

A Debate on John Silver's Good and Evil: A Neuroethical Interpretation of *Treasure Island*

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Abstract Can John Silver in *Treasure Island* be simply labeled as “evil”? This paper aims to tap into this problem from the perspective of neuroethics. Silver’s evil fails to obscure his impressive traits as poetical talktiveness, frugality, self-discipline and his trust in others, which is physically based on his maturely developed Theory of Mind; Besides, the witness and imagination of buccaneers’ judicial execution of hanging frequently activate Silver’s mirror neurons. With the mimesis of hanging in his brain, the blended sensation of horror, depression and regret buzzes in his mind. As a result, Silver sets up a principle of survival, with some altruistic behaviors as disguises, thus presenting a character before readers with moral ambiguity and the duality of human nature, which can be identified as Stevenson’s strategies to break away from the western literary tradition and a future feeling as modernity.

Keywords R. L. Stevenson; *Treasure Island*; Silver; good or evil; Neuroethics

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Introduction

Robert Louis Stevenson(1850-1894), a Scottish writer in the 19th century, known for his New Romantic works, was driven out of the great tradition of humanistic thinking and moral concern in English literature by F. R. Leavis(1895-1978), who, in *The Great Tradition*(1948), pointed out that Stevenson’s works, despite their “literary sophistication” and “fine writing,” did not totally break away from the “bad tradition” of Walter Scott (1771-1832)(6). In *R. L. Stevenson: A Critical Study*, Frank Swinnerton was even more scathing about Stevenson, commenting, “it is no longer possible for a serious critic to place him among the great writers, because

in no department of letters—excepting the boy's book and the short-story—has he written the work of first-class importance”(188). Stevenson's first novel, *Treasure Island*(1883), is one of these boy's books. Henry James(1843-1916), however, spoke quite high of it, as he argued, “*Treasure Island* will surely become-it must already have become, and will remain—in its way a classic; thanks to this indescribable mixture of the prodigious and the human, of surprising coincidences and familiar feelings” (Smith 154-155).

The novel tells the story of the adventures of Jim Hawkins, the son of innkeepers of Admiral Benbow Inn, with Dr. Livesey and his party as they outsmart buccaneers and search for treasures. The previous studies on this romance mainly focused on the protagonist Hawkins. In fact, the buccaneer John Silver's importance in the novel is self-evident, as Michael Mendelson put it, “he is iconic..., discussion of his complexities can mobilize attention and, with guidance, catalyze interest in more expansive issues” (342). At the end of the novel, Hawkins says, “of Silver we have heard no more...but I dare say he met his old Negress, and perhaps still lives in comfort with her and Captain Flint” (Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 223). Here, Stevenson seemed to have step out of the ethical dilemma in favor of arranging a happy ending for Silver. However, he juxtaposed the happiness in this life with the punishments in the afterlife, and left the task of punishing Silver to God in whom he himself did not believe, which has prompted considerable speculation.

The Indeterminate Moral Judgment on Silver

Does the end of the novel, with the possibility of Silver's leading a comfortable happy life implicitly convey embedded meaning?

Whether to regard buccaneer Silver as a wicked person has much to do with the ethical judgment of buccaneers as a whole. The novel seems to set the “negative” buccaneers and the “positive” characters with high social status like Dr. Livesey and the local lord, the bombastic Squire Trelawney in two opposite groups. As in the very first chapter, Dr. Livesey is portrayed as “neat, bright doctor, with his powder as white as snow and his bright, black eyes and pleasant manners,” while the buccaneer Billy Bones is compared to “filthy, heavy, bleared scarecrow” (Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 5-6). Binary opposition forms a sharp contrast between the “positive” figure of Dr. Livesey and the “negative” figure of Billy Bones, with a slight implication of ethical judgments of good and evil. However, simply making good or evil ethical judgment on the group of buccaneers is debatable. To begin with, it goes against Stevenson's original intention of *Treasure Island*, which is explicitly stated on the title page: “To S.L.O., an American gentleman in accordance

with whose classic taste the following narrative has been designed...” (Stevenson, *Treasure Island* XXII). Stevenson insisted that the novel was intended to stimulate readers’ imagination, not to cultivate a sense of moral responsibility. He once lamented, “Ethics are my veiled mistress. I love them, but I know not what they are” (Booth 213), echoing his indeterminate and paradoxical attitude in terms of ethical judgment.

