea he and Thomas developed to once more make the pirates members of society instead of bringing them to court. Here, Flint's actions are comparable to Satan's farewelling Heaven. Instead of interacting diplomatically with his old society, Flint, like Satan, aims to remain in the new society as an outlaw. Similar to Satan, Flint actively chooses his outcast role. After Flint is banned from England, Lord Peter Ashe offers help. Taking Ashe's support in episode XIII would allow McGraw to remain in civilised society, for example in Paris, Brussels, or Amsterdam. However, McGraw rejects the offered help and therefore ultimately chooses his own exile. Instead of remaining in a civilised European society, McGraw redirects his path to Nassau, preferring to become a pirate and create his alter ego, Captain James Flint. He decides to exile a second time, after the incident in Charlestown.

Satan, Conrad, and Flint do prefer their lives as outcasts to the idea of re-joining their original societies. While the Byronic hero is already cast out and does not necessarily renew his decision to remain in exile during the narrative, in the cases of Satan and Flint the audience witnesses their active decisions for banishment. A possible reason for preferring their new surroundings could be that they both align with the Byronic hero characteristic who generally "defines his own moral code"[27] and is not regulated by the government's legislation or laws. Satan and Flint do the same. In Hell, the devils are more equal than in Heaven as they are allowed to speak their minds,[28] and they do have an open discussion about how to proceed with regard to Heaven and

[27] Stein, *The Byronic Hero in Film, Fiction, and Television*, 8.
[28] Paris, *Heaven and its Discontents*, 19.

God in the Stygian Council. Flint sets his own set of morals too. These norms are inspired by society's rules, yet they are designed to let the pirates live a relatively free life. The common rules of *do not lie*, *do not steal*, *do not kill* apply to Nassau as well but only within the pirate community. Through dialogue it is made clear in the serials beginning, that stealing from another member of the own crew is a severe crime in the pirates' society and punishable by death. The pirates apply their rules with nuances; within their crew they are expected to obey the common rules. Within Nassau they are likewise expected to follow the rules but there the rules are broken more often, and such norm violations are not always punished. Outside of Nassau the rules are largely suspended. By allowing the buccaneers to pursue their profession, these morals are suspended outside of Nassau and the pirates' vessels. The ability of Satan, the Byronic hero, and Flint to dictate norms relates to the status they each hold in their outcast societies. Satan and Flint are in charge of their communities; thus, both are the rule-givers. Being in charge of the rules makes it easier for both to break their won rules or adjust them as needed which underlines the creating of their own morals to. Satan tends to comply with his own set of rules whereas Flint breaches them more and more as the narration continues, going as far as killing two of his own men. Ironically with breaking the rules, Flint underlines his position of power as he proves to be dangerous and not willing to deal with any issues caused by his crew, therefore there are no direct consequences of his breaking of the rules.

Earlier, I mentioned that Palfy identifies a high social standing and a high position for the Byronic hero in his original society, which she exemplifies in terms of Childe Harold and Manfred.[29] I have argued that Lucifer also shows these characteristics, as he is the highest-ranked angel, but wields no influence. Flint is similarly respected in his original society but has no de-facto elevated position. I now broaden my focus on the characters' rank in their new society, as outcasts. Conrad, whose status in his society of origin is not revealed within *The Corsair*, holds the highest rank on his pirate isle. Repeatedly, he is addressed as "leader", "chief", or even "lord Conrad", and the poem clearly states that he "commands."[30] Moreover, Conrad's orders are followed immediately: "[a]nd all obey and few enquire his will."[31] Conrad is the unquestioned leader of his group of pirates. He stands out from Satan and Flint here as both other characters tend to consult with their fellow outcasts or, in the case of Flint, their opinions might even be challenged, as I address below. Conrad's style of leadership is less democratic. Lansdown states that Conrad dominates his crew,[32] and McDayter even names

[29] Palfy, "Anti-hero Worship," 171.
[30] Byron, *The Corsair*, Canto I, 61, 64, 158.
[31] Byron, *The Corsair*, Canto I, 80.
[32] Lansdown, *The Cambridge Introduction to Byron*, 85.

Conrad a "dictator."[33] Yet Conrad does not violently enforce his high rank as his crew is loyal to him and he is a leader whom his men look up to and whom they praise. Any kind of suppression or discontent is not mentioned within the poem. Thorslev observes that "his sense of undisputed command and the undying loyalty of his comrades is the theme of half the poem."[34] Within his outlaw society Conrad holds the highest possible rank, which aligns with Palfy's observation on Byronic heroes and their position in society. So does Milton's chief devil.

In Hell, Satan holds a higher rank than in Heaven. He moves from the second, and, after the anointing of the Messiah, to the third rank in Heaven; in Hell, he is ruler. In Hell, Satan is the unchallenged leader of the fallen angels, thereby holding the highest rank in his new society. None of the other demons' questions Satan's position as their leader and natural ruler. No one threatens Satan's position or even disobeys him. The Byronic hero also tends to be well respected in his society and is usually the leader of a loyal group of other rebels or outcasts.[35] The *Black Sails* pirate James Flint shares this characteristic of having a high position in his new society. In the pirates' headquarters of Nassau, he is an esteemed member of the community and, as fellow pirate Charles Vane puts it "one of her [Nassau's] most notorious captains", which provides him with a respected reputation amongst the pirates as well as with Nassau's administrator and unofficial ruler, Eleanor Guthrie, who welcomes Flint's advice, ideas, and opinions. Flint's position as a pirate is influential in his society. Even more than in England, his ideas are considered and often followed. In the second part of the serial, the pirates intend to fight the British Navy and, in episode XXI, "[a] thousand men, a dozen ships, plus the Man o'War, all organized for battle"[36] wait for Flint to arrive in Nassau and direct them through a war with the British Navy. Flint is supposed to command their fleet, underlining his status and influence. His military position connects him with Satan as well, who leads the rebellious angels into battle against the Heavenly forces, characterising him as "a courageous military leader."[37] These characters' status as military leaders underline their high social ranking. As unchallenged leader, Conrad also leads his men into battle. But for Satan and Flint, their military actions and qualities are more fleshed out in their narratives.

Like Satan and Conrad, Flint is presented as a leader and even calls himself the "king" of the pirates in episode II. What differentiates Flint from Satan and the Byronic hero is the fact that his leadership is not unchallenged. At the serial's beginning, he is facing a possible mutiny

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33 McDayter, *Byronmania and the Birth of Celebrity Culture*, 93.
34 Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero*, 158.
35 Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero*, 96.
36 *Black Sails*, episode XXI.
37 Loewenstein, "The Radical Religious Politics of *Paradise Lost*," 377.

provoked by his opponent, Mr Singleton, that Flint can only prevent by fighting and killing the other man. Later, in episode IX, Flint even loses his captaincy for a while and has to re-instate it through proving his naval skills and showing that he is needed as captain and leader. As the narrative proceeds, Flint increasingly loses his influence and commanding role to the character John Silver. This loss of power is a subtle, but steady development. Silver neither aims to take Flint's position, nor tries to do so by force. Instead, Flint's loss of power differentiates him from Satan and Conrad, since his crew is not entirely loyal to him, and the loyalty of his men 'shifts' towards Silver. Overall, however, Flint's position as a pirate constitutes a socially esteemed status in his outcast community. Amongst other rebels and outcasts, all three characters are more respected and influential than in their original society, a position that may motivate their rejection of a reunion with their former society, instead choosing to fight for their new communities.

The characters' status as outcasts, their reasons for being expelled, and their reasons for staying expelled foreground the characters' complexities. None of the characters acts out of plain reprehensible intentions. Audiences do not necessarily need to approve of the characters' actions in their original society, but the possibility is offered of developing an understanding of the characters' motives and actions; such insights can invite a positive response towards the characters.[38] In the next section, I outline how the characters' complexities are further highlighted through the crimes they have committed and how these crimes continue to haunt them.

8.3 Past Crimes Haunting the Character's Present

In relation to Byronic heroes, Kerley notes that these characters are "often guilty of a crime or sin,"[39] and McGann observes that Byronic heroes are often haunted by sorrows and disasters.[40] Despite being an earlier literary character, Satan shares these characteristics. So does the contemporary serial character, Flint. I now discuss whether the 'crime' the characters have committed affects other characters as well, if such past crimes affect their present, and if that impact causes the characters to have doubts or regrets. Being doubtful may enhance the characters being experienced as more complex, which can help to invite positive responses towards the characters. With regard to the characters' 'crimes': Satan and Flint did rebel against set norms and the status quo in their society. For Byronic heroes, the precise 'crime' they committed can remain unclear.

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38 Tan, *Emotion and Structure of Narrative Film*, 173.

39 Gary Kerley, "Byronic Hero," in *Encyclopedia of Romanticism: Culture in Britain, 1780s–1830s*, ed. Laura Dabundo (London/New York: Routledge, 1992), 72.

40 McGann, "Milton and Byron," 26.

Through his missing backstory, Byron's Conrad is, again, different from the other two characters. The poem tells that he has "deeds", is "doomed", and that "he knew himself a villain",[41] yet those are only indications regarding his past. His previous 'crimes' do not appear to haunt him in his outlaw life. Conrad's past clearly causes his status of having been expelled, however, since he prefers his life as a pirate, his past does not haunt him or cause him sorrow. Conrad is also aware of committing 'new' crimes through his actions as a pirate. It is these new piratical actions that largely influence the narrative in the poem. Conrad is captured, his capturer Seyd is killed by Gulnare who falls in love with Conrad but is not loved by him, and Conrad's love Medora dies of grief, assuming that Conrad died on his raid. What happened in his previous society, however, does not directly affect his state of mind or the events in the poem. It might be argued that Conrad hunts down ships because he is an outlaw and thus a pirate, yet Canto III speaks of "all his treasure, not unwisely sold; Report speaks largely of his pirate-hoard."[42] This line indicates that Conrad owns quite a large treasure, which means that he is not actually forced to go out onto the sea to hunt down more. Additionally, the beginning of the poem makes clear that the pirates enjoy their hunts. Therefore, Conrad's state of mind in his present life in the poem is not largely affected by whichever 'crimes' he committed in his past. Conrad is, however, haunted by his actions in the narrative's present. Where Satan and Flint already caused the fate of others through their past actions, Conrad causes Medora's death through his present actions. Thorslev observes that "Conrad is grief-stricken not because he leads an outlaw life, but because Medora dies."[43] Here, Conrad again differs from Satan and Flint as both characters affect the fate of others through both their past and present actions.

Through their rebellious actions, Satan and Flint do affect the fate of other characters similarly to their own, which differentiates them from the Byronic hero. Regarding Conrad, if and how his former actions affected others is not disclosed in *The Corsair*. In the case of Satan, his rebellious angels are cast down to Hell with him because they support his notions of an uprising against God. Flint, in his former identity as James McGraw, destroys the lives of Thomas and Miranda Hamilton with whom he had a tripartite sexual relationship. In order to conceal his homosexuality, Thomas is sent away to the "Bethlem Royal Hospital" where he later (as far as Flint knows) dies. Miranda is exiled, together with McGraw, and leaves her former life behind to follow Flint to Nassau. Through his choice of actions and words, McGraw has a huge part in causing his friends to lose their reputations and their lives as they knew them. Through his participation in pushing forward sexual activities and progressive political ideas

41 Byron, *The Corsair*, Canto I, 251; 256; 265.
42 Byron, *The Corsair*, Canto III, 145–146.
43 Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero*, 164.

that are forbidden in his society of origin, McGraw's actions directly affect two other characters. But, as I show, the fate of their companions is not the initial reason for the characters' doubts.

8.4 Conflicting Identities

In *Black Sails*, Flint is regularly shown as doubtful, weary, and torn between two identities. He is clearly haunted by sorrows. Although the 21st-century television serial takes more room and time to explicitly show and develop such characteristics than poems and tales take, these features can also be found in *Paradise Lost.* Satan, for instance, has inner torments and sorrows that he expresses on the way to Eden:

> Me miserable! which way shall I flie
> Infinite wrauth, and infinite despaire?
> Which way I flie is Hell; my self am Hell;
> And in the lowest deep a lower deep
> Still threatning to devour me opens wide,
> To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n.[44]

Regret for the decisions that brought him into Hell is conveyed through Satan's words. Paris sees pride and ambition as responsible for his downfall.[45] Moreover, Satan is clearly aware of the change in his identity, which is repeatedly foregrounded in the poem, and which Satan actively reinforces when he decides on his famous leitmotiv 'Evil be thou my Good':

> So farewel Hope, and with Hope farewel Fear,
> Farewel Remorse: all Good to me is lost;
> Evil be thou my Good.[46]

Even though Satan actively decides to live up to evil, since that is what he perceives is expected of him, his thoughts on Mount Niphates express some doubt about his new identity. Upon reaching Eden in Book 9, he is also torn and sorrowful:

> For onely in destroying I find ease
> To my relentless thoughts;
> [...]
> O foul descent! that I who erst contended
> With Gods to sit the highest, am now constraind
> Into a Beast, and mixt with bestial slime.[47]

Bothered by his past decisions, Satan is not always defined by a sole identity. He is aware of what he has lost and who/what he was before he became an outcast. Forsyth reasons that Milton

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44 Milton, *Paradise Lost* 4, 73–8
45 Paris, *Heaven and its Discontents*, 53.
46 Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 4, 108–10.
47 Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 9, 129–30; 163–5.

shows a "complicated, private, deeply reflecting Satan, who needs to talk himself back into hate [at seeing Eve in Paradise]."[48] Satan does not express his inner doubts, contradictions, and sorrows in interactions with other characters. Such thoughts are, as Forsyth labels them, "private." In external interaction, he remains self-assured and proud. Feeling doubtful and torn between two identities shows strongly in the *Black Sails* character James Flint as well.

Flint struggles between the personas of the pirate James Flint in public spaces and his civil self, James McGraw, in private spaces. Flint is a complex character who faces his own inner quarrels, and like Satan, he differentiates a more inward-facing identity and a role he has chosen to present himself to the outside world. He appears to be haunted by an underlying weariness of the life he has chosen. His weariness seems to stem from being a pirate, but is also connected with his past. The serial conveys this through flashbacks introducing a much more light-hearted James McGraw in London. In the narrative's present, Flint's weariness is reinforced nonverbally via stern expressions, a trembling voice, or a look of exhaustion. A dialogue between Flint and Miranda in episode XVII sums up Flint's exhaustion concerning the life he leads:

> [w]hen I first met Mr Gates and he asked me my name I feared the man I was about to create. I feared that someone born of such dark things would consume me were I not careful. And I was determined only to wear him for a while and then dispose of him when his purpose was complete. […]. Am I ready to let him go? Truth is every day I've worn that name I've hated him a little more. I've been ready to return him to the sea for a long time.[49]

This self-examination towards the midpoint of the serial expresses Flint's sorrows, his weariness of being captain, and having to keep the identity he has created. Another example of Flint's disquiet can be found in episode IX, as Flint approaches Miranda's house in Nassau at night time to present her with a copy of *La Galatea*. He stops in front of her window and peeks inside, where Miranda is interacting with some neighbourhood children in a light mood. A small smile appears on Flint's face but soon fades after just an instant, the corners of his mouth move slightly downwards, and after watching another moment he puts the book gently on her porch and walks away. This scene conveys, through actions and gestures, that Flint is tired and sad, evoking the impression of a character who is lost and does not belong to the warm and joyful scene he has just witnessed. As children play no role in the greater narrative, they seem to be used here to represent innocence – to which Flint does not belong and where he does not dare enter or interrupt. The discrepancy between public and private spaces and the identities Flint adopts in those is emphasised. He cannot enter the private space here as there are strangers there

[48] Forsyth, "Satan," 24.
[49] *Black Sails*, episode XVII.

are not aware of the existing of his other persona and will, therefore, not be able to distinguish between the public and private identities of Flint and McGraw in the same way Miranda is able to. Therefore, the pirate Flint cannot enter McGraw's private space, as it is occupied by others who only connect Flint with his public identity. In the described scene, the children are used to visually underline that Flint left his old life as McGraw behind and his public identity, the pirate James Flint, dominates his perception by others which he cannot undo. Even when he tries to undo the public identity he created; Flint fails in the attempt. Thus, the depiction of the children and Flint's reaction mirroring sadness to it, underlines the character's complexity.

Flint's companion Miranda is another character who serves to foreground his two personas; for Miranda is the only one in the serial who addresses him as 'James'. All other characters refer to him either as 'Flint' or 'Captain.' Miranda, building the bridge to Flint's past and calling him by his civil (and private, as the pirates do not use it) first name illustrates the two identities Flint struggles with. His two identities also show clearly in episode VIII when they collide with each other. In a very private moment, Flint is sharing memories while drinking with his friend, the *Walrus*'s quartermaster Mr Gates. Later in the episode, Flint brings disaster upon himself when Gates challenges Flint's public face by disobeying him and threatening to incite the crew to disobey him as well, yet Flint also shows his private identity in the presence of Gates. Thus, both identities are fighting for the upper hand in the action here. As a result, Flint strangles Gates, and finally breaks his neck. Flint's contradicting personalities come to the surface. Via violence, he tries to secure his – public – position of power, while at the same time appearing – privately – to be horrified by his actions. While murdering Gates, Flint sobs, apologises, and is visibly shaken; he keeps repeating "I am sorry", even after Gates is already dead, and is clearly devastated by his actions. Deeply torn between his two identities, Flint's inner contradiction is clearly foregrounded.

Both literary character Satan and serial protagonist Flint are presented with inner contradictions and sorrows that haunt them. Shadows of their pasts cling to the characters. Even though both have actively chosen a new identity, they cannot entirely leave their old selves behind. Through their actions, they invite disaster. Satan's plot in Eden – the tempting of Eve – ends disastrously as he and his demons are turned into serpents. Flint kills his best friend as Gates brings a dispute of private and public identity upon him, and his lover Miranda is shot as a consequence of McGraw deciding to become James Flint, and then trying to undo Flint again. This event is also a consequence of Flint being unsure which identity to follow, similar to his own murder of Gates. When Flint's private and public identities collide, disaster appears to

come upon him (and someone else). This illustrates the massive impact on the character being unclear on which identity to choose.

Byronic heroes can also show inconsistent character traits, such as brooding and ruthless conduct, while also being courteous towards women and loving art.[50] Conrad does not struggle between two identities; he appears content to be a "famed and feared"[51] pirate. However, Byron does at least hint that there is more complexity to his character. The poem describes Conrad's appearance in detail; the description reads "[y]et, in the whole, who paused to look again, Saw more than marks the crowd of vulgar men."[52] The phrase Byron is using can indicate that a second look, a closer and better knowing of Conrad reveals more about his personality and the reader needs to consider greater character complexity. This differentiation may indicate that Conrad also consists of a public person simply being the corsair, and a more private one, which only becomes visible on a second look. However, within the poem, there are no indications that Conrad has two strongly conflicting personalities like Satan and Flint do. The indicated differentiation between Conrad's public face, visible at first glance, and a more nuanced one, visible at second glance, seems to depend on knowing Conrad. Byron might be indicating with this passage for readers not to judge the character too quickly. However, there are no further clues of Conrad himself struggling between a public and a private identity. Since he appears not to quarrel with his identity of being a pirate but is engrossed in his life as one, Conrad does not show contradictions. In combination with the fact that the audience is not aware of his past, I argue that, in the cases of Satan and Flint, their inconsistencies and two competing identities become even clearer and both identities are repeatedly in conflict with one another.

8.5 Conclusion

Paris argues that "Satan is full of inconsistencies, to be sure, but so are many fictional characters and so are most human beings."[53] I argue that in lacking clarity in regard to what they want and how they want it, these characters are rendered more human. Screen-writing expert Linda Seger suggests that it is crucial to create characters who are "like us" in order for audiences to be able to relate to the characters.[54] Creating complex identities can allow the audience to feel more drawn to such characters and thus elicit a more positive viewing reaction.

Even though the *Black Sails* character James Flint originates from a different medium and was created several centuries after Satan and the Byronic hero Conrad, he shares significant

50 Stein, *The Byronic Hero in Film, Fiction, and Television*, 20.
51 Bryon, *The Corsair*, Canto I, 61.
52 Bryon, *The Corsair*, Canto I, 199–200.
53 Paris, *Heaven and its Discontents*, 4.
54 Seger, *Creating Unforgettable Characters*, 176.

character traits with both. Thus, even if contemporary evil heroes are new character types found largely in quality television serials, historical contextualisation shows that they nonetheless clearly progress from traditional character types embedded in literary history. The current evil heroes are new 'versions' that combine characteristics of different 'evil' character types. Flint has stronger overlaps with Satan in complexity and contradictive characteristics. There are different longings and aims within the characters, resulting in competing identities. Through such complexity, characters may not be judged as entirely 'good' nor entirely 'bad', thus aligning with Plantinga's and Eisele's views that the audience can see parts of a character as 'good' and others as 'bad'.[55] Moreover, this complexity may render characters more convincing in terms of being 'like' the viewer and offering something to relate to. Seger suggests that characters should be designed like us, for we then can "identify with them because they share our same flaws, our same desires and goals."[56] Eder also points out that a high level of complexity and individualism supports the "realistic" impression of a character.[57] The complexity of the characters that I have highlighted supports the notion of being "like us." Therefore, I posit that the complexity of the *Black Sails* characters allows viewers to relate to them and creates a certain resemblance between the audience and characters which, as Eder also argues, may contribute to a positive audience reaction.[58]

In the following chapters, I examine how nonverbal actions of the actors Toby Stephens and Luke Arnold, who portray James Flint and John Silver respectively, can contribute to different character traits and support character complexity.

55 Eisele, *Entgrenzte Figuren des Bösen*, 12; Plantinga, *Screen Stories*, 203.
56 Seger, *Creating Unforgettable Characters*, 174.
57 Eder, *Die Figur im Film*, 387; 389.
58 Eder, *Die Figur im Film*, 639.

9 Positive Nonverbal Actions – Inviting Positive Viewer Responses

Focusing on the bodily cues introduced in chapter 5.1, this chapter illustrates the insight that nonverbal actions can invite audiences to respond positively to a character through the close reading of selected scenes from different *Black Sails* episodes. The chapter consists of three sections: the first section focuses on the characters' physical appearance; the second section examines inviting and welcoming gestures displayed by the characters; and the third engages with the positive effect the smiles of the characters may have on the viewers' reactions. As I investigate how positive reactions towards the characters may be enhanced within the viewers, I focus on nonverbal actions that are responded well to, although I am aware that the characters also display other nonverbal signs. Yet the positive ones are used more frequently. Instead of investigating every movement, gesture, or facial expression, I concentrate on bodily cues likely to foreground a positive reaction towards the characters. I argue that the positive nonverbal actions displayed by the characters counteract their morally questionable behaviour and can, for instance, balance greediness, arrogance, or aggression. Since *Black Sails* is an American production, it is likely to be tailored for viewers influenced by western culture, such as music, books, screen stories, and games. For that reason, I have in mind an audience influenced by western pop culture when analysing the serial.

The appearance given to the characters by the serial creators and actors is part of the first impression the viewers get when a character is introduced. I establish how the appearance of the character may positively affect the viewers. Dress and physical appearance are part of bodily cues.[1] Costume, hair, and makeup used to transform the actors into the characters can influence the viewer's initial reaction to the characters. I then move on to examine the gestures the characters carry out, as gestures play an important role in nonverbal communication. Open bodily motions are responded well to; thus, the gestures of the characters can subtly influence the audience to respond positively towards them. In the last section of this chapter, I analyse facial expressions with a particular focus on smiles. Smiles similarly belong to welcoming and warm nonverbal actions that humans tend to favour. I presume that positive nonverbal signals can subconsciously influence the audience and help to even out some of the characters' morally wrong actions. Therefore, an appealing appearance, open gestures, and smiles can help in creating a positive response in the viewers regarding the evil heroes. I use a close reading approach and have chosen to focus largely on examples from early episodes because viewers

[1] Bonaiuto, DeDominicis and Ganucci Cancellieri., "Gestures, Postures, Gaze, and Movement in Work and Organization", 1352.

are likely to form an initial opinion regarding the characters after watching a few episodes.[2] I also include examples from later episodes where they serve to illustrate the characters' habits and outline their development.

The *Black Sails* characters are what I call 'evil heroes'; they act morally questionably, harm, hurt, and kill other characters. Evil heroes are complex characters and maintain their morally questionable actions during the whole narrative. Because of that, I argue that, without refreshing a positive viewer response to the characters throughout the serial, the audience might disconnect from an evil hero. More shades are added to an evil hero's personality as the narrative moves forward and this can help the audience to ignore issues on which they otherwise might turn away from the character. A neat physical appearance and warm and welcoming nonverbal actions can help to reinforce a positive audience response and even create a liking for the characters.

As outlined in chapter 5.1, nonverbal actions deeply influence how people react to one another. Chapter 5 moreover established that viewers react to fictional characters in a comparable way as to other human beings. Aware that, for example, John Silver and James Flint are fictional, audiences also know that a team of creators, writers, costume designers, makeup artists, together with the actors, created these evil characters in the way they appear on screen. This simultaneous audience awareness illustrates "twofoldness", in the way Plantinga uses the term with respect to film.[3] McConachie reasons similarly, calling the effect that theatre viewers blend actor and character into one image a "doubleness."[4] I suggest that viewers react to the characters' bodily cues the same as they would in interaction with other persons. Nonverbal actions are factors lying beyond the plot but combining with the plot to evoke an overall audience reaction. Plot and nonverbal actions applied by the characters complement each other as they are different threads of the overall fabric of a screen story. Nonverbal actions can enhance a positive response towards characters that may finally develop a liking by the viewers for the characters. Other factors lying underneath the plot's surface are mise-en-scène, including the light, sound, and camera work that compose the picture the viewers see. Due to the limited space here, I address these factors only when their effect clearly supports the nonverbal actions displayed by the characters. Nonetheless, it should be kept in mind that a screen story is a fabric woven together of all the threads mentioned above. Those threads, of which I am analysing the one of nonverbal actions, come together in creating the audience's final response to a show and the characters therein. Although I use the same categories in

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2 Vogler, *The Writer's Journey*, 40. Original emphasis.
3 Plantinga, *Moving Viewers*, 117.
4 McConachie, *Engaging Audiences*, 42.

analysing both protagonists, the emphasis will vary. One reason to do so is that both characters are given different looks and features. The other reason for a slight change of focus is that fleshing out different details in the characters' nonverbal actions and the effects of these nonverbal actions for inviting a positive response towards the characters enable a better overall impression of the techniques used to invite a positive audience response.

Chapter 7.2 presented John Silver as the antagonist in *Treasure Island*. He might be ambiguous, yet he is the character in the novel that needs to be overcome for a good outcome. James Flint is mentioned only as villain in *Treasure Island*. In *Black Sails*, the tradition of presenting these two characters as opposed to the hero shifts. From being an enemy to be overcome in many movies based on *Treasure Island*, *Black Sails* establishes Silver and Flint as the main characters and invites a positive audience response towards them. Through different methods and character features, the *Black Sails* creators present Silver and Flint with favourable features, allow them to appear accessible, and equip them with leadership qualities. Consequently, understanding of and admiration for the characters may arise. In *Black Sails*, the focus on those two protagonists has shifted away from being antagonists and villains towards presumably liked protagonists. Bodily cues displayed by the actors Toby Stephens and Luke Arnold, while portraying James Flint and John Silver, affect viewers subconsciously as they draw on humans' automatic reading and reaction to the body language displayed by others.[5]

9.1 Appearance – Visualities' Influence on Creating a Positive Response

Appearance is one factor to exploit in overwriting the cinematic and literary tradition which likely would make Silver and Flint the 'bad' antagonists of a 'good' protagonist. Instead, both characters are evil heroes. Scholars accordingly state that appearance is a powerful tool in directing human reactions toward others. How someone looks is likely to be noticed early and provides initial cues for forming an impression about that person.[6] Outward appearance, how someone dresses, the overall physical optics are instantly affiliated with assumptions concerning the whole person, including character traits. This is one of the reasons why serial creators carefully choose the costume, makeup, and style of their characters. Although a hypothesis formed based on appearance may not remain unchanged or may even prove to be incorrect, classifying someone based on optics is largely an automatic process. Psychologists Viren Swami and Adrian Furnham argue that physical appearance provides "perhaps the most accessible trait of an individual, and plays a powerful, dramatic and sometimes surreptitious

5 Schafer and Karlins, *The Like Switch*, 19.

6 Laura K. Guerrero and Michael L. Hecht, "Beginning Perspectives," in *The Nonverbal Communication Reader: Classic and Contemporary Reading*, eds. Laura K. Guerrero and Michael L. Hecht, Third Edition (Long Grove, Illinois: Waverland Press, 2008), 11.

role in our everyday lives."[7]A valuation based on first impressions of looks does not require any background information or additional content. How someone reacts to someone else may differ, depending on how the observer personally reacts to certain information, yet the information in itself is available without restriction. Because appearance presents the possibility to evaluate someone without further information, a conclusion drawn based on looks can prove to be wrong as soon as more traits are added.

As the narrative starts, John Silver is a greedy and cunning character, acting selfishly and accepting willingly that others might be harmed because of his actions. Out of greed, he kills the cook of the vessel on which he is travelling at the start of the serial. Yet the costume and physical appearance Silver is given might counteract his morally questionable behaviour, as I illustrate below. Silver is young and lean, with shoulder-length black hair framing his face which, together with bright blue eyes, bestows upon him an angelic look that indicates innocence.[8] In comparison to the minor characters shown before him – the captain and the crew belonging to the vessel on which Silver is located who are trying to organise the defence of the ship against the approaching pirates, and the cook who is in the room with Silver – Silver appears reasonably calm, which offers relief and the chance to process the events for the audience after the serial opens with suspense, hectic characters, and a fight sequence.

The cook, Silver's counterpart in his entrance scene, is of ordinary appearance: he is overweight, has sweat on his face and stubble on his chin. When the pirates, after an extended fight scene, finally arrive in Silver's hideout, the *Walrus*'s quartermaster Mr Gates enters the hold. Gates appears neat too, wearing a light-grey shirt, a dark-brown vest, and a carefully trimmed beard, but he is approximately in his late 50s, bald and also slightly heavy-set, which contrasts his look from Silver's. The other pirate in this scene is Joshua who points the blocked hold door out to Mr Gates and enters the room with Gates but then remains in the back. Similar to Silver, Joshua is slim but, as the pirates were in a fight, he wears accessories designed to frighten his opponents: sharpened false teeth are placed in his mouth and his bald head is smeared with white paint, which adds a grotesque nuance to his face as he looks wild and unsymmetrical through the paint. Supporting his adornment, Joshua's uncovered upper body upholds the slight impression of wildness as all the other characters are fully dressed. On his left arm, furthermore, tribal scars are visible, hints of blood can be seen on his body, and animal

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7 Swami and Furnham, *The Psychology of Physical Attraction*, 10; see also John Frow, *Character and Person* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 283.

8 Oxford English Dictionary Online, "Angelic," Accessed February 6. 2020. https://www-oed-com.simsrad.net.ocs.mq.edu.au/view/Entry/7467?rskey=muFPI2&result=1#eid.

fur is part of his outfit. Joshua's optics evoke a light underlining danger, distinguishing him from the civilised-looking Silver.

As this example illustrates, the serial creators use different strategies to invite positive responses to Silver. One strategy is presenting him more appealingly by differentiating Silver through his looks from the other characters in his introduction. Therefore, a halo effect for Silver can be enhanced by surrounding him with the described personnel from whom he stands out through his presentation. A halo effect is a cognitive bias, attributing favourable characteristics to people who are considered to be good looking.[9] Re and Rule observe that "[a]ttractive people are viewed more positively in general, a phenomenon known as the *attractiveness halo effect*."[10] A favourable and appealing outward appearance increases the attribution of positive character traits to a person without instantly questioning if these well-disposed assumptions are legitimate.[11] None of the other protagonists operating in the scene in the ship's hold is blatantly presented as dirty or disgusting, yet the selected characters and careful orchestration of Silver's entrance into *Black Sails* works to his advantage because in direct comparison with the others he appears slender, clean, young, and neat, and therefore the least threatening. Therefore, the attractiveness halo effect can come into account as a consequence of the serial's elaborated presentation of Silver as tidy and attractive. Hence, the makeup and costume in which Silver is presented can invite a positive first impression towards him and give a subtle reason to prefer him over the characters he is contrasted with in the described scenes. Additionally, in western cultures people with juvenile faces are perceived as more trustworthy and honest,[12] which subtly supports the teasing out of a positive response towards Silver in his first appearance in the series. The costume Luke Arnold is wearing portraying John Silver can additionally support a positive response.

When first shown, Silver is outfitted in a blue jacket over a white shirt with light-brown stripes, and light-brown pants. His clothes are generally in good shape and not torn or patched, which gives a neat impression and strengthens the halo effect. Moreover, the chosen costume lacks the impression of anything military or naval. Silver appears civilian and it remains unclear what his professional role on the first ship is. He may even be a passenger. Making his reason for being on the vessel unidentifiable creates a vagueness that can strengthen a curiosity for his character. Plantinga posits that when a bond between viewer and character is created, an interest, curiosity, and suspense regarding the question of what will happen to the character is

9 Eder, *Die Figur Im Film*, 291.
10 Re and Rule, "Appearance and Physiognomy," 221. Original emphasis.
11 Hendrick and Hendrick, *Liking, Loving and Relating*, 46.
12 Burgoon, Dunbar and Segrin, "Nonverbal Influence," 456.

likewise created.[13] It appears reasonable, however, that Plantinga's observation works the other way around too and curiosity can help to create a bond. If curiosity about a character can be elicited, the audience might pay closer attention to said character, which can serve as a first step on the way to obtain liking. Schafer notes that curiosity in others "increases the chances that individuals will want to interact with you in an attempt to satisfy their curiosity."[14] When humans are curious about someone, they strive to comply with their interests and find out more about the person, triggering the curiosity. In an attenuated form, the presentation of Silver, including his appearance, may trigger such curiosity. Unlike in film and literary history, audiences of *Black Sails* only learn later about his future role as cook and about his physical injuries. *Treasure Island* and the movies based on the novel tend to present Silver in the way Stevenson describes him at a later stage of the character's life, as the one-legged ship's cook. The novel's protagonist Jim Hawkins notes at Silver's arrival: "[h]is 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."[15] The description of Silver given in *Treasure Island* is maintained in most movies engaging with this story but differs widely from the character presented in *Black Sails*' first episode. Given the general audience's broad familiarity with the Silver character in *Treasure Island*, introducing him with a lack of clarity regarding his position in the merchant ship's crew and without his famous disability of a missing leg might increase the viewers' interest in him and how he develops. Gaining the viewers' interest in an evil hero may facilitate the creation of liking as the story continues. Subtly eliciting curiosity for Silver through the way he looks and the fact that he is the first major character to be introduced may support the achievement of liking.