Besides, buccaneers, as a social group, emerged and thrived in a specific social and historical context. Therefore, critics who make ethical judgments about them need to take these factors into consideration. As Nie Zhenzhao and Shang Biwu proposed, “ethical literary criticism is grounded in the specific historical context or ethical environment of literature” (6). In certain period of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, buccaneers, synonymous with national heroes, were worshipped by the English. For instance, Flint, an English buccaneer worshipped by Squire Trelawney in the novel, is described as “bloodthirstiest buccaneer of whom the Spaniards were prodigiously afraid”(Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 37). Buccaneers are, in certain context, represented with various positive images in narratives, as Stevenson’s poem titled “Pirate Story” chants,

Where shall we adventure, to-day that we’re afloat,
Wary of the weather and steering by a star?
Shall it be to Africa, a-steering of the boat,
To Providence, or Babylon, or off to Malabar? (Stevenson, *A Child’s Garden of Verses* 28)

This little poem is smudged with a layer of romantic atmosphere. From the perspective of a child, it constructs a vision of innocent, romantic and carefree buccaneer life. Hawkins, the protagonist of the novel, deeply influenced by buccaneer narratives, shows his great interest in the life of buccaneers and often dreams of sailing, looking forward to landing on foreign islands to find treasures, as he described, “I brooded by the hour together over the map, all the details of which I well remembered. Sitting by the fire in the housekeeper’s room, I approached that island in my fancy, from every possible direction...”(Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 42). In his neighborhood are a party of younger men, showing great admiration for Billy Bone, and attributing the English supremacy at sea to buccaneers, for they call him “true seadog” and a “real old salt”, and say “there was the sort of man that made English terrible at sea” (Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 4).

The vague attitude of the English towards buccaneers is embedded in literature

works. On the one hand, buccaneers are portrayed as brave and chivalrous, with much heroic potential in various nautical narratives. On the other hand, the image of buccaneers as greedy and despicable is recurring in the novel. The contradiction shows itself via the words of Trelawney. Squire Trelawney initially criticizes avaricious schemes pursued by all the buccaneers, believing that the ultimate purpose of all legendary heroic feats of buccaneers is “money” (Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 37). But when he accidentally gets access to the treasure map, he abandons his responsibility as a local lord and arranges a voyage to seek treasure urgently. In his exhortation to Dr. Livesey, “righteous” Trelawney faces the same moral dilemma as buccaneers do when persuading Livesey to hunt the treasures, “you will give up this wretched practice at once. We’ll have not the least difficulty in finding the spot, and money to eat, to roll in, to play duck and drake with ever after” (Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 40). Obviously, the ultimate purpose of his treasure-hunting is money, much the same as that of the buccaneers. The ambiguous attitude of the English Government towards piracy might be the root of the above social phenomenon. English rulers issued “privateering commissions” to buccaneers, especially during the reign of Elizabeth I. Buccaneers were worshipped as heroes for the wealth they plundered prepared enough funds for the English bourgeoisie revolution. However, despite the enduring popularity of the “Golden Age” of piracy, buccaneers in Britain experienced ups-and-downs roller coaster, especially in 1698, when *Acts of Piracy* was enacted to curb maritime offenses by buccaneers, labeling piracy as illegal.