As *Black Sails* progresses, only slight alterations in Silver's appearance are noticeable: he grows a beard, starts to look more like a pirate by tying his hair back, wearing boots and a navy-style dark-green jacket and generally darker shades; his general fashion, however, stays the same.[16] Maintaining the presentation of the character over a long period is a discrete method to prevent viewers from getting an optical encouragement to shift their opinion about the evil hero, which the halo effect might evoke to be a positive one. With only slight modifications in his costume, stability for audience and character is created. Silver is recognisable and an easy

13 Plantinga, *Screen Stories*, 44.
14 Schafer and Karlins, *The Like Switch*, 105.
15 Stevenson, *Treasure Island*, 80.
16 In the end of season 2 in episode VXII, he loses his left leg, and by the end of season 3, in episode XXVIII, he is ascribed the name of 'Long' John Silver, a term Billy Bones picked for him without Silver's knowledge. Bones wrote a letter signed by Long John Silver to their enemies in Nassau that is read out loud by the character of the sex worker, Max.

reference point for viewers. By keeping a conforming style for the presentation of Silver and hardly changing it, the *Black Sails* creators apply a technique the audience is used to from other serial formats. The method of keeping the costume does not require viewers to regularly attune newly to the character and familiarity is created, which offers some cognitive relaxation. The audience needs to closely follow the story narrated in the serial anyway, hence, a set style for the main characters means that viewers do not have to pay additional attention to the way the character is fashioned in different episodes.

Since it takes several seasons for a change in Silver's dress to take place, a closer look at colours connected with him is worth considering, as humans do react to colours too. The colouring of Silver's jacket in blue and later a darkish green might enhance positive reactions towards him. A clear and fixed definition of colour connotations is difficult because connected attributions and reactions arise from a psychological basis and can vary. Factors like age, gender, personal experience, and context influence responses towards colours. Nonetheless, psychological research emphasises that there is a large concordance between people regarding preferred colours.[17] Personal preferences do affect colour selections, but similar choices appear, and, although hue reception may change from person to person, research findings indicate that adults show a preference for blue,[18] especially in American and other western cultures.[19] German informatics scholar Tobias C. Breiner highlights, regarding colour association, that blue is often named as a favourite colour by adults and has a connection with calmness and friendship.[20] Green is inter alia associated with security and friendliness.[21] Naz Kaya and Helen H. Epps found a preference for green, which relates to comfort and soothing emotions.[22] Blue can, however, in western cultures also relate to loneliness and green to envy. A definite definition of what a hue stands for is impossible. Yet, research repeatedly detects positive emotions associated with blue and green before negative emotions are mentioned. The positive attributes connected with blue and green can be foregrounded through light, camera setting, and plot line. Therefore, the colours connected with Silver might support a subtle enhancing of a positive response towards the character, slightly enhancing his likeability. Since blue is the colour that Silver wears in the first two seasons when it is crucial for the audience to form a

17 Kaitlin L. Brunick and James E. Cutting, "Coloring the Animated World: Exploring Human Color Perception and Preference Through the Animated Flm," in *Cognitive Media Theory*, eds. Ted Nannicelli and Paul Taberham (New York: Routledge, 2014), 126.

18 Mark Meerum Terwogt and Jan B. Hoeksma, "Color and Emotions," *The Journal of General Psychology*, 122, no 1 (1995): 14. See also Brunick and Cutting, "Coloring the Animated World," 126.

19 Naz Kaya and Helen H. Epps, "Relationship Between Color and Emotion: A Study of College Students," *College Student Journal*, 38, no 3 (2004): 397.

20 Tobias C. Breiner, *Farb- und Formpsychology* (Berlin: Springer, 2019), 94.

21 Breiner, *Farb- und Formpsychology*, 92.

22 Kaya and Epps, "Relationship Between Color and Emotion," 399.

positive opinion regarding his character that can then develop into liking, wearing blue may subtly support the creation of a benevolent reaction.

The colours used in costuming Silver create a somewhat angelic look for the character, underlined by his shoulder-length hair, actor Luke Arnold's youthful face, and bright blue eyes. An angelic look is accentuated by him wearing blue, which is a hue closely intertwined with paintings of Christ and Mary whose cloaks, dresses, and coats are commonly shaded in blue in Renaissance art such as *Madonna with Child and Saints* (Sandro Botticelli 1485), *The Last Supper* (Leonardo da Vinci 1490), *The Sistine Madonna* (Raphaelo Santi 1512), or *Christ Carrying the Cross* (El Greco 1580). Considering the connotations around blue, the serial creators' choice of this colour and connecting it through the costume with Silver underlines his angelic appearance and may evoke an overall more positive reaction toward him. Movie experts Christopher J. Bowen and Roy Thompson see colour as a creative tool for filmmakers that can be made use of to represent characters.[23] In her remarks on cinematic storytelling, Jennifer van Sijll states that "[c]olor is used to identify each character's initial persona."[24] Van Sijll refers to colours created through lighting here. I see no contradiction, however, in transferring her findings to colours that are not created through lighting. A colour set by light is likely experienced in a similar way to the colour of, for example, a coat associated with a character. Van Sijll's statement appears valid for the colours of clothes if the link between colour and character is strong enough through a steady appearance of hue and fictional being together. In Silver's case, the fashion he is equipped with delivers such a coherence between him and the colours blue and green. Silver is given a costume and appearance inviting a positive response for him. Only shortly after Silver, a second main character is introduced in *Black Sails*: James Flint.

Flint is the captain of the pirate vessel *Walrus*. He is introduced early in the first episode and, like Silver, his costume and the setup of his physical appearance are used by the serial creators to distinguish him from other characters and to invite a positive response to him. In the following section, I show how the appearance of Flint might positively affect viewers. Flint is introduced slightly differently from Silver. Before the character even appears on screen, he is given a bad reputation for being cruel and ruthless. I conjecture in the next part that his bad reputation, together with his appearance and his not living up to that reputation, shapes the first reaction of the viewers to Captain Flint. Therefore, I introduce the reputation the character is

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[23] Christopher J. Bowen and Roy Thompson, *Grammar of the Shot*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Focal Press, 2012), n.p. chapter 3.

[24] Jennifer van Sijll, *Cinematic Storytelling: The 100 Most Powerful Film Conventions Every Filmmaker Must Know* (Studio City: Michael Wiese Productions, 2005), 210.

given as well. Additionally, Flint is, with pirate Mr Singleton, given a "contrast character"[25] to directly distinguish from, as I illustrate below. Together with his physical appearance, these two elements are central factors used in directing the audience's initial response towards Flint.

It is unlikely that any viewer vaguely familiar with narratives associated with *Treasure Island* will be completely unbiased to the name of Captain Flint. He may not appear himself in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, but his name is nevertheless closely linked to the novel. Flint's reputation in *Treasure Island* is not a good one. Protagonist Jim Hawking muses: "[t]he name of Captain Flint, though it was strange to me, was well enough known to some there and carried a great weight of terror."[26] Flint is introduced as a monstrous pirate captain in Stevenson's novel. Another example for a discussion about Flint in *Treasure Island* reads:

> '[h]eard 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.'[27]

Flint is linked with blood, terror, danger, and fear. For a character that never appears in the novel as an actual character, Flint has made quite an impression in literature, and his name and dangerousness lodge in the collective memory of English literature. Even assuming that viewers of *Black Sails* may be unfamiliar with *Treasure Island*, the serial creates a similarly notorious image of Flint before he appears on screen. He is subject to conversations between minor characters and, again, his name is set in a direct connection with fear and danger. The cook hiding in the hold with Silver asks: "[y]ou know who that is out there? That ship flies the banner of Captain Flint."[28] As no further explanation is added about who Flint is, the serial invites the assumption that Flint has a largely known reputation and his name alone terrifies men. Another of the merchant sailors states: "[i]f we don't surrender now, Flint will kill us all."[29] Even before he appears on screen, the audience gets a first idea that Flint is a dangerous character with a reputation of being a notoriously cruel and violent pirate. Since he has not yet been introduced himself, the serial creators influence the viewers to slightly shift into the direction of responding poorly to Flint as he appears to be a ruthless killer. However, by harnessing different methods, of which the character's physical appearance is only one, the serial creators start to reveal more positive traits about Flint, making the characterisation of him more nuanced.

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25 Bruun Vaage, *The American Antihero*, 127.
26 Stevenson, *Treasure Island*, 64.
27 Stevenson, *Treasure Island*, 75.
28 *Black Sails*, episode I.
29 *Black Sails*, episode I.

Flint's actions distinguish him from the other characters. he brings order to the chaos caused by his men as they are attacking the English sailors. The pirates approach the merchant crew with howls, singing, and rhythmical clapping; hidden in the smoke from an explosion, they engage the merchant crew in combat. The first pirate to appear is the wildly painted Joshua, hissing at the merchants, sharpened false teeth in his jaw. The others who follow him are painted the same and some are only dimly visible due to the smoke. The pirates clearly have the upper hand in the fight as one after another comes into the sailors' hideout, killing the men in there. The inferior position of the merchants is emphasised through low angle shots that highlight the pirates' superiority. Film study experts Richard Barsam and Dave Monahan highlight that, depending on the situation, a low angle can make the figures filmed in it appear threatening.[30] After such a low angle shot from the point of view of the merchant captain, a man tries to kill him with a blow of his sword. The captain is only saved because another man steps in and blocks the hit with his own sword, voicing the firm exclamation "[i]ts done."[31] The man, who turns out to be Captain Flint, sets an end to the fighting and to the chaos on the ship. For the viewers, he thus presents a steady and organising element in the wild fight which seemed to go on without rules. Flint's intervention establishes rules and ends the fighting scene, which gives the viewers time to process the rapid succession of elements presented in *Black Sails* to that point. Besides his actions, Flints' physical appearance likewise sets him apart from the other fictional beings.

Flint wears a black scarf and turban around his head that leaves only his eyes visible when he first appears. Showing only actor Toby Stephen's green eyes, highlighted by the fact that none of the other pirates is clearly visible, introduces something for the viewers to engage with, as the eyes carry major means in communication and their visibility is of importance.[32] Moreover, the character's importance for the serial is teased out by the clear presentation of Flint as a stationary element within a moving fight, and the highlighting on his eyes. Focusing on Flint's eyes invites a first engagement with the character. Additionally, the direct association with the colour black of the serial's title helps to identify him as a character who is central to the show. Through him ordering a halt to the fighting, the rumours that have been told about his cruelty are not yet proven wrong but a rethinking of the assumptions that Flint is a cruel monster is gently indicated. His appearance and costume distinguish him from the other characters. As he takes his scarf off, his face is clean, whereas the others' are either painted,

30 Barsam and Monahan, *Looking at Movies*, 8.

31 *Black Sails*, episode I.

32 Reginald B. Adams and Anthony J. Nelson, "Eye Behavior and Gaze," in *APA Handbook of Nonverbal Communication*, eds. Hyisung C. Hwang and Mark G. Frank (Washington D.C: American Psychological Association, 2016), 335.

dirty, or sweaty. In comparison to his men, Flint, therefore, appears more civilised and less fierce, which can enhance a positive response towards him in his entry scene.

Most of the other characters acting at the beginning of *Black Sails* are dressed in light colours. Flint stands out in his clothing, wearing a dark-blue jacket over a white shirt and with his shoulder-length hair neatly tied back. As stated above, people are likely to respond well to blue and associate it with pleasurable traits. More saturated colours are also preferred by humans,[33] which supports the positive effect of Flint wearing dark blue. Flint's overall physical appearance is clean, his beard is well trimmed, his hands are groomed, and the character appears less wild than the other pirates. On a visual level, the claims made about the cruel and bloodthirsty captain Flint made at the beginning of the serial are revoked. Moreover, curiosity about the character can be triggered by presenting him so differently from the expectations set at the start of *Black Sails*. Character complexity is already foreshadowed here. With the help of his appearance, the halo effect might come into account, which can strengthen a positive response towards Flint and enable a liking for him.

After his initial introduction, the second time Flint is on screen he is in his office with his quartermaster Mr Gates and accountant Mr Dufresne. The presentation of the character is used further by the serial creators to create a positive initial response toward him. Immediately before Flint appears on screen, the camera follows Silver and *Walrus* boatswain Billy Bones on the ship's deck where they pass the blood-stained and dirty pirate Mr Singleton who tries to evoke hatred in the merchants against their captain. After Singleton's hate-driven speech, Flint, again, presents an anchor for rationality and calmness for the viewers. Flint's calm interaction with his men reduces the image of a feared and monstrous pirate even more as he seems to have a loyal and trusted person beside him and he does not use fear or manipulation in communicating with his man. Flint's civility is teased out even more through his physical appearance, again in direct contrast to Mr Singleton. Singleton is smeared with blood and dirt, talks in a rough manner, and aims to torture the captured merchant captain. He presents what Bruun Vaage names a "contrast character"[34] who acts in a manner to be seen as more evil than the actual evil character. Bruun Vaage gives characters who commit rape as an example of such contrast characters. Plantinga agrees with her, nuancing that "[r]ape elicits sheer bodily disgust that ramps up and amplifies the moral disgust it generates."[35] Rape presents a physical offence against someone defenceless. In the described scene in *Black Sails*, there is no rape involved. Yet I argue that the intended torture of the merchant captain by Mr Singleton presents a similar

[33] Brunick and Cutting, "Coloring the Animated World," 126–7.
[34] Bruun Vaage, *The American Antihero*, 127.
[35] Plantinga, "Bad Fans, Bad Protagonists, and Ethics," 13.

humiliation of a defenceless person's body and can thus be connected with "bodily disgust" too. Flint is the character who tries to prevent the torture from taking place (in the end the appearance of a different ship interrupts the happenings), which invites that the viewers take his side as he appears civilised and reasonable but not (yet) unnecessarily cruel. Instead, Flint expresses a clear disapproval of the intended torture. Low eyebrows and a look of disgust conveys this disliking on his face. Shafer points out that obviously lowered eyebrows serve as a foe signal.[36] Flint stands out from the other pirates at a very early stage through his clear disapproval of unnecessarily cruel behaviour. Flint and Singleton are also set apart through their looks: Singleton still has sailor's blood smeared over his face, his eyes are narrow, his mouth is thin with aggression, and his light-brown shirt shows traces of blood and stains. Singleton appears dirty and cruel in comparison to the well-behaved and cleanly dressed Flint.

Like Silver, Flint has only one major change in his optics in *Black Sails*. As season 3 starts, he has shaved his head and keeps it that way for the rest of the serial. His clothing, however, continues to include a dark-blue coat, his beard remains neatly trimmed, and he is seldom presented with dirt on himself. Thus, the good impression achieved in episode I regarding his approvable physical appearance is maintained. Comparable to Silver, the consistency in his optical presentation gives a reliable reference for the audience and newly adjusting to the way Flint looks is only required once.

Overall, costume and appearance of both characters sets them apart from the other characters when they are first introduced and may subtly enhance a positive audience response. Flint and Silver are likewise given a tidy appearance in costume and makeup; the colour blue, which is often liked by humans as mentioned above, is used for both evil characters, supporting a positive response even more. A halo effect, according to which humans ascribe positive attributes to others simply based on looks, may come into effect for both characters. Flint is, additionally, given a bad reputation that he immediately revokes, and a counter character, who seems to live up to said bad reputation. As said above, I assert that, due to their looks, actions, and reputations connected with both evil heroes, the viewers' curiosity regarding the characters is triggered. Curiosity is closely connected with an interest in a character, and a general interest can simplify the creation of a liking even more.

9.2 Gestures – Using Open Motions can Enhance Positive Responses

Wide, open, and welcoming gestures belong to a category of nonverbal actions to which people respond well. In the following section, I introduce inviting gestures carried out by the characters

[36] Schafer and Karlins, *The Like Switch*, 28.

as such motions are likely to elicit a positive response within the viewers and subtly enhance the characters' likeability. For Silver, I argue that his open gestures support a counteraction of his cunning actions at the serial's beginning. For Flint, open motions diminish the character's straightforward aggressiveness. I focus on selected examples of positive gestures used by the characters. Gestures, however, are not always blatantly displayed by the actors in the sense that an intentional action or arm movement is carried out. Sometimes the characters simply stand or sit with their hands in a position that creates openness in the movements. Being a screen story, there is no live, synchronous interaction between viewers and actors. Once the film is screened, however, spectators respond to the gestures as bodily contributions to the overall mise-en-scène and the creation of a particular character. The camera does not always capture the actors in frame like, for instance, the American frame down to the waist, in which the actors' hands are invisible. Moreover, the danger of distracting the viewers through excessive gestures from the actual topic of the scene or dialogue needs to be considered. In line with the assumption that viewers react to characters on screen comparably to real human beings, I presume that the characters' gestures do subtly affect the viewers too.

Gestures are typically described as motions of hands and arms, although head or shoulder movements sometimes are similarly considered as gestures.[37] To be recognised as a positive or friendly motion, gestures need to be open.[38] Such can be, for instance, wide arms, raised hands (without going higher than the shoulders), or inviting gestures towards a person like stretching out a hand.[39] Arms in symmetrical side-by-side positions also have positive connotations. Although the whole body is capable of actions and motions that can all affect audiences' perception of what is presented, I will, under the term gesture, focus on the motions of hands and arms, which "are not just the arms waving in the air, but *symbols that exhibit meanings* in their own right."[40] As part of body language, nonverbal cues conveyed through hands or arms can help to deliver a spoken message or bear significance on their own. Gestures are conducted by all people, sometimes automatically and sometimes intentionally.[41] Gestures can offer a

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37 Erica A.Cartmill and Susan Goldin-Meadow, "Gesture," in *APA Handbook of Nonverbal Communication*, eds. Hyisung C. Hwang and Mark G. Frank (Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2016), 308.

38 David Matsumoto, Hyisung C. Hwang and Mark G. Frank, "The Body: Postures, Gait, Proxemics, and Haptics," in *APA Handbook of Nonverbal Communication*, eds. Hyisung C. Hwang and Marck G. Frank (Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2016), 387.

39 Andersen, *Nonverbal Communications*, 273.

40 David McNeill, "Hand and Mind: What Gestures Reveal About Thought," *Leonardo* 27 no. 4 (1994): 105. Original emphasis.

41 Cuddy, *Presence*, 36.

generalised way to express meaning.[42] Usually, gestures accompany speech to underline the spoken words but can also serve as a tool to communicate without words and are helpful to convey meaning.[43] Movements of hands and arms, in connection with spoken words, can increase the comprehensibility of what is said. Besides underlining and carrying meaning, gestures influence how a person is perceived. Using open gestures in job interviews, for example, leads to a positive reaction.[44]

Silver displays open gestures throughout *Black Sails*. When Mr Gates enters the ship's hold where Silver is hiding, for example, Silver takes the initiative and acts rather than reacts to Gates. He has his body turned towards Gates, greets the pirate proactively, and has his hands raised to shoulder height. Silver performs a well-known emblematic gesture, a gesture with a clearly defined meaning, for surrender that indicates that he accepts defeat and presents no threat.[45] With not bringing his hands higher than shoulder level, Silver does not appear panic-stricken or gesturing excessively. Turning his body towards Gates, not away, further emphasises an open attitude and supports a positive perception of the character. Another open gesture can be noted later in episode I when he is introduced to the old *Walrus* cook Randall and raises his right hand to greet other man. Silver's motion underlines his unthreatening intentions towards the other man and may help to evoke the impression of him as a likable character. The gesture leaving his upper body uncovered and showing a welcoming hand indicates openness which will, subliminally, be understood by the audience, too, and thus may subtly influence the viewers in perceiving Silver as kind and non-threatening. As the scene continues, Silver enters a short conversation with *Walrus* boatswain Billy Bones in which Silver has his arms symmetrically relaxed at his sides, leaving his upper body free. Although Silver is not moving his arms in this situation, his body is uncovered and turned in Billy's direction, which presents vulnerability instead of a threat or aggression. Furthermore, symmetrical positions of arms are assessed positively by people,[46] which can work in Silver's favour because his body language does not indicate danger, pressure, or ulterior motives.

With the sex worker Max, Silver finds an accomplice to sell the journal page he stole. The page Silver brought into his possession is crucial in the first half of Black Sails. It is Flint's

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42 Cuddy, *Presence*, 153. See also Hyisung C. Hwang and David Matsumoto, "Facial Expressions," in *APA Handbook of Nonverbal Communication*, eds. Hyisung C. Hwang and Mark G. Frank (Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2016), 261.

43 Milkica Nešić and Vladimir Nešić, "Neurosience of Nonverbal Communication," in *The Social Psychology of Nonverbal Communication*, eds. Aleksandra Kostić and Derek Chadee (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 52.

44 Bonaiuto, DeDominicis and Ganucci Cancellieri, "Gestures, Postures, Gaze, and Movement in Work and Organization," 1351.

45 Korte, *Body Language in Literature*, 85.

46 Matsumoto, Hwang and Frank, "The Body: Postures, Gait, Proxemics, and Haptics," 388.

main interest to find the page as it outlines the course of the Spanish vessel *Urca de Lima*, carrying a massive treasure load. Silver becomes aware quickly in the serial that he possesses something valuable which provides him with a basis for negotiation with other characters and influences his level of confidence in such negotiations, In the scene with Max, he sits in the basement of the busy brothel on a bench waiting for her to discuss further details of their plan to gain money. In his right hand, he holds a silver mug and has his arm and hand at waist height. His other arm lies on the armrest of the bench and is also approximately at waist level, and both his arms present him in an open bodily position. Silver's gestures present him as relaxed, non-threatening, and open to the situation, which brings together preferred attitudes towards him. In later seasons, Silver develops a habit of regularly having his hands in a position that presents an open gesture. He, for instance, starts wearing a weapon belt and often has one or both hands on his belt while talking to another character. Placing his hands at navel or waist height without crossing them leaves his upper body free and thus creates an open position. Mark Bowden claims that people standing in such a position while talking are trusted more, and calls this motion the TruthPlane.[47] Bowden is not an academic author and does not present any research findings to support his assertion. His claim is based on personal experiences and observations from public speeches and presentations. If his observation is valid, it may subtly work to Silver's advantage and evoke trust in the character; if not, the position Silver presents his hands in when having them at his belt still creates an open bodily impression that is preferred by humans. Having his arms symmetrically and relaxed at his sides reoccurs too, and Silver often stands in this position when he has an argument or discussion. I argue that this gesture during a heated situation works in his favour because it keeps the pressure low. With relaxed arms, Silver does not present a threat through his nonverbal actions and his hands are visible, which reduces the potential menace in an agitated situation and does not create an overwhelming tension with other characters. As television serials have more than one main protagonist, the described effect can help viewers not to start disliking Silver when he is having a disagreement or argument with other main characters whom the audience presumably likes too (such as Billy Bones, for example). Silver's open gestures may help to counterbalance his greedy and cunning actions, especially at the beginning of the serial. Later they can support a refreshing of a positive audience response and underpin his likeability or even a developed liking for him.

Open gestures also play a role in the depiction of James Flint. He is presented as a confident, straightforward-acting character, who could be seen as too aggressive because the serial

[47] Mark Bowden, *Winning Body Language: Control the Conversation, Command Attention, and Convey the Right Message – Without Saying a Word* (New York/Chicago/San Francisco/ao.: McGrawHill, 2010), 56.

introduces him as not hesitant to challenge, abduct, or kill people if he considers it necessary. Using open nonverbal actions can help to revoke his aggressiveness. Flint presents open gestures, for instance, in conversations. In episode I, as Mr Gates informs him about the possibility of a mutiny, Flint is seated behind his desk and has his hands on his knees, which creates an open body position towards Gates. Even though the news is unpleasant for Flint, he remains in his open position, gesturing slightly towards Gates with his right hand. The gesture he uses, however, does not have an accusing or aggressive undertone, it is simply a motion underlining the conversation. Flint raises his voice slightly in this scene, but his bodily position indicates a low level of aggression as he does not show tension, leaning forward. The viewers are presented with the information that he can keep his temper and does not become a threat when presented with unpleasant information, which creates a more complex personality for the character.

In episode I, Flint and Billy Bones kidnap Nassau's administrator Richard Guthrie. Billy does not approve of this. On their way back to the *Walrus* in a longboat, Billy debates with Flint. Flint stands to make himself bigger, Billy quickly does the same, additionally pulling his dagger to be able to defend himself if necessary. Yet, Flint keeps his temper, and his arms remain calmly at his sides showing an open position with a free upper body. Moreover, Bowden points out that this gesture is the opposite of being aggressive, and as it keeps the speaker's energy low.[48] Again, I am aware that Bowden is a non-academic source, nonetheless, his conclusion seems comprehensible to me as hanging arms are not a threatening posture and can help to keep the level of displayed aggression low; moreover, Bowden's claim aligns with the research findings that people prefer arms in a symmetrical position.[49] In the situation in question, Flint rises, moves toward Billy, and makes him finally step back although Billy holds a dagger. Having his arms relaxed and not holding a weapon takes the pressure out of the situation and reduces the impression of Flint as a danger because he appears more passive. As Billy is a likable character, and at this early stage of the serial the audience might not be sure how to react to Flint, having the actor displaying nonverbal actions lessening the threat to Billy is even more important; otherwise, the audience could take sides against Flint. Through his gestures, Flint is presented as calm, approachable, and less aggressive. Comparable to Silver, Flint is often presented with the wide-open gestures and symmetrical arms that people favour. Thus, it appears reasonable to assume that such motions can support the creation of a liking for the characters. These gestures may help to subtly encourage a positive viewer perception, keep

[48] Bowden, *Winning Body Language*, 86.
[49] Matsumoto, Hwang and Frank, "The Body: Postures, Gait, Proxemics, and Haptics," 388.

the characters likable, and ultimately create a liking. Presenting warmth and friendliness is further teased out by Silver's habit of frequent smiling.

9.3 Smiling – A Habit Preferred by Humans

Smiles, as facial expressions, belong to the category of nonverbal actions that people respond positively to. Therefore, I assume that smiles expressed by the characters can influence the audience in seeing the characters in a more positive light. Together with smiling, head tilts and eyebrow flashes belong to so-called "friend signals."[50] In this section, I examine the possible positive effect of the characters' smiles and also pay attention to the other two "friend signals" as they are likely to support a positive audience response as well. Smiles have a profound influence on humans' reactions toward others and direct how someone is perceived. Smiles are judged as pleasant, connected with positive emotions, happiness,[51] and rapport with another person.[52] Smiles enhance the association of a character with positive attributes. Admittedly, there are about 20 types of smiles and not all smiles express happiness or friendliness.[53] Smiles can, for example, be naïve, nervous, patronising, or mean and connected with negative expressions and emotions rather than positive ones. As I focus on positive reactions, my focus will be on honest-appearing smiles, likely to evoke positive reactions. Hwang and Matsumoto emphasise that individuals with Duchenne smiles, which are smiles involving the eyes and judged as honest, are perceived positively. Duchenne smiles evoke attributions such as being pleasant, honest, calm, trustworthy, and likable.[54] When someone presents a smile experienced as non-artificial, the smiling person is received as congenial. I assume such a reaction can occur towards the *Black Sails* characters too, even though it is a screen story. Firstly, because in a television serial, the time viewers have to perceive details of a smile is limited through camera frame and editing. Moreover, camera frame and lighting can be used to foreground the smile. Secondly, because Luke Arnold and Toby Stephens are professionally trained actors and their skills likely allow them to produce Duchenne smiles when required. Due to the effect of "doubleness" in which actor and character melt into one, their smile is likely attributed to the character here, not to the skills of the actor.

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50 Schafer and Karlins, *The Like Switch*, 3.

51 Peter A. Andersen, "Positions of Power Status and Dominance in Organizational Communication," in *The Nonverbal Communication Reader: Classic and Contemporary Reading*, eds. Laura K. Guerrero and Michael L. Hecht, third edition (Long Grove, Illinois: Waverland Press, 2008), 403.

52 See Matsumoto et al., "The Body: Postures, Gait, Proxemics, and Haptics." 388.

53 Willibald Ruch, "Psychology of Humor," in *The Primer of Humor Research*, ed. Victor Raskin (Berlin/New York: DeGruyter, 2008), 21.

54 Hyisung C. Hwang and David Matsumoto, "Facial Expressions," in *APA Handbook of Nonverbal Communication*, eds. Hyisung C. Hwang and Mark G. Frank (Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2016), 266.

In *Black Sails,* John Silver smiles frequently and this supports the perception of him as likable. Through the smiles, the serial creators found a way of letting Silver express emotions that counterbalance his manipulative behaviour. Smiles let the character appear kinder, and the halo effect is subtly underpinned. Flint, in comparison, seldomly smiles, but does so occasionally. I propose that, because he displays smiles rarely, their effect is even stronger. Creating a friendly and pleasant impression on a person's face strengthens the halo effect introduced in chapter 9.1. Research shows that during job interviews candidates who smile frequently leave a more positive impression on the recruiter;[55] in contrast to stern interviewees, smiling applicants are associated with higher social skills.[56] In *Black Sails,* John Silver smiles frequently. As Silver is, at the serial's start, an impostor who has just murdered a man and is now responsible for Randall, the old *Walrus*'s cook, losing his position, Silver's smiles can help counteract negative audience reactions. He, for instance, smiles with a mixture of insecurity and friendliness when Mr Gates, in episode I, introduces him to fellow pirate Billy Bones, and shortly afterward when Billy presents him to the hitherto *Walrus* cook Randall. While Silver's smiles in the presence of Billy Bones and Randall contain an insecure element, the main intention is to express openness and establish a friendly personal interaction. When Mr Gates introduces him to Billy, Gates and Silver smile at each other, the component of uneasiness appears when Billy does not return Silver's smile after Gates leaves the two on their own. In this scene, Billy Bones is introduced to the audience, he repels Silver's smile and frowns at him with his mouth open and appears irritated by Silver's presence. Since Silver was hiding in the ship's hold and the pirates were in a fight, Silver is clean and neat whereas Billy has dirt, sweat, and blood on his bare upper body. None of the characters is known well by the audience at this early stage of the serial. So far, Silver is one of the characters in the centre, and his appearance and facial expression are exploited here to set him apart from Billy, who will be another major character. Silver's friendly expression in direct comparison to a harried-looking Billy Bones makes it likely for the viewers to respond to Silver's welcoming expression as an appealing nonverbal action, which lessens the chance of a detachment from a character who has just revealed himself to be an evil hero through overwhelming greed, murder, and causing others harm. In Silver's case, Billy's rebuffing reaction can help to make Silver more accessible.

In his meeting with Randall, to whom a now clean, dressed, and higher-spirited Billy Bones introduces Silver, Silver's smile and raised hand to greet the old cook appear rather shy and

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55 Frauendorfer and Schmidt Mast, "The Impact of Nonverbal Behavior in the Job Interview," 227.

56 Robert Gifford, Cheuk Fan Ng and Margaret Wilkinson, "Nonverbal Cues in the Employment Interview: Links Between Applicant Qualities and Interviewer Judgments," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 70, no. 4 (1985): 730.

underpin Silver's uneasiness with the situation of Randall being told by Billy that he is no longer needed as the *Walrus*'s cook. At the same time, Silver intends to be friendly. Randall reacts with a disapproving look at the newcomer, his eyes wide open and his lips thin. When Billy explains the situation to Randall, Silver is only vaguely visible in the background but his swallowing and shifting can still be noticed and this underlines Silver's discomfort. In both situations, the one with Billy, and the one with Randall, Silver's friendly gesture is declined. In the scene with Billy, the unanswered smile carries embarrassment that Silver is facing and creates an amenable element for viewers. In the encounter with Randall, the creators of the serial use the situation to add a trace of sensitivity to Silver who, although knowing that he is going to replace the old man, meets him with a kind and almost apologetic expression.

When the pirates first reach their homeport of Nassau, John Silver is new to the place. Flint's crew leaves the *Walrus* in longboats to make their way to the island. Silver is one of the first ones to arrive onshore. He follows fellow pirate Logan onto the wooden landing stage. Different from Logan, who is familiar with Nassau, Silver does not walk straight off the stage but remains close to its edge for a moment and, open-mouthed, turns himself around and then smiles. The astonished smile reveals more detail concerning Silver's personality. His wonder regarding the place where he just disembarked culminates in an amazed smile that adds something boyish to his character. Despite all his calculating and greedy behaviour, he suddenly appears capable of childlike, 'innocent' fascination, which lessens his perception as cunning and makes him appear humbler. Shortly thereafter, Silver finds some books in a basket waiting to be packed. Browsing through the pages, he discovers that he is looking at the journals from which he possesses a page with information about a Spanish treasure, a coincidence causing him to smile. Although the journals bring Silver a step closer to the money he desires, the smile on his lips is not greedy but a happy one with his mouth slightly open and his teeth visible. His face is relaxed, his eyes are open and bright, and his eyebrows are slightly raised rather than lowered. Silver does not display aggression, even though his teeth are bared. This truly happy smile when he finds the journals from the merchant ship supports the adding of complexity to Silver's character. His smile lacks a greedy component and appears glad; he expresses a real, positive emotion here and is not trying to make an impression, manipulate someone, or disguise his true feelings. An honest expression being present on Silver's face increases the chance of the positive traits connected with a smiling person to take effect and raise his likability. Smiling works to Silver's advantage in these scenes as he is the character who reaches out with an affable expression. The other participants do not react in the same way and that can shift the audience's affection slightly and subtly towards Silver.