Fiona McCulloch regarded the ambivalent attitude to buccaneers of the English middle and upper classes with Trelawney as representative here in the novel to be the double-standard of colonialism, “which legitimizes itself by claiming to civilize savage nations whilst concealing the insatiable appetite of Empire” (73). On the one hand, Trelawney tries to cover up some of the evil activities of the Empire, while on the other hand, he tends to civilize and legitimize these evil and barbaric acts. The interpretation of this paradoxical phenomenon from the perspective of colonialism may not resonate among all readers. However, both buccaneers and respectable English men share the desire to extract treasure regurgitated from the treasure island, “so blurring legitimate and illegitimate intent and rendering them two faces of the same coin—playing double for doubloons” (McCulloch 73). Thus, it blurs the line between the “good” man represented by Squire Trelawney and the “evil” man represented by buccaneer Silver, in Andrew Loman’s words, “dissolving meaningful moral distinctions between buccaneer and good English sailor” (2).

Since it is reckless to rush to the conclusion that all buccaneers are evil, a

closer inspection needs to be taken on the evil of Silver, a buccaneer in *Treasure Island* both appreciated and hated by Hawkins.

The “evil” image of Silver recurs in the novel. He first appears in Bill and Hawkins’ conversation as a “seafaring man with one leg” (Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 3), and then he haunts Hawkins’ dreams “in a thousand forms, and with a thousand diabolical expressions” (Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 3). Simple lines profile Silver as a negative figure. But that doesn’t fully obscure his bright side. In the first place, Silver is tall and strong, with a face “as big as a ham—plain and pale,” but “intelligent and smiling” (Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 48). Hawkins, when he first meets Silver, claims that “I had seen the captain, and Black Dog, and the blind man, Pew, and I thought I knew what a buccaneer was like—a very different creature, according to me, from this clean and pleasant-tempered landlord” (Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 48). Compared with the traditional stereotyped image of buccaneers, Silver wins the heart of Hawkins by his gentle and amiable image, successfully dragging himself away from the gang of the evil. Besides, Silver shows his undeniable charm via a spectrum of qualities manifested by the good education he once received in childhood. The coxswain sees in him no common man, saying, “he had good schooling in his young days, and can speak like a book when so minded; and brave—a lion’s nothing alongside of Long John!” (Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 62) Silver also has professional and thorough knowledge of sailing. When Silver and Hawkins meet for the first time, he warmly introduces Hawkins to ships and the sea. He is knowledgeable, patient and responsible in teaching newcomers:

[H]e made himself the most interesting companion, telling me about the different ships that we passed by, their rig, tonnage, and nationality, explaining the work that was going forward—how one was discharging, another taking in cargo, and a third making ready for sea; and every now and then telling me some little anecdote of ships or seaman, or repeating nautical phrase till I had learned it perfectly. I began to see that here was one of the best of possible shipmates.” (Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 51).

Alan Sandison said Dr. Livesey’s “quiet but confident authority” was enough to be the “ideal father” for the young Hawkins (55). While Alexandra Valint had a totally different story on the so-called “ideal father” as she claimed Dr. Livesey who had a privileged place as narrator was often seen as a positive figure, but was “cruel, greedy, emotionless, and quick to punish those deemed inferior... Jim resists and critiques the doctor’s version of adulthood by taking refuge in an eternal

and haunted childhood" (3). Actually, Hawkins sees an "ideal father" in Silver the moment he first meets the warm, wise and knowledgeable man, foreshadowing his contradictory feelings mixed with both love and hatred towards Silver in the plots to come.

The ethical judgment of good or evil is relative. The social status of buccaneers in English society changed in different periods of time in the history. Historically speaking, buccaneers are not absolutely evil, and some of them are even seen as synonymous with patriotic national heroes. When Silver disappears at the end of the novel, Hawkins says, "Yet my heart was sore for him, wicked as he was, to think on the dark perils that environed, and the shameful gibbet that awaited him." (Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 189) Here, Hawkins' ambivalent attitude towards Silver is also understandable.

Silver's Shining Traits and Theory of Mind

Despite the villainous image in traditional literary criticism, the positive character and conduct of Silver is slightly reflected in what his shipmates comment about him. His bravery and fortitude are his distinctive marks, as the coxswain says, "a lion's nothing alongside of Long John" (Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 62). Despite the refusal of the still-honorable sailor Tom to Silver's proposal of mutiny, he gives high appraisal of Silver with "honesty" and "richness" (Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 87), which is resonated with the comparison of cowardly-profiled buccaneers in the novel. In Chapter Five, when the buccaneers are frightened by the pistol-shot of a revenue officer, they "turned at once and ran, separating in every direction, one seaward along the cove, one slant across the hill" (Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 32), and they abandoned Pew, which indirectly lead to the death of him. Later in the treasure-hunt on the island, buccaneers are dreadfully affected when hearing a voice among the trees, which is thought to be the voice of Flint Captain, "[t]he color went from their six faces like enchantment; some leaped to their feet, some clawed hold of others; Morgan groveled on the ground" (Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 206). These ironically portrayed pictures intensify Silver's brave, decisive and resolute image and highlight his impressive blended attributes of personality, which, in the context of buccaneers and treasure hunting, seems utmost important.

Silver also impresses readers with praiseworthy frugality against the extravagant life of other buccaneers. In the novel, Hawkins criticizes buccaneer-lifestyle as wasteful and undomestic, saying "they had cooked, I suppose, three times more than we could eat; and one of them, with an empty laugh, threw what was left into the fire...I never in my life saw men so careless of the morrow; hand

to mouth is the only word that can describe their way of doing..." (Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 198). Although Silver's conduct is not explicitly described here, it is already stated in the novel that Silver claims that he has laid his money safe in bank, with emphasis on saving rather than earning (Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 66). Unlike other buccaneers, he has a good vision of future life by making a dense plan of home construction. Admittedly, it has certain restraints on his conducts at the moment, highlighting his rigorous and self-disciplined character.

To profile the sea cook Long John Silver is a tough task, and obviously these shining qualities pull him away from the group of traditional-stereotyped villainous buccaneers, adding to the complexity of this character. Consequently, it is understandable that on the one hand, Hawkins, gasps after the detection of Silver's intention of mutiny and what he tends to do with still-loyal shipmates, while on the other hand, Hawkins is impressed by Silver's ebullience and resilience, admiring his independence and competence.

As traditional ethics tends not to profile a buccaneer in a positive way, neuroethics may interpret Silver's shining traits from a new perspective.

Neuroethics was born in 2002. It breaks the traditional western dualism and believes in the intimate connection between our brain and our behaviors. It implies the intersection of ethics and neuroscience "will be the area with truly profound implications for the way ethics, writ large, is approached in the 21st Century" (Roskies 22).

In neuroscience, Theory of Mind (ToM for short) is a term used to describe human beings' ability "to explain people's behavior in terms of their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and desires" (Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction* 6). Obviously, Silver has developed excellent ToM for his circumstantial resilience and what appears to be genuine friendliness, and he spends most of his waking hours reading other people's minds. The coxswain admires Silver's good schooling and Hawkins thinks high of Silver's calmness and his pretending courtesy to everyone, which all serve to offer clues of Silver's fine growing environment, in which to better cultivate the ToM, developing into a kind of magical power when he steps into adulthood.

Silver's mature ToM is manifested in his conversational skills. Evidently, before negotiation, he has thoroughly conjectured the thoughts and desires of Dr. Livesey and his party, and, is well aware of the importance of the dressing etiquette for business negotiation. He "was tricked out in his best; an immense blue coat, thick with brass buttons, hung as low as to his knees, and a fine laced hat was set on the back of his head" (Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 123). Even though the negotiation eventually fails to fulfill his goal, he has left a deep impression on the other party,

especially on Hawkins. In her essay, “the Poetics of Conversation in Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*”, Amy Wong explored a particular connection that “Stevenson was making between the powerful dynamism of talk and the philosophical principles of late-Victorian adventure romance” (902). As a result, the poetics of Silver’s talk is characterized by vitality and openness, and ToM is clearly responsible for the vividness and openness that Silver brings to the conversation, both his confidential private talk with the still-loyal shipmate in his persuasion of the latter to join the party of mutineers and his rhetorical public talk during the negotiation.