Moreover, smiling separates Silver from other characters. His counterpart, Captain Flint, with whom he has a shifting relationship in being allies, friends, or enemies, is designed as a serious character who seldom smiles. *Black Sails* opposes severe characters in their centre such as the pirate captains James Flint and Charles Vane with a more nonchalant companion. Both pirate captains are paired with a companion character. Vane has the show's trickster, Jack Rackham, in his crew and as a close friend, and Flint is opposed to John Silver. On the level of the overall mood and plot, Silver's repeated smiling differentiates him from more serious characters, and, together with Rackham, his easy-going attitude prevents the serial from shifting too much towards sobriety, which might enhance a positive audience response towards him because he is one of the characters associated with relief of tension and sternness. Silver (and Rackham) are also often involved in teasing humorous comments out of other characters or making witty remarks themselves. Humour increases the likeability even of fictional beings.[57]

Besides smiling, eyebrow and head movements can positively affect how a person is perceived.[58] Flashing the eyebrows and moving the head slightly are largely universally recognised gestures[59] that communicate friendly intentions and can evoke a positive reaction towards the greeting person. These two specific motions are displayed by John Silver too. When he first enters the merchant ship's hold, knocks over the cook, and barricades the door, he engages in a conversation with the other man. As the talk starts, Silver quickly raises his eyebrows and tilts his head. When Mr Gates enters his hideout, Silver briefly flashes his eyebrows at the pirate, likewise when he discusses the value of the page in his possession with the sex worker Max and admits that he does not yet know what the page's asset is, he quickly raises his eyebrows. The displayed eyebrow flash and tilting of the head can subtly enhance a positive reaction to Silver and support other positive gestures and expressions. In sum, Silver presents three "friend signals" that are an accepted form of greeting between people. By using facial expressions and gestures, the repelling level of Silver's actions is lowered, which offers viewers the possibility to not detach from him at the start of *Black Sails*, keeping the option open to develop a liking for him as the story continues and Silver's scheming behaviour lessens.

Flint only occasionally smiles as, for instance, in episode I as Gates and Flint discuss the possibility of a mutiny against Flint. Flint responds to an ironic remark of Gates with a slight

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57 Martin Eisend and Alfred Kuß, "Humor in der Kommunikation," in *Handbuch Kommunikation: Grundlagen - Innovative Ansätze - Praktische Umsetzungen*, eds. Manfred Bruhn, Franz-Rudolf Esch and Tobias Langner (Wiesbaden: Gabler, 2006), 633.

58 Schafer and Karlins, *The Like Switch*, 25.

59 Roger E. Axtell, "Initiating Interaction: Greetings and Beckonings Across the World," in *The Nonverbal Communication Reader: Classic and Contemporary Reading*, eds. Laura K. Guerrero and Michael L. Hecht, Third Edition (Long Grove, Illinois: Waverland Press, 2008), 110.

smile. It is just a small pulling up of the corners of his mouth, yet it is noticeable and presents a friendly and warm expression. In addition to the "friend signal" that Flint presents through smiling, he appears approachable even with difficult topics. Smiles are also used to give the character more complexity. As Flint and his crew pursue the pirate vessel *Andromache* in episode V to capture cannons the other ship is carrying, which Flint needs to hunt down the *Urca*, he even smiles several times. A discussion arises whether the *Walrus* can go any faster to catch up with the *Andromache* or if trying to do so will destroy the *Walrus*. Flint orders the faster pursuit, and his plan is seconded by Billy Bones to whom Flint looks and presents him with a brief smile. With this smile, Flint again shows a welcoming facial expression. Furthermore. it underlines that Flint can appreciate Billy's support, which counters the impression of an arrogant or self-centred captain. The serial creators use nonverbal actions here to reveal more information about Flint's personality. As the *Walrus* finally gains the needed speed without falling apart, Flint exchanges a happy and satisfied smile with Billy Bones that exposes his teeth. For Flint's character, smiling with visible teeth shows an unusually big motion as he mostly only expresses slight smiles. Flint's happiness about the outcome of the hunt and gratefulness for Billy's support is therefore foregrounded even more. In the very next shot, Flint stands on the *Walrus*'s rail, gazing towards the *Andromache,* and smiles again. Here his smile is comparable to John Silver's astonishment as he reaches Nassau. Flint is not astonished, nor does he smile as brightly as Silver does, but he does appear hopeful. Through his hopeful and optimistic smile, another layer is added to his personality as he is expressing yet another emotion; Flint's capability of being light-hearted and positive is underpinned through his facial expression. Flint exchanging smiles can help to counterbalance his aggressiveness and his cold and ruthless moments.

Flint presents the other "friend signals", the head tilt, and the raised eyebrows, as well. In episode I as he tries to convince Mr Guthrie to support the *Urca* hunt, Flint tells him the story of the *Urca*. As he does so, he has a slight smile on his lips, but he also raises his eyebrows as he speaks and has his head slightly tilted to the side. As the camera is focusing straight onto Flint in a medium close up, his "friend signals" are not only directed at his interlocutor but also at the viewers and can effectively unfold their positive characteristics. Closing in on Flint's facial expressions highlights his usually only small movements and conveys them to the viewers with a stronger effect. In episode V, Flint explains his plans to a doubtful Billy Bones. While answering a critical question from Billy, Flint remains calm and his face is unmoved besides a slight raising of the eyebrows. Moreover, Flint's answer is accompanied by a slight tilt of the head which presents another positive and reassuring signal. Flint's nonverbal actions take the

pressure out of the situation and are yet again used to demonstrate the different sides of Flint's personality. Together with the general positive effects of smiles, I argue that the traits that are finely added to Flint's personality through his nonverbal actions can subtly influence the viewers into a positive response towards him, which can then lead the way for the evolvement of liking for the character.

The instances when Flint smiles appear more striking because they stand out from his usual behaviour which is, overall, stern. When Flint smiles, it likely has a positive effect on his perception, but smiles are not applied as often as they are for Silver. At any rate, it is a method to add more nuances to his character as it fleshes out that Flint can show other habits than being stern, angry, or exhausted. Occasional presentations of happiness bring more colour to his personality. In interaction with Silver, humour works in Flint's favour too, as it is often him making a witty remark directed at Silver that is likely to be received as amusing by the audience. Negative behaviour, such as aggressive actions or appearing ruthless and cold, can be lessened through smiles. Moreover, a smile is a warm and welcoming bodily cue that gives him a more approachable radiance which, in the long term, equips him with a characteristic that is well-responded to by humans.

9.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced the positive effects that the characters' first appearances, open gestures, and smiles might have regarding their perception by the audience. The basis for my argumentation is the "doubleness" in which viewers blend actor and character into one image. On this premise, I also assume that viewers react to characters largely in a similar way as they would to humans. Therefore, the character's nonverbal habits and appearance are likely to subtly influence the viewers. Focusing on appearance for forming a first impression, open gestures, and smiles, I posit how positive bodily cues displayed by the actors can subtly enhance a positive reaction towards the characters. Negative behaviour, such as being greedy, aggressive, or ruthless, can be counterbalanced through the use of positive nonverbal cues.

For Silver's and Flint's first appearance, the serial creators ensured to set both evil heroes, through their physical appearance, apart from other characters. Flint and Silver are both introduced as neat-looking and calm. Both are given a costume in colours largely preferred by humans. In their gestures, both characters show relaxed, open, and welcoming nonverbal actions to which people tend to react well. When it comes to facial expressions, Silver smiles noticeably more than Flint. Flint uses smaller measures of facial expressions, but he does smile too. Additionally, Silver and Flint use the "friend signals" of the head tilt and eyebrow flash. An approvable appearance, warm gestures, smiling, and "friend signals" can, as I illustrated,

subtly influence the audience towards a positive (first) response towards the characters and likewise help reinforcing a positive response. Light, camera setting, and choice of colours can further help to foreground the characters' nonverbal actions. Moreover, the bodily cues carried out can, as I argued, reveal in a subliminal way character features, foreground the characters' complexity, and counterbalance their negative behaviour which, eventually, can make the characters appear more accessible and relatable. Other categories of nonverbal actions can add to the complexity given to the characters. Letting them show uneasiness and confidence, as well as emotions in general, outlines character depth and complexity, as I emphasise in the following chapter.

10 Uneasy, Confident, and Emotional – Adding Complexity to Evil Heroes

In the previous chapter, I explained how, based on the assumption that viewers react to characters in a comparable way as they would to real-life-individuals, an appealing physical appearance, including makeup and costume, together with warm and open gestures, smiles, head tilts, and eyebrow flashes may enhance a positive response to evil heroes. I introduced Flint as a complex character with inner contradictions in chapter 8. The character's nonverbal actions work together with the character traits based on Milton's Satan and the Byronic hero to create character depth and ambiguity. In this chapter, I illustrate how other, contradicting, nonverbal actions can further increase character depth and therefore add more accessible traits to the characters. In chapter 6 I emphasised the importance of character development and character arc, especially in the slow-narrating serial format to which *Black Sails* belongs. Slow-burn-narration allows the serial creators time to add characteristics to their protagonists little by little and the characters are given time to develop. For a character to be experienced as complex, he does not necessarily have to have contradicting traits or good and bad characteristics. For the two evil heroes from *Black Sails*, however, complexity and character depth are created by giving them contradicting features. Chapter 8 introduced, in the example of Flint and the historical contextualisation with Milton's Satan and the Byronic hero Conrad, that establishing inner doubt in characters is a technique repeatedly used in literature history. Providing characters with complexity can make it easier for viewers to engage with the characters in a positive way, as depth and complexity can help to create an image of "characters who are like us" for the viewers.[1] Seger emphasises in her guide to creating compelling characters that "[h]uman nature being what it is, a character is always more than just a set of consistencies."[2] Characters need to show intricacy to appear convincing and 'realistic.' Thus, giving depth to the characters likely makes the evil heroes in *Black Sails* appear more like human personalities with different layers and shades. Through using complexity for the characters, and harnessing contradicting traits, positive character features counteracting negative behaviour might be established and reinforced. Nonverbal actions can be harnessed as a tool to underline and foreground character depth and positive character traits. On a level beyond the plot, bodily cues can help to show the characters' states of mind, illustrating doubts, worries, and emotions in general. In the following, I use selected examples from scenes within *Black Sails* episodes to

1 Seger, *Creating Unforgettable Characters*, 174.
2 Seger, *Creating Unforgettable Characters*, 32.

outline how the characters' bodily cues may be employed in supporting a positive viewer response towards Flint and Silver, focusing on the bodily cues that most likely support a positive viewer response.

This chapter consists of three sections. The first discusses nonverbal signs that make the characters appear more complex by showing them as confident. Their confidence is part of giving them depth as it can contradict with the evil heroes' vulnerable traits and, overall, create complexity. Moreover, appearing confident may subtly let the viewers develop an admiration for the characters' traits, which, as Eder argues, can enhance the viewers' readiness to relate to the characters.[3] Media scholar Igor Prusa states that humans have an "inherent desire to relate and admire."[4] Laudable character traits can help to fulfil the aspiration for role models – at least to a degree – and thus invite a positive response for a character. García highlights that audiences respond well to admirable traits,[5] and Vogler stresses that admirable qualities can invoke the wish in the audience to be like the hero showing such characteristics.[6] The *Black Sails* characters are not traditional heroes who are willing to serve a good cause and sacrifice their lives. Nonetheless, they are the liked main characters of their story; therefore, I suggest that Vogler's observation, aligning with Eder's and García's, can be transferred to evil heroes as well.

In the second section of the chapter, I introduce how the character of Flint is made to appear more amenable by being presented as vulnerable, letting him appear less ruthless and cold. In the third part I move on to Silver and argue that presenting him with signs of uneasiness can support the creation of character depth as it helps to balance out his greedy and confident actions. Both characters are shown as concerned about what goes on around them. For Flint and Silver, different states of mind are used in creating their complexity. Using nonverbal actions indicating that the characters are affected by events around them can support giving them a human touch and counteract their greedy, arrogant, or cold and ruthless behaviour. In chapter 2, I outlined that studies on character engagement and evil heroes so far conclude that being able to relate to the characters is a major means for viewers to respond well to them. The characters' bodily cues can support their presentation as accessible and may support viewers to relate to the evil heroes. A basis for my argument is what Plantinga calls "twofoldness", where viewers react to characters comparably to real humans, and McConachie's "doubleness",

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3 Eder, *Die Figur im Film*, 656.

4 Igor Prusa, "Heroes Beyond Good and Evil: Theorising Transgressivity in Japanese and Western Fiction," *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies* 16, no. 1 (2016): n.p. Accessed October 9, 2019, https://www.japanesestudies.org.uk/ejcjs/vol16/iss1/prusa.html.

5 García, "Aesthetic Enjoyment and Repugnance in *Hannibal*," 213.

6 Vogler, *The Writer's Journey*, 40.

meaning that viewers blend actor and character into one image. Viewers are aware of seeing fiction, yet their reactions to the characters in the fiction appear to be largely comparable to their reactions to other humans. For that reason, I assume viewers are also affected by the characters' nonverbal actions comparably to the nonverbal actions of real people.

Another factor in viewers engaging positively with characters is caring (out of curiosity) and suspense, which can be highlighted through the characters' bodily cues. Davis writes that "[c]aring about what happens next is caring about what happens next *to the characters*."[7] Caring in the way Davis uses the term includes caring for the story as well as the fate of the characters. Interest in how a scene continues is closely interwoven with the character taking part in the scene and thus creates suspense. Davis's observation highlights the close connection between the viewers' general interest in how the story will progress and the characters advancing the plot. Such a caring reaction may occur especially in situations showing the characters in peril, and the character's nonverbal actions can help to tease it out. I posit that even if the viewers have not yet engaged with a character, a reaction of caring for the character can take place as what happens to him is related to the progress of the story, and vice versa. Interest for the outcome of the narrative connects with an evoked caring, as Davis calls it, for the characters. Black et al. even state: "[w]hen readers and viewers *like* fictional characters, they care what happens to them."[8] Caring for a character and liking a character is closely intertwined. I do not argue that viewers instantly start to like Silver or Flint just because they are in a perilous or suspenseful situation; but there is a relationship between caring about what happens next in the story and the character centred in a scene. Moreover, caring for a character aligns with the argument that curiosity about a character can help to create a bond, which I made in the previous chapter. Based on Plantinga's assumption that when a bond between viewer and character is created, interest, curiosity, and suspense regarding the question of what will happen to the character is likewise created,[9] I argued that being curious about a character might also help create the bond with the character. Thus, a character displaying bodily cues that visually underline the plot-created suspense can subtly lead the audience to start caring for the character, which can be the first step into inviting a liking. The closely intertwined relationship between character and story progress can prevent the viewer's disconnection from the fictional being.

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7 Davis, *Creating Compelling Characters for Film TV and Radio*, viii. Original emphasis.

8 Black et al., "Who can Resist a Villain?", 2. For an explanation as to why I do not employ the term empathy please see chapter 4.4.

9 Plantinga, *Screen Stories*, 22.

10.1 Confidence for Complex Characters

Confidence, vulnerability, and uneasiness are contradicting traits. However, I propose, that these character traits when presented by the evil heroes, foreground the characters' complexity when coming together. In chapter 8, I showed Flint's inner contradiction and two personas. The nonverbal actions displayed by the character highlight such a contradictory personality. Although Silver is a more consistent character, his bodily cues also support a more nuanced image of the character, giving him more depth as well. Letting both characters display confidence as well as nervousness or exhaustion creates a more rounded impression of the evil heroes in the whole of the serial; the character arc is foregrounded, and character depth strengthened. Moreover, too much confidence may be perceived as arrogance, which is not likely to trigger a well-disposed reaction toward the self-assured person but rather a rejection.[10] Plantinga states that a character connected with condescension may be disliked by the audience because of his arrogance.[11] For that reason, the balance between confidence and vulnerability in *Black Sails* is even more crucial. Confidence, if not overly displayed, is a character trait that is preferred by humans in others and, thus may subtly invite a positive reaction towards the characters.[12] Additionally, being presented as calm and fearless even in dangerous situations can, as I illustrate below, even evoke admiration for evil heroes and also lead to a positive response. In *Black Sails*, John Silver and James Flint both show features of self-assurance. While Flint, who is already established in the pirate world as the narrative starts, is confident from the beginning, Silver develops and leaves behind his uneasiness and unsureness, and develops confidence, calmness, and even fearlessness. For Silver, his increasing confidence is part of his character arc and development. This section focuses on selected examples of nonverbal actions showing the characters' confident behaviour and arguing how it might create a positive audience response.

Self-reliance can affect how others perceive a person and sovereignty can be a tool in creating liking. Moreover, poised people are trusted more.[13] Bodily cues for self-assurance include an upright position, wide, purposeful steps whilst walking, and the claiming of more personal space, especially through the arms.[14] Relaxed motions are another indicator. Andersen notes that relaxation "is a power cue since higher-status individuals are generally perceived to

10 Cuddy, *Presence*, 33.
11 Plantinga, "I Followed the Rules," 42.
12 Schafer and Karlins, *The Like Switch*, 65.
13 Cuddy, *Presence*, 20–21.
14 Navarro and Karlins, *What Every Body is Saying*, 120.

be more relaxed."[15] Self-assured people tend to be calm, which might cause appreciation and thus can create a positive response.