Silver shows his fully developed ToM via his charming personalities as frugality and self-discipline. Silver is quite a good master of sailors’ vision of future life, luring them into his company of mutiny and teaches them the philosophy of getting rich by saving. He takes blind Pew as a negative example, and presents the severe consequences of extravagance: “Old Pew, as had lost his sight, and might have thought shame, spends twelve hundred pound in a year, like a lord in Parliament. Where is he now? Well, he’s dead now!” (Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 66). Silver’s accurate reading of the thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and desires of his fellow sailors convinces most of them to join his grand plan of mutiny, winning strong allies for his later confrontation with Livesey and his loyalist party.

Furthermore, Silver’s ToM is the physiological basis for his trust in his wife. Silver tells his shipmates that “the Spy-glass is sold, lease and goodwill and rigging; and the old girl’s off to meet me” (Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 67-68). It appears to be a great risk that Silver gives what he possesses to his wife, for once his wife betrays, he will lose all. However, Silver, despite the doubt of his wife’s loyalty from his shipmates, has thoroughly considered the possibilities of the future before making decision, among which he chooses a seemingly altruistic one: benefit maximization. His black wife appears to be the biggest beneficiary, while Silver with a win-win strategy, also maximizes his own benefits facing the uncertainty of the future. During his treasure hunt, his wife shoulders the responsibility as the keeper of Silver’s property and the caretaker of the whole family. Once Silver escapes from being hanged, his savings and fortune kept by his wife would be the material security for him to rerun a family. Thus ToM mechanism plays a fundamental role in the evolution of altruism. We construct and navigate our social environment by attributing other people’s states of mind, making seemingly altruistic decisions, which are actually self-benefited. People’s ToM converts the actions and feelings of others into that of their own, with an illusion of identical emotions. In Silver’s case, his trust in his wife is derived from his attributing her states of mind, knowing her

betrayal is much less possible than her loyalty to him, either for his cruelty or for his ability to manipulate a family, which to a black woman is a guarantee for a happy life.

The shining traits of Silver, such as poetic conversational skills, frugality and self-discipline, trust in others, based on mature ToM, blur his evil. The complexities of Silver's personality offer a possible explanation of Hawkins' paradoxical feelings to Silver and the great risk Ben Gunn takes to let him escape at the end of the novel.

Mirror Neuron and Silver's Principle of Survival

The complexity of Silver lies in that despite his cruelty as a buccaneer, he impresses others with traits based on his mature ToM. In addition, some of Silver's altruistic behaviors are derived from his great principle of survival.

The witness and imagination of buccaneers' judicial execution of being hanged frequently activate Silver's mirror neurons. With the mimesis of the whole process of being hanged in his brain, the blended sensation of horror, depression and regret buzzes in his mind. As a result, Silver sets up a principle of survival, with some altruistic behaviors as disguises, thus presenting a figure before readers with moral ambiguity and the duality of human nature

As is mentioned above, the *Acts of Piracy* the English Government once enacted did have a deterrent effect on buccaneers, at least on Silver. Silver has more than once witnessed the hanging of buccaneers; he has seen the "dance" of hanged sailors' "look mighty like a hornpipe in a rope's end at Execution Dock by London Town" (Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 185); he has seen the hanged prisoners "hanged in chains, birds about them" (Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 186); He has seen countless fellow buccaneers, whom he regards as heroes, "drying in the sun at Execution Dock" (Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 70). The scene of hanging restrains the frequent manifestation of Silver's evil behavior on the one hand, while on the other hand, it stimulates the generation of Silver's seemingly good conducts.