Silver develops a calm confidence in the *Black Sails* narrative, which can enhance a liking for him. His growing confidence might invite viewers to hold him in high esteem and therefore overlook his greedy behaviour at the serial's start. Silver's development is underlined as he moves from making initial gestures of confidence to becoming fearless in the face of danger; nonverbal actions are used to foreground his development. That Silver is showing motions to which humans tend to react well can also help to counterbalance his unappealing and cunning actions, especially in the first few episodes. In episode IV, Silver approaches Flint and tries to convince the captain to put his trust in Silver instead of boatswain Billy Bones. As the conversation starts, Silver appears a little nervous, holding a bowl as a direct barrier in front of him and keeping his distance from Flint's desk. Eventually, Silver plucks up his courage, puts the bowl aside, and steps closer to Flint's desk. Although Flint appears harried by Silver's presence and looks at him with a doubtful frown, Silver does not back away. Instead, he puts both hands on Flint's desk and leans toward Flint as he continues talking to him. With this motion, he enters the captain's personal space and does not shy away. He is facing Flint directly and only leaves as it becomes obvious that Flint is not willing to engage in a conversation about Billy. Silver does not back off easily or give in at the first sign of difficulty, a trait that can be perceived as admirable. Psychologists Dana R. Carney and Amy Cuddy, and organisational behaviour expert Andy J. Yap describe leaning forward on a table or sitting with wide arms and legs as a "power pose",[16] a pose that is associated with attaining power by claiming space.[17] Silver ignoring the captain's space illustrates that he develops a 'backbone', which represents a character trait people are likely to respond well to. Scenes like this illustrate that Silver develops a calm confidence without becoming aggressive. With his motions becoming wider and more relaxed, his nonverbal actions illustrate that he is self-assured even in situations in which he is not in control of what happens next or depends on the mercy of another character. From becoming more confident, Silver moves on to being presented as fearless.

When *Walrus* quartermaster Mr Dufresne contrives a mutiny against Captain Flint in episode VIII, Silver, as Flint's associate at that stage of the narrative, is affected too. Sailing master Mr

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15 Peter A. Andersen, "Positions of Power Status and Dominance in Organizational Communication," in *The Nonverbal Communication Reader: Classic and Contemporary Reading*, eds. Laura K. Guerrero and Michael L. Hecht. Third Edition (Long Grove, Illinois: Waverland Press, 2008), 452.

16 Dana R.Carney, Amy Cuddy and Andy J. Yap, "Power Posing: Brief Nonverbal Displays Affect Neuroendocrine Levels and Risk Tolerance," *Psychological Science* 21, no. 10 (2010): 1365.

17 Andersen, "Positions of Power Status and Dominance in Organizational Communication," 460; See also Bonaiuto, DeDominicis and Ganucci Cancellieri, "Gestures, Postures, Gaze, and Movement in Work and Organization," 1352.

DeGroot hinders Silver from leaving the ship's hold by pointing a gun at him and making Silver sit on a chair. Asking Mr DeGroot what he hopes to accomplish, Silver sits leaning forward with his legs wide and his arms spread out. This move brings him closer to the gun pointing at him. His cool dealing with the event can increase admiration for the character. Silver's developing confidence is underscored through body language such as standing or sitting wide, equally to presenting confidence these motions create open postures. By presenting a calm and laid-back way of self-assurance, a liking for Silver may be enhanced. His calmness even in dangerous situations is a trait that might evoke respect for him and gives the character a trace of braveness. The ability to face superiors in an argument, stay calm, not panic, or lose his head, are qualities that some viewers might aspire to have themselves; this could elicit the idea of seeing Silver as a character with admirable features. Eder argues that a character with admirable qualities is likely to evoke a positive response because "[i]f viewers perceive a character as superior this can evoke the desire to be like the character, which then again may increase the willingness to adopt the character's perspective."[18] The word "superior", or the German adjective "überlegen" from the original quote, means to be better at something than someone else, for instance, smarter, faster, stronger. Silver might show traits here that viewers would like to have themselves. He clearly shows development in his confidence, unlike Flint, who shows that trait immediately.

Flint is a confident character from the beginning of the serial. Through his movements, he is presented as an assured character. He walks with long strides and often has one or both hands on his belt, creating an akimbo impression which "widens a person's profile in an attempt to display dominance."[19] Schafer's pointing out of the "attempt" to present dominance is justified as different positions are read differently in regard to the situation they are presented in. Wide arms can, for example, also be considered as an open gesture, "whereas arms akimbo (arms at hips) or arms crossed in front of one's body generally are associated with more negative attitudes."[20] Whether the arms are considered to be truly akimbo, with elbows facing outwards, or just seen as open, depends on the rest of the bodily cues. Hands at hips can create simply an open position, or be experienced as indicating a slightly unfavourable attitude; the surrounding circumstances combined with the nonverbal position are crucial. In Flint's case, however, the placing of his hands, often creating an akimbo position, is frequently a motion underlining his confidence in a situation rather than illustrating an annoyed, condescending, or bad attitude.

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18 Eder, *Gefühle in Filmen und Fernsehen*, 232. Original quote: "Wenn Zuschauer eine Figur als überlegen wahrnehmen, kann dies den Wunsch hervorrufen, wie diese Figur zu sein, was wiederum die Bereitschaft erhöhen mag, ihre Perspektive zu übernehmen."

19 Schafer and Karlins, *The Like Switch*, 54.

20 Matsumoto, Hwang and Frank, "The Body: Postures, Gait, Proxemics, and Haptics," 387.

Arms akimbo leave the upper body uncovered, a vulnerable spot, which highlights that the character is not worried about being attacked or challenged. Thus, having his arms akimbo presents Flint as relaxed and self-assured at the same time.

Flint's confidence is underlined by his lack of respect for others' personal space. The confidence the serial creators conceded to the evil hero allows him to encounter nearly every environment as if he belongs. An example is the scene when Mr Dufresne temporarily replaces Flint as captain of the *Walrus* in episode X. Flint very politely knocks before he enters the office and even asks Dufresne for permission to come in. Flint's body language, nevertheless, reveals something different from respect. With his arms behind his back, Flint shows a habit that can be repeatedly noticed for him. Navarro describes that as a sign of superiority: "[w]hen people place their arms behind their backs, first they are saying, 'I am of higher status.' Second, they are transmitting, 'Please don't come near me; I am not to be touched.'"[21] Andersen, in contrast, emphasises that men with their hands behind their backs are generally judged as humbler and subordinate.[22] Hands behind the back and what this posture means can differ from subjective experiences. Either way, it proves Flint's disrespect for Dufresne in the described situation. If the motion is read with a higher status meaning, which Navarro attributes to this movement, it suggests that Flint does not take Dufresne seriously and still sees himself as superior to his former accountant. Even if the hands behind his back are associated with humbleness, as Andersen argues, it can be assumed that the storyline of *Black Sails* up to this point has revealed enough information about Flint to exclude the idea that he is, in the given situation, truly motivated by humbleness. Instead, he might be conceived not as a devoted subordinate to Mr Dufresne, but rather mocking the other man and possibly conveying a plan in order to retain his position as captain. Flint is a de facto subordinate to Dufresne in the described scene, yet his nonverbal actions communicate that he does not accept that. Flint's bodily cues are indicating that his confidence and lack of respect towards the other continue. As the scene continues, Flint inspects a bookshelf and does not look at Dufresne while he is talking to him, which can be considered rude.[23] By displaying disrespectful behaviour through his postures, Flint is shown as continuing to insult Dufresne nonverbally – Flint's talk, then, is very polite. When Flint finally turns around, he steps to Dufrene's desk and leans on it, which emphasises his confidence in the situation. Andersen observes that "higher-status persons have access to more territory and can more easily invade other's space."[24] Entering someone else's personal space

21 Navarro and Karlins, *What Every Body is Saying,* 118.
22 Andersen, "Positions of Power Status and Dominance in Organizational Communication," 454.
23 Hendrick and Hendrick, *Liking, Loving and Relating,* 72.
24 Andersen, "Positions of Power Status and Dominance in Organizational Communication," 453.

without having permission to do so and ignoring personal borders communicates confidence.[25] Finally, Flint walks away without looking back. Although he shows confident and even disrespectful behaviour in the described scene, I propose that his nonverbal actions can reinforce a positive audience response towards him. After X episodes, it appears likely that most viewers will receive Flint as a likable character. Dufresne replacing him as captain threatens Flint's life and future; it also threatens the development of the story as it affects the hunt for the *Urca* gold. Moreover, the viewers are familiar with Flint's plan to become captain of the *Walrus* again, which means there is also suspense connected with Flint's actions and how he might overcome Dufresne. Because of that, caring for the character due to his close entanglement with the proceeding of the story might affect viewers. It is reasonable to assume that the viewers would like the story to continue in an interesting and suspenseful way. Moreover, the development of the narrative makes it likely that viewers see Dufresne as more and more arrogant and unappealing and, therefore, agree with Flint's actions against him. As Dufresne aims to sail to Nassau and Flint is the one aiming to proceed with the treasure hunt here, viewers are likely to take Flint's side. If Flint prevails against Dufresne, the narrative promises to continue at an interesting and suspenseful level. Thus, I argue viewers are even likely to take the side of Flint and therefore start to care more for him. Flint's confident and disrespectful nonverbal actions towards Dufresne can underpin the viewers' likely opposition to Dufresne and similarly emphasise their positive response to Flint. The viewers understand Flint's plans, which can lead to an adopting of the protagonist's goals[26] and strengthening of the viewers' relationship with a particular character. Plot line and nonverbal actions work powerfully together here to enhance a liking for Flint. Moreover, the character is presented with the ability to not give in and not accept defeat, which might increase respect for the character of Flint.

Flint shares the trait of fearlessness with Silver. In episode I, for instance, as he and Billy Bones visit and abduct Nassau's administrator Mr Guthrie, Billy has a moment of doubt about how to behave. During his scepticism, he points a gun at Flint. Flint looks straight at Billy but does not alter his upright position with an open upper body, take any measures to protect himself, or take away the gun from Billy. He keeps his gaze on Billy but does not show any signs of tension or fear. In this and several other scenes, Flint's nonverbal actions let him appear entirely unbothered by the fact that his life might be endangered. His nonverbal actions remain

[25] Larry Smeltzer, John Waltman and Donald Leonard, "Proxemics and Haptics in Managerial Communication," in *The Nonverbal Communication Reader: Classic and Contemporary Reading*, eds. Laura K. Guerrero and Michael L. Hecht. Third Edition (Long Grove, Illinois: Waverland Press, 2008), 187.

[26] Tan, *Emotion and the Structure of Narrative Film*, 173.

calm, certain, and confident. Remaining self-assured in a perilous situation with an unknown outcome, which is highlighted through Flint's nonverbal actions, might convey admirable character traits and can help to strengthen liking for the character.

Through confidence, both Flint and Silver are given characteristics that reinforce a positive image of them and might even create an admiration for them. Their self-assured presentation counterbalances their greedy, cunning, and violent behaviour, which can cause viewers to remain open towards the characters and not disconnect from them. Confident people are liked better than cowards and using open and relaxed nonverbal actions to display self-assurance strengthens a positive effect on viewers even more, as people likewise prefer open postures. Moreover, confidence and fearlessness can make the characters appear as equipped with admirable traits. An admiration may be created through which the viewers see features in the characters they would like to have themselves. Such a reaction can subtly invite and reinforce a positive response towards the characters, allow such a response become stronger, and finally pave the way for a liking for the characters to develop.

To allow the characters to appear even more complex and accessible, they do display emotions as well. The confidence the serial creators grant their characters balances out their moments of uneasiness, fear, or weariness, and therefore, working together, uneasiness and confidence create a rounded character image, foregrounding the characters' complexity.

10.2 Vulnerability for Complex Characters – Flint

For creating character depth in the *Black Sails* evil heroes, the described confidence needs to be balanced out. I argue that the serial creators do so for the character of Flint by introducing vulnerability as a character trait. In introducing both confidence and vulnerability, the character is given a complexity through featuring contradicting traits. Coming together, these character traits can make the characters appear amenable to the viewers. To increase Flint's depth, the *Black Sails* creators use moments in which Flint loses his unmoved façade. His nonverbal actions help to foreground his states of mind that are not expressed in dialogue. For Flint, signs of weariness and sadness are used to make him appear more vulnerable. The character's inner contradiction, which I outlined in chapter 8, is foregrounded in the serial through his bodily reactions. Flint's behaviour differs between his public and private self and the two identities of the character are emphasised nonverbally. At the end of episode II, for example, Flint enters the house of his companion, Miranda Barlow. He stands in the open door panting, with cold light flowing in from behind him contrasting the 'outside world' where he is a pirate and whence he just came to the private surroundings inside the house where he does not need to act as

untouchable Captain. Flint leaves the public space and enters a private space here, and a private and more vulnerable image of the character is revealed. As Miranda leaves the room, the scene that follows uses body posture, making Flint appear small, exhausted, and sunken in to reveal to the audience, nonverbally, aspects of Flint's private persona that he rarely shares with any other characters in the serial. Flint literally falls to his knees, appearing weary from previous events. Once the door has been closed to both his fellow pirates and to his intimate companion, the camera uses a shot that is slightly angled from above and thus supports the presentation of the character as inferior. The camera closes in on the character's face is another technique to create a more positive response. Film expert Peter Verstraten notes that "[a] character who often appears in close-up tends to build up narrative 'credit': there is a good chance that his or her vision will become known to the viewer."[27] As a main character, Flint (as well as Silver) appears in a close-up regularly during the serial. In the described scene, a positive response can be enhanced through the additional presentation of his exhaustion. Bruun Vaage, moreover, posits that close-ups make viewers "latch" onto the characters feelings.[28] The character's nonverbal actions and the movie techniques strongly work together here to convey Flint's state of mind to the viewers. Presenting Flint with vulnerability that breaks his violence, sternness, and confidence early in the narrative is important because, at the end of episode I, he engages in a brutal and bloody fight. By the end of episode II, techniques come together that can help prevent the audience detaching from the evil hero. By falling to his knees, breathing hard, and making himself appear smaller, Flint visually leaves his position of power and calmness. Flint diminishes the space his body is inhabiting by collapsing against the door; this visualises his exhaustion. High-status individuals tend to claim a great deal of physical space for themselves, while subordinates use a smaller amount of room while standing, sitting, or walking.[29] Powerful and confident persons do normally physically claim more room and can choose to take on a relaxed or even leisurely position, which is likely to include wide movements such as sprawling the feet, stretching the arms out, or leaning back. In the scene described above, Flint is not doing that, he breaks down and keeps his arms close to his body. He does not claim space; he takes on a position making himself appear smaller and thus having the opposite effect than the position described by researchers. Flint's bodily position, combined with the sweat and blood on his face, his loose hair, and laboured breathing make him appear exhausted, vulnerable, and with a sudden loss of power, which the evil hero only shows when in a private space. In public spaces Flint, for the most part, keeps his cold and unmoved façade upright. For instance, he is

[27] Peter Verstraten, *Film Narratology* (Toronto/Buffalo/London: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 71.
[28] Bruun Vaage, *The Antihero in American Television*, 73.
[29] Burgoon, Dunbar and Segrin, "Nonverbal Influence," 455.

repeatedly presented standing alone at the bow of the *Walrus* with camera and light focusing on him. Depicting his character in such a heroic set-up emphasises a strong and leading position, a confident character ready to stand his ground. So do the scenes with a fearless Flint unmoved by personal danger that I pointed out above. Scenes such as the one described above introduce the opposite and create a more complex image of Flint. Also, the viewers come to know a more private image of Flint here, which can invite a positive reaction as it underlines that the character has more than one side. Flint is presented as not merely 'evil' but as a vulnerable human being. A more faceted image of James Flint is created.

The danger of Flint being perceived as too cold because he just pursues his aims with events around him not affecting him is reduced. More shades are added to his character and depth is created. Next to him having a vulnerable side, the serial creators also reveal, through the character's nonverbal actions rather than dialogue, that Flint does not want others to see through his tough façade. Wanting to retain an untouchable image when in public highlights Flint's vulnerability. Such character traits give the audience different points to being able to relate to Flint and thus respond positively towards him. It appears reasonable that viewers can comprehend the experience of keeping a calm and strong outward appearance even though mental exhaustion dominates.

More examples of an emotionally and vulnerable bothered Flint are given. He faces a possible mutiny led by Mr Singleton in episode I. Just before facing his opponent, Flint is alone and breathing heavily, his features are tense, and his eyes go straight forward but do not appear to focus on anything in particular. Flint's facial expression is highlighted by the camera in a medium-close up, and through a sole focus on him, the background is blurry. The possibility for viewers to interlock with Flint's emotional state here is enhanced through the combination of the shot and the clearly displayed facial expression. It is thus likely that viewers of this scene may start to engage with Flint, which can invite a positive response towards him generally, and eventually lead to a liking for the character. As the camera moves back, it becomes visible that Flint is clenching his fists and steadies himself with one hand on a chair. Clenching his fists thus shows Flint's anger as it is an abbreviated punch,[30] but also emphasises the need to defend himself and to fight for his position as the *Walrus*'s captain. The suspense connected with the awaiting fight is already set up through Flint's motions. Flint then has an emotional outburst; he violently knocks his desk over and smashes the chair. His facial expression remains tense and he starts twitching his lips. He might react in a wild manner, yet insecurity about what is to come is illustrated, counteracting cold and calm behaviour. A second violent outburst happens

[30] Andersen, *Nonverbal Communication*, 4.

shortly afterwards when Flint finally fights Singleton for the captaincy. Once more, the aspect of caring is introduced in connection with his character as what happens to him affects the story's development. Even though Flint wins the fight, he continues to beat Singleton's corpse with his fists. As he stops, he stares straight into the camera. Again, his gaze seems to disappear into nowhere, his hair frames his face wildly, he is smeared with blood, his teeth bite together hard and his breath is laboured. At first glance, Flint's anger and violence in the described scenes do not seem to increase the possibility of a positive response towards him. The viewers might be repelled here from Flint having carried out such an explicitly violent act. However, I argue that the presentation of the character, the nonverbal actions that are clearly highlighted, pave the way for a positive response to form (perhaps with a small delay). It is illustrated through Flint's motions described in the scenes above that he has trouble coping with what is going on, that he is bothered by it, hence the image of an always calm pirate who does not care about anything is countered. His worries and uneasiness about the awaiting fight can, eventually, even help to counteract his violent behaviour during the fight. Flint's nonverbal actions introduce the factor of uneasiness, doubt, and perhaps even fear. This is not fear because he fears the fight with Singleton itself, but fear because he does not know the outcome. Although both scenes are violent, they illustrate that Flint displays anguish, anger, and weariness. These expressions correspond with Davis's hint of the importance of placing the character in an emotional state that is recognisable to the viewers.[31]

Devin McKinney additionally states that audiences expect a certain amount of violence, especially when watching screen stories in other genres then comedy or romanced,[32] which indicates that violence in a movie is not as repelling as an act of violence carried out in real life. Moreover, the situation between Flint and Singleton increases the suspense, which "makes the story engaging."[33] Flint's facial expressions in both scenes highlight how crucial these events are for the unfolding of the story. Furthermore, Flint fights his contrast character, Singleton, who is one of very few characters in *Black Sails* not presented with a single positive trait. Even though it is a violent scene, nonverbal actions, camera, and story woven together could draw the audience to Flint's side.

A scene showing Flint as nervous and even disturbed is given later in the serial, in episode XIII, after Flint (McGraw, as it is a backstory scene) learns that he is expelled from the Navy and must leave England immediately. A close up of his face indicates signs of uneasiness, such as twitching lips, shifting, blinking, inability to speak. This scene nonverbally reveals another

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31 Davis, *Creating Compelling Characters for Film TV and Radio*, 87.
32 Devin McKinney, "Violence: The Weak and the Strong," *Film Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (1993): 19.
33 Bruun Vaage, *The Antihero in American Television*, 76.

detail about Flint. I argued above that he seems unimpressed in situations threatening his life. In this backstory scene, not only Flint is affected but also his lovers, Thomas and Miranda Hamilton. Miranda is expelled from England with him and Thomas is taken to a mental asylum. Thus, through nonverbal actions it is conveyed that Flint is bothered when his decisions and actions carry an outcome that is threatening his friends; when only he is affected, he remains unmoved, but not when people he cares for are involved. Thus, the nonverbal reactions reveal the character trait of Flint being able to care for others and worry about other characters. For the audience, the mentioned backstory scene, moreover, makes it easy to relate to McGraw as his actions leading to the scene as well as his worries in the scene are understandable. These scenes showing Flint as exhausted, angry, vulnerable, or uneasy, create character reactions to which viewers can relate. The character is equipped with more and more facets that help to take the focus away from his ruthless actions and make him appear more like a 'normal' human being. Nonverbal actions support the presentation of such emotions and states of mind. Presenting Flint that way may also result in viewers re-assessing of behavior Flint displayed earlier in the serial and evoke a more positive stance towards him.

10.3 Uneasiness for Complex Characters – Silver

Seeing someone display uneasiness and fear makes it easier to relate to that person or protagonist because viewers can likely comprehend the feeling, as being afraid is a basic human emotion,[34] and thus form a bond to the character more easily.[35] The character does appear less homogeneous and therefore more amenable. For the serial creators, the beginning of *Black Sails* appears crucial to prevent viewers from disconnecting from Silver. Especially in the serial's early stages, Silver is characterised as a greedy impostor; providing him with different traits adds to his complexity and keeps the possibility for viewers to relate to him. Therefore, nervousness is used early in characterising Silver. The serial creators make him display signs of nervousness, like most people, in moments where he does not know how to react, circumstances with an unknown outcome, in situations that contain personal danger for him, or when he lacks control of what happens. In episode I, Silver walks past Flint's opponent Mr Singleton who is giving a hate-driven speech, intending to incite a mutiny to claim the *Walrus* captaincy himself. Silver lowers his gaze with a frown and hunches his shoulders as he walks through the gathering of listening men and past Singleton. With these motions, Silver's body language elucidates his discomfort with the situation. Silver's motions equip the viewers with

[34] Peter Lamarque, "How can we Fear and Pity Fictions?" *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 21, (1981): 291.
[35] Gaut, "Identification and Emotion in Narrative Film," 206.

a further impression of his personality: he does not feel comfortable in the presence of agitators or an aggressive mood. Moreover, it is indicated that he might be greedy but not necessarily combative beyond measure. It appears reasonable to say that most viewers will be able to relate to the feeling of irritation in the presence of someone behaving aggressively. Hence, Silver's nonverbal actions present him as more accessible.

After the *Walrus*'s pirates and their new cook, John Silver, arrive in their homeport of Nassau, some men from the crew make Silver believe he will undergo a meeting with the legendary but dreaded pirate captain Blackbeard, as is a custom in Nassau. Silver's smile fades instantly as the others tell him that Blackbeard wants to meet him; he is frowning and looks worriedly from one man to the other. On the way to the initiation ritual, he throws uncomfortable glances back over his shoulder, breathes heavily, swallows in front of Blackbeard's door and winces as one of the men accompanying him taps him encouragingly on the shoulder. Suspenseful music underlies the scene too, underpinning the tension Silver is nonverbally conveying. An uneasiness about undergoing a potentially dangerous situation with an unknown outcome is emphasised. Later in the serial, Silver walks into such moments unbothered. At the early stage of the narrative, however, he is presented as more insecure. Viewers likely can relate to his fear of undergoing a – potentially – unpleasant meeting and his uneasy actions counteract his greedy behaviour. From just appearing to be arrogant and greedy, the character is given an amenable characteristic here, inviting viewers to not disconnect from him. In the scene, Silver's fright turns out to be in vain as the Blackbeard his crewmates lead him to turns out to be Max and some other sex workers, not pirate captain Edward Teach. Yet, Silver's nonverbal actions underline the suspense of the scene and tease out his worries, which creates comprehensibility for the character and may evoke a feeling of familiarity within the viewers.

In the beginning of *Black Sails*, Silver is repeatedly shown as nervous and uneasy. Underlining his concerns about what is going on and what might happen to him with bodily cues can bring the character closer to the viewers as it enhances his relatability. Additionally, curiosity and caring about Silver and what might happen to him and how the story will proceed may be enhanced, which can culminate in the audience starting to care for Silver because his actions build-up the tension in the narrative.

Especially through his connection with the journal (which reassures the viewers' that he possesses the page Flint is desperate to find), Silver is established as central for the narrative, which is likely to increase the interest in – and caring for – him. With the nonverbal actions he displays, suspense is created and at the same time curiosity about him is likely to grow as what

happens to him will affect what happens in the plot. Thus, as mentioned above, viewers might be more likely to develop a caring for Silver as his actions, his fate, and the development of the plot are closely intertwined. I argue that presenting such situations and motions early in the serial furthermore works to Silver's advantage because the audience at this point may not have decided whether to tend towards liking or disliking him and him showing signs of being nervous and in danger might bring the audience on his side. Character complexity is foregrounded and can help to counteract his greedy arrogance. Like Flint, Silver is affected by what is going on around him. The nonverbal highlighting of his reactions can make him appear more amenable.

The bodily cues of uneasiness that Silver displays, moreover, can help to keep him likable as a character. The evil hero's nonverbal actions may support diminishing his perception as a cunning and unsympathetic character who does not hesitate to steal from others in order to gain money himself. As I explained in chapter 9, Silver even plays one character against another in pursuing his goal. Silver's bodily cues indicating uneasiness and fear work against him being seen as overwhelmingly arrogant or simply greedy. As a consequence of his uneasy shifting, turning, and swallowing, the audience is reminded that he is not free of worries.

10.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I showed how bodily cues can foreground different and even contradicting character traits. Both Silver and Flint display the confident motions that are favoured by humans and can create admirable character traits. Such confident nonverbal actions might enhance a positive audience reaction to both evil heroes. In order to create crucial character complexity, I argue that contradicting character traits levelling out confidence and arrogance for these two characters are vital. Flint is shown as weary and bothered by the events around him. His two identities, the one as pirate Flint and the civil one as McGraw, are reinforced through his nonverbal behaviour, particularly through the juxtaposition of appearing stern and confident on the one hand but weary and vulnerable on the other. For that reason, character depth is enhanced, the character can be seen as more convincing and 'realistic', and viewers are likely to find possibilities to relate to the character. For Silver, sequences of uneasy and nervous behaviour are used to create a complex image of his character. Through his uneasy behaviour, the impression of an overly greedy, cunning, and uncaring character is reduced. The situations in which Silver is shown as nervous are presumably plausible to the spectators and can provide opportunities to relate to the character.

Overall, the characters' nonverbal behaviour and the plot work together in creating complex characters with which viewers can engage. The introduced nonverbal cues counteract Silver's

selfish greediness from the beginning; Flint develops far less but the described nonverbal actions are examples of incidents balancing his aggressiveness and cold behaviour in other parts of the serial. Through their presentation, Flint and Silver appear to be what is called "round" and "flat" characters[36] in the sense of a round character being complex and a flat character having fewer traits that do not change significantly as the story progresses.[37] The complex character of Flint is a round character as he struggles between two identities and aims. Flint is presented as self-contradicting and, therefore, highly complex. Silver, neither is a plainly a flat character. His character is drawn as more 'uncomplicated' as his aims replace one another and are not conflicting with each other like Flint's. Yet, Silver does show development too, visually underlined through the change in his nonverbal behaviour.

As shown above, nonverbal behaviour can support the creation of relatable and 'humanlike' appearing characters on a level beyond the plot's surface. In highlighting Silver's and Flint's experiences on both layers, through what is narrated in the plot, and subtle techniques such as the actors' body language, music, light, and camera settings, the characters become more comprehensive, complex, and nuanced.

[36] Barsam and Monaham, *Looking at Movies*, 127.
[37] Barsam and Monaham, *Looking at Movies*, 127.

11. Conclusion

This thesis explored how positive viewer responses toward evil heroes can be invited through character complexity and nonverbal actions carried out by the actors when portraying evil hero characters. Using the quality television serial *Black Sails* as a case study, the objects of research were the characters James Flint and John Silver. Based on an interdisciplinary approach, I connected insights from cognitive media theory, literary and film theory, and, where relevant, from neuroscience, communication studies, psychology, and sociology with character engagement. By doing so, I have filled two gaps in the literature:

- The first is the historical contextualisation of evil heroes. I examined how evil heroes in contemporary serials may be integrated into literary history and tradition and how this contextualisation is indirectly connected with viewers' reactions towards characters. Although evil heroes have frequently populated screen stories since the late 1990s, their relation to literary history and the characters they originate from have not been widely explored.
- The second research gap is how the evil heroes' nonverbal cues may invite positive viewer responses. I have demonstrated how factors beneath the plot's surface that subconsciously affect viewers—such as nonverbal actions—can enhance positive viewer responses, convey character complexity, and thus even out morally bad behaviour. The research question related to this second gap is directly connected with character engagement.

My intention was to make a contribution to existing studies that tend to focus mainly on plot and behaviour. My thesis has shown that character complexity is a vital factor in inviting positive viewer responses. Creating complex characters derives from those literary traditions on which serial creators build. Such character complexity can be subtly foregrounded through the use of character presentation and nonverbal actions. Nonverbal behaviour can help to subliminally influence viewers and create their liking for an evil hero.

Through my choice of the serial *Black Sails* as the object of study, I moved the focus away from an unofficial canon of researched serials, including *The Sopranos*, *Breaking Bad*, and *Dexter*. Thus, my study has offered a new perspective on evil heroes, television serials, and the presentation of and potential audience responses to evil heroes in quality television serials, broadening the scope of studies on character engagement in quality television serials.

I used a close reading for both research strands in the case study. To historically contextualise Flint by means of Milton's Satan and Byron's Conrad, I selected character traits to compare the

'evil' characters. The traits chosen are those repeatedly mentioned in research in connection with the figures of Satan and the Byronic hero, including being an outcast, 'crimes' in the character's past, pride, and creating their own moral standards. Therefore, the character traits used in the analysis can stand as representative and typical for these types.

In my second research strand, investigating the positive influence of characters' nonverbal actions, I integrated the close reading of selected scenes from *Black Sails* with an interdisciplinary approach. Doing so allowed me to bring together findings from different research fields, such as cognitive media theory, literary and film theory, and movie analyses, supplemented by research on nonverbal communication and inter-human reactions deriving from fields such as neuroscience, communication studies, psychology, and sociology. The selected scenes from *Black Sails* are sequences that provide good examples of the nonverbal actions I previously analysed. This selection allowed me to build a clear argumentation about how the positive nonverbals of the characters can invite a positive viewer response towards Flint and Silver.

For both research strands I used qualitative rather than quantitative data. The methodological focus on qualitative data allowed me to carry out an in-depth case study of selected scenes and strategies for soliciting positive viewer responses. Such an approach contributed to a clear argumentation with instructive examples and sustainable results. Therefore, elaborating the impact of nonverbal actions on spectators and demonstrating how character complexity is established was strengthened. As a result, the approach and criteria I used for analysing specific characters and scenes can provide a model to research television serials that feature evil heroes, such as *The Backlist*, *Hannibal*, *Breaking Bad* and *Sons of Anarchy*.

A cornerstone for my method regarding nonverbal character actions was the hypothesis that viewers react towards characters in a similar way as they do towards real-life individuals. Using this finding from previous studies enabled me to develop my argument by using the findings on nonverbal actions that researchers have drawn from analysing human interaction. My study has illustrated how the stakes held in personal interaction and relationships by visuality, appearance, gestures and movements can also affect viewer reactions.

Since media and characters are constantly evolving, I argued for the notion of an 'evil hero' to describe characters like Flint and Silver. Through my choice of terms, I contribute to recent research that questions the binaries of 'good' and 'evil', especially within media, and consider why morally questionable acting characters are in the centre of so many narrations and responded well to. Moreover, I suggest a concrete notion to precisely address such character types. A distinct naming of evil heroes allows nuanced discussions and reduces the danger of

misunderstandings which may arise through the terms of 'antihero' or 'villain'. Throughout literary history, those terms have been used to describe character types that do not fully align with current evil heroes. Antiheroes have the function of opposing the protagonist and are often characterised through a lack of heroic abilities. Villains are a story's main 'bad' character (but may also be the story's protagonist), their function is also to antagonise the hero, but they are widely characterised as wicked. Audiences frequently dislike villains. Whereas evil heroes are the stories' liked protagonists and often display or demonstrate heroic attributes such as bravery, intelligence, or physical attractiveness, which disqualifies them as antiheroes or villains. Thus, I argued for a more precise descriptor. The characters in current television serials overlap with too many traditional characters in terms of features. Their function as evil heroes may demonstrate some features of the villain but also those of a hero. As such, they may be the story's main protagonist but not necessarily with noble aims.

To answer my first research question regarding whether James Flint displays similarities with his literary predecessors, I compared Flint to Milton's Satan, and Byron's corsair Conrad in chapter 8. The comparison revealed that Flint shares significant traits with both characters. Although the Byronic hero still populates current fiction, as chapter 7.1 established, it is Milton's Satan, one of the Byronic hero's predecessors, with whom Flint shares strong similarities. Satan and Flint rebel against circumstances, both are cast out by a father figure and prefer their new milieu. In addition, both take on a new name in their new surroundings and, refuse to re-join their former social group. Both actively seek revenge for what has been done to them, and their actions and rebellion directly affect others, leading the latter to a similarly outcast status. Whilst Byron's Conrad is also an outcast and can be similarly brooding and even doubtful, he does not demonstrate those inner contradictions that Flint and Satan clearly do to the extent of having two separate identities divided into private and a public. Nor does Conrad struggle at any time with life as an outcast. On the contrary, he maintains a stable identity, while in comparison, Satan and Flint experience a recurring struggle of identity. Both have a private and a public identity, and only the private identity is granted the ability to show doubt or weakness. In their public identities, Satan and Flint present an image to that Conrad continually does: one of no doubt regarding the choices they made. Because of his inner contradictions, Flint is presented as a complex character.

In regard to research question two, which considered how nonverbal cues may enhance a positive viewer reaction, my evaluation of Flint and Silver revealed that motion and gesture support complexity for both evil heroes. That process began with the presentation of both characters as clean, slender, neat, well-mannered, and well-dressed. A positive response

towards the evil heroes is invited by making the actors perform warm, welcoming, and open nonverbal actions and communication. Signals like smiles, head tilts, and raised eyebrows are furthermore capable of evoking positive responses. Close-up camera frames, lighting, and camera angles support and highlight such motions. I showed in chapters 9 and 10 how the nonverbal behaviours of Flint and Silver help to counteract potential negative viewer responses towards their morally questionable behaviour.

For Flint, such morally questionable behaviour largely consists of violence, unnecessary killings, and recklessness towards his crew. Silver is less directly violent. He is presented as a greedy impostor, endangering other characters through his cunning actions and playing one protagonist against another. The positive nonverbal actions I analyse in chapter 9 help to balance out such actions, and subliminally invite a positive viewer response as the nonverbal actions carried out by Flint and Silver are largely motions individuals react well to when noticing such body language in others. Nonverbal cues other than positive ones can work in the characters' favour too as they can foreground character complexity.

In chapter 9, I established the factors that contribute to character complexity. These factors included presenting the characters with contradictive nonverbal actions, giving them confidence but also letting them appear uneasy, weary, sad, or exhausted. As the historical contextualisation underpinned the importance of character complexity in literature for inviting positive audience responses, the continuity of character complexity in current television evil heroes is not surprising. Evil heroes are designed as highly complex characters exhibiting a range of character traits. Some of these traits complement one another, others contradict each other. Through the use of various traits, characters are rendered more complex, which can make evil characters appear more amenable and, therefore, invite a positive audience response. Through contradictory motions, self-assurance and nervousness, ruthlessness and weariness, cruelty and smiles, the characters are prevented from appearing 'too evil' and one-dimensional. Perceiving the characters as too self-assured or arrogant is counteracted, as moments of weakness and doubt are conveyed for both characters. Such contradictions allow the characters to appear more 'real' as the evil heroes' behaviour becomes more balanced and is not simply 'bad'. Both are bothered by their circumstances and events around them; designing the characters that way makes them appear more amenable and increases their perception as 'normal' individuals with several facets of personality and also with problems they need to deal with such as rivalry, leadership, entering a new social group, and maintaining their positions. Complexity gives viewers possibilities to relate to the characters and experience them as convincing.

What is narrated at plot level can be powerfully supported (or counteracted) by threads lying underneath the surface of the plot. Such threads are of subliminal influence and nonverbal cues are such a thread beyond the plot. Through nonverbal actions and complexity, liking for characters can be invited and reinforced. The contradiction of reacting well to a character who behaves in morally questionable ways can be–subliminally–moved into the background, allowing spectators to develop a liking towards evil heroes.

When using the term 'liking', I refer to a reaction in which the viewers connect to the evil heroes and are on their side. I exclude from 'liking', however, the factor of moral approval through the audience for the characters' actions. I do not presuppose a moral approval for the evil hero's actions within the audience. Using 'liking' in a more neutral way appeared most profitable as I did not analyse whether viewers feel empathy with, or sympathy for the characters. Instead, I focused on *how* positive reactions and liking may be invited rather than *what* spectators feel towards a character. I assume a positive audience reaction towards the characters but do not go into the details of how to categorise such a response and whether the audience imagines themselves in the characters' positions or if they react with a particular emotion to what happens to the characters in the serial. Approaching 'liking' in this more neutral fashion allowed me to focus on the general effects of nonverbals on a larger audience rather than discussing nuances of viewers' reactions.

I stated in the literature review that Plantinga[1] and Bruun Vaage presume that viewer responses towards characters can be "manipulated [...] on a psychological level to develop a positive response to such characters." [2] My study found that the nonverbal cues actors display whilst portraying the characters can enhance such a "manipulation". If positive or complex character traits are introduced via the narrative, nonverbal cues can work beneath the surface of the plot and flesh out these more positive character traits. Bodily cues can stop viewers' disconnection from evil heroes as nonverbal actions convey an evening out of the character's morally questionable behaviour. Therefore, nonverbal actions work together with the plot in eliciting a positive viewer response toward the characters and eventually enable the viewers to develop a liking for them. I argue that nonverbal actions lie underneath the plot's surface as spectators are not likely to be aware of their automatic reaction to the characters' bodily cues.

My analysis demonstrated that character complexity is a crucial factor for inviting positive audience responses. My findings support that throughout literary history (as I outlined in chapters 7 and 8), complex characters like Milton's Satan, Byronic heroes, and Noble Outlaws

1 Plantinga, "I Followed the Rules," 35.
2 Bruun Vaage, *The Antihero in American Television*, 76.

have elicited positive responses. For Satan, positive reactions towards him, including arguing for him as the hero of *Paradise Lost*, increased in the late 18th century when a paradigm shift in the assessment of good and evil occurred and binaries became unclear. The Byronic hero, being developed in the early 19th century, immediately gained positive reader responses. Milton's Satan and Byron's Conrad show that audiences react positively to characters with complex traits, even contradicting characteristics and inner doubts. Therefore, I conclude in regard to Flint and Silver that both *Black Sails*' evil heroes are designed in a way that aligns with literary tradition.

I argued in chapter 10.4 that, through their presentation, Flint and Silver appear to be what is called a "round" and a "flat" character respectively. Flint resembles a round and more complex character as I showed in chapters 8, 9, and 10. The presentation of Flint as a round character is laid out in the plot and subliminally reinforced and made even stronger by his alignment with Satan and Conrad. Due to his nonverbal cues, his complexity is subtly fleshed out.

For Silver, who I consider a flat and, thus, less complex character, the factors underneath the plot are of even more significance. I established in chapter 9 how Silver's positive nonverbal actions and his presentation can enhance positive viewer responses and help to even out his impostures and arrogant behaviour. In chapter 10, I explained how contradictive nonverbal actions work to create character complexity. Letting Silver show contradictive behaviour, being calm and nervous, easy-going, and worried, enables a perception of him as a complex character with several layers and traits too. Therefore, nonverbal actions affect the viewer responses towards the characters and belong to the factors that can enhance positive viewer responses which then can, finally, develop into a liking for the characters.

The format of the quality television serial, to which *Black Sails* belongs, builds the ideal foundation for conveying character complexity. The slow-burn narration style and the developing and long-running format of a serial allows the *Black Sails*' creators to convey information bit-by-bit and take their time with the narrative. Character complexity can be introduced at plot level and subtly foregrounded beyond the plot's surface repeatedly and over a long time to invite positive responses to evil heroes. Character complexity and the different facets of the characters can be shown thoroughly. Nonverbal cues, as I showed in the analytical case study, support a foregrounding of character complexity on a subconscious level.

My thesis showed that factors other than plot are of importance in eliciting and guiding, or even "manipulating", viewer reactions in a screen story. Through my historical contextualisation I contributed to an integration of the current characters into literary tradition.

Doing so pointed out that, although analysing a serial, evil heroes have their predecessors within literary history and that the serial, therefore, continues on foundations and character models inspired and formed by literature.

My analysis of character nonverbal action has outlined that a serial relies on several threads to create its overall fabric. Threads that support the plot, such as nonverbal actions, should be considered when analysing character engagement. Through analysing the effects of character complexity and bodily cues on viewers and considering how these two factors enhance a liking for characters who act in a morally questionable way, I engaged with a new aspect of character engagement and shifted the focus away from the level of the plot and the question of how the characters behave within that plot.

My specific use of the serial *Black Sails* brought attention to a not yet largely researched serial and moved the focus away from serials like *Breaking Bad* or *The Sopranos*. Not using a 'canon serial' allowed me to approach my analyses in a more unbiased manner as there were no prior studies of *Black Sails.* The lack of previous studies enabled a fresh approach to character engagement within quality television serials and evil heroes. Therefore, my research contributed to a widening of the current research focusing on character engagement.

For further research, there are several starting points for investigating *Black Sails* itself or transferring the research to other serials which also focus on evil heroes. *Hannibal*, *The Black List*, or *Sons of Anarchy* are a few with the potential for such an examination. All three shows drew a large audience and have not been largely investigated yet, which would allow a further widening of the canon of researched serials. The serial's title *Black Sails* might suggest a clear differentiation in good and bad characters, as does the two-coloured pirate flag. Yet the characters challenge binaries, they are neither fully bad, nor fully good. I mentioned the effects of colour choices in chapter 9. To look beyond this thesis and existing research engaging with colours further could broaden the research on character engagement. Widening the research towards other elements in a screen stories which might affect the viewer reactions, different components can be explored. Colours, words, or symbols used in a serial's title, in the opening credits, in characters' names or frequently within the serial appear worthwhile considering for further exploration. I pointed out how colour choices affect people and which attributes are largely connected with colours. In which colours characters are presented, if there is an overall colour choice for a serial and even if colours are being mentioned can be explored as yet another thread underneath the plot used for shaping viewer reactions. In *Black Sails*, for instance, the design process of Jack Rackham's own pirate flag is mentioned several times. The flag offers potential to explore the symbol of the Jolly Roger, the colours it is connected with, binaries

which might be implied, and how Rackham's careful choosing of a design might affect character perception. In *Breaking Bad*, for example, the lead character's name is Walter *White*– a colour traditionally associated with innocence, yet the character does not behave in a way which would be considered 'innocent'. I mentioned the influence of colour used within the serial. The colours used in a serial's name, logo, or opening credits will also influence viewers, as these are the colours leading to their first impressions. How such colours are used and whether the colours 'match' with what is narrated in the serial offer a further aspect for research.

For further research on *Black Sails* itself, it may be asked which other techniques are used to convey character complexity and create a liking for characters. As serials consist of different threads such as camera techniques, light, and sound, these threads which eventually create the fabric of the whole serial may also be investigated. Moreover, 'minor' characters like Charles Vane, Jack Rackham, and Eleanor Guthrie can be added to the focus. A literary contextualisation for these characters can offer insights for literary traditions other than Milton's Satan and the Byronic hero. Asking what other literary character types may be predecessors to evil heroes can widen the focus and help to contextualise serials and their characters within literary and film history. The nonverbal actions of minor characters and their use of positive or negative bodily cues can also be investigated. Of interest here would be to ask if largely the same or different nonverbal actions are used, or if differences exist between minor and lead characters or within each 'group' of characters.

Moving away from *Black Sails*, both literary contextualisation and the use of nonverbals can be applied to other serials to create a wider approach to the literary tradition of evil heroes and the use of nonverbal behaviour in character engagement. Focusing not only on one serial but on several could reveal the patterns in both creating evil heroes and eliciting a liking for them.

Plantinga notes that "[t]he phenomena of bad fans and bad protagonists is [sic] complicated and troublesome" and that "ethical worries are justified."[3] It may also help to engage with the question of ethical concerns by taking the investigation a step further into what I call evil heroes by considering the audience more fully. This process would also involve identifying further factors creating positive responses to such characters and asking why such protagonists are liked. A further investigation of different aspects of character engagement and audience response could clarify if ethical concerns are valid or if it is simply a clever character design that makes people like evil heroes.

[3] Plantinga, "Bad Protagonists." 20.

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Appendix

Concise summary of: 'Evil Heroes' in *Black Sails* – A Case Study: How Character Complexity and Nonverbal Actions Invite Positive Viewer Responses

Based on a case study using the quality television serial *Black Sails*, my thesis examined how evil heroes can be contextualised in literary history and how positive nonverbal cues of the characters may enhance positive viewer responses. The findings are that character complexity is vital in character engagement and complex characters are likely to be responded well to by viewers. The *Black Sails* character of James Flint shares significant characteristics with the analysed literary predecessors, Milton's Satan and Byron's Corsair Conrad. Since the two literary characters are showing a complex design with even contradicting characteristics, Flint's design based upon such characters contributes to his complexity. Although Satan and Byron's Corsair Conrad are literary characters whereas Flint is a character from a television serial and all three characters come from different periods in history, they are nonetheless showing comparable characteristics and features. Therefore, I found that Flint can be integrated into literary history and the design of literary characters is still used in current television serials to aid in creating complex characters.

In my second strand of research, I investigated how the positive nonverbal actions displayed by the *Black Sails* characters of James Flint and John Silver can invite a liking towards the evil heroes. I concluded that their warm, open, and welcoming nonverbal behaviour supports an evening out of their morally questionable actions which could bring viewers to detach from the characters. Therefore, subtle influences lying beneath the narrative's plot that can affect the audience's assessment of these characters, arguing that nonverbal cues and character complexity can influence the audience subliminally. The characters' presentation, appearance, and positive bodily cues work together with the narration's plot to shape an overall image of the character and invite a liking for the characters. moreover, the use of positive bodily cues supports a constant refreshing of a positive audience reaction. The nonverbal actions are also used to convey character complexity and inner contradictions of the characters to make them appear more amenable and 'real'.

My thesis found that character complexity is a vital factor to invite a liking for current evil heroes. Character complexity and its positive effect is established within literary tradition and still used today as current evil heroes can be contextualised with literary characters. Positive nonverbal actions used by the actors whilst portraying the characters support and foreground

character complexity on a subtle level yet influencing the audience's response towards the characters.

Kurzzusammenfassung: 'Evil Heroes' in *Black Sails* – A Case Study: How Character Complexity and Nonverbal Actions Invite Positive Viewer Responses

Basierend auf einer Fallstudie der Qualitätsfernsehserie *Black Sails* untersuchte die vorliegende Dissertation wie evil heroes in der Literaturgeschichte eingegliedert werden können und wie positive nonverbale Handlungen der Figuren positive Zuschauerreaktionen hervorrufen können. Die Ergebnisse sind, dass Charakterkomplexität entscheidend für Characterbindung ist und Zuschauer auf komplexe Charaktere häufig positiv reagieren. Die *Black Sails*-Figur James Flint teilt signifikante Merkmale mit den hier analysierten literarischen Vorgängern, Miltons Satan aus *Paradise Lost* und Byrons Korsar Conrad aus *The Corsair*. Da die beiden literarischen Figuren eine komplexe Konzeption mit teils widersprüchlichen Eigenschaften aufweisen, trägt Flints Beschaffenheit, die auf solche komplexen Vorgängerfiguren basiert, zu seiner Komplexität bei. Obwohl Satan und Byrons Korsar Conrad literarische Figuren sind, während Flint eine Figur aus einer aktuellen Fernsehserie ist und alle drei Figuren aus unterschiedlichen Zeiten stammen, zeigen sie dennoch vergleichbare Charakterzüge. Daher lässt sich feststellen, dass Flint in die Literaturgeschichte eingegliedert werden kann und die Gestaltungsgrundlage traditioneller literarischer Charaktere auch in aktuellen Fernsehserien verwendet wird, um komplexe Charaktere zu schaffen.

In meinem zweiten Forschungsstrang untersuchte ich, wie die positiven nonverbalen Handlungen, die von den *Black Sails*-Charakteren James Flint und John Silver ausgeführt werden, zur Sympathie für die evil heroes beitragen können. Ich kam zu dem Schluss, dass ihr warmes, offenes und einladendes nonverbales Verhalten ein Ausgleichen ihrer moralisch fragwürdigen Handlungen unterstützt, was die Zuschauer dazu bringen könnte, sich von den Charakteren abzuwenden.

Nonverbale Verhaltensweisen und die Komplexität der Charaktere das Publikum unterschwellig beeinflussen können, die unter der erzählten Handlung der Erzählung liegen und die Bewertung der Charaktere durch das Publikum unterbewusst beeinflussen können. Die Präsentation der Charaktere, ihr Aussehen und positive nonverbale Verhaltensweisen, ergänzen den Handlungsstrang der Geschichte, um ein Gesamtbild des Charakters zu formen und zu einer Sympathie für die Charaktere hervorzurufen. Darüber hinaus unterstützt die Verwendung

positiver körperlicher Verhaltensweisen eine Abwendung von den moralisch fragwürdigen Handlungen der Charaktere durch den Zuschauer.

Nonverbale Hinweise und die Komplexität der Charaktere können die Zuschauer unterschwellig beeinflussen und so Bewertung der Charaktere durch das Publikum bewirken. Die Präsentation der Charaktere, ihr Aussehen und positive körperliche Hinweise arbeiten mit der Handlung der Erzählung zusammen, um ein Gesamtbild des Charakters zu formen und zu einer Sympathie für die Charaktere einzuladen. Darüber hinaus unterstützt die Verwendung positiver körperlicher Hinweise eine ständige Auffrischung einer positiven Publikumsreaktion. Die nonverbalen Handlungen werden auch genutzt, um Charakterkomplexität und innere Widersprüche der Figuren zu vermitteln, um sie sympathischer und 'echter' erscheinen zu lassen.

Charakterkomplexität ist ein wichtiger Faktor, um Sympathie für die evil heroes in aktuellen Fernsehserials zu erzeugen. Charakterkomplexität und ihre positive Wirkung ist in der literarischen Tradition verankert und wird auch heute noch genutzt, da aktuelle evil heroes mit literarischen Figuren kontextualisiert werden können. Positive nonverbale Handlungen, die von den Schauspielern während der Darstellung der Charaktere eingesetzt werden, unterstützen und unterstreichen die Komplexität der Charaktere auf einer subtilen Ebene und beeinflussen dennoch die Reaktion des Publikums gegenüber den Charakteren.