How does people's witness of the hanging influence their behavior? In 1980s, in the University of Parma of Italy, a group of neurophysiologists, directed by Giacomo Rizzolatti, first identified the mirror neurons. "What defines mirror neurons is that when we observe another executing an action they fire or activate the same neurons in our brain" (Deligiannis, et al. 173). It is important in imitation when the sensory stimulus are joined with the motor cells. Later, observation goes that motor neurons are not only fired by action and observation, but also "by intentionality of actions and emotions. The mirroring process takes place directly and automatically, it does not require conscious conceptualization" (Deligiannis, et al. 173). And in the

novel, Silver sees the hanging of the buccaneers, as if he were watching a play in a theatre, for he could not help replaying the whole scene of hanging in his mind. And as a witness to the scene of hanging, he also rehearses the emotions like shock, fear, remorse, sadness experienced by the hanged buccaneers at the very moment of death. Not only is the scene visually striking, but it also allows his brain to access to the scene and replay it over and over again. His neck is stiffened at the thought of the gallows, of which he is scared much more than other buccaneers. Silver confesses to Dr. Livesey that he risks his life to save Hawkins' life by offending the larger force of mutineers, hoping that Livesey and Hawkins would "testify to his protection in court" (Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 186). From the perspective of neuroethics, the brain area responsible for rewards and punishments and mirror mechanism together play a fundamental role in the evolution of altruism, pushing us to offer help at the witness of unfair phenomenon, so as to maintain social fairness. It allows us to transform the actions and emotions of others into those of ourselves.

Silver's altruistic act of saving Hawkins is ascribed to the function of the mirror neurons in his brain. Silver denies the possibility of Hawkins's being murdered, which might re-stimulate his brain and trigger his inner fear of death. Silver, on the other hand, understands that his seemingly altruistic acts of rescuing Hawkins from the angry pirates are, essentially speaking, self-saving, for Hawkins might testify to Silver's protection in court. With the help of mirror neurons, the scene of hanging flashes back and replays over and over in his mind. A mixture of shock, regret, sadness, horror, shame and other emotions haunts him, further intensifying his fear of hanging. This exact fear of death leads him to set survival as the primary goal in everything he does, both good and evil. Guided by the rule of survival, Silver further breaks down his goal into multiple objectives like making enough money, staying out of the business of piracy, starting a family, being a decent and high-status man living in a mansion and riding in carriages. The very philosophy of survival based on neuroethics is rarely found in other buccaneers, most of whom, as he condemns, "have no definite purpose in life" (Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 70). Therefore, Among a group of buccaneers without clear purpose in life, Silver's stinginess and his plan for the future and family are comparably valuable.

Silver's fear of death also stems from the previous loss of his leg. The story does not offer any details of how Silver lost his leg. Mr Trelawney tells Hawkins in a letter that Silver "lost it in his country's service, under the immortal Hawke" (Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 44). Losing his leg in a naval battle is just a gimmick for him to win trust from Mr. Trelawney. Yet it is true that Silver has lost his leg. No matter what has happened, the past life-threatening experience echoes his

understanding of death. In *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reasoning and The Human Brain* (*Descartes' Error*, 1994), Damasio claimed "having a mind means that an organism forms neural representations which can become images, be manipulated in a process called thought, and eventually influence behavior by helping predict the future, plan accordingly, and choose the next action" (90). The neural representation of body states recognizes external changes as if they were experienced. Silver's experience of losing his leg strengthens his cognition of life and his awareness of the value of having life, which influences his behavior as to set up a principle of survival.

At the end of the novel, Hawkins speaks ironically of Silver, saying that no one takes him seriously except Ben Gunn, but "it was remarkable how well he bore these slights and with what unwearying politeness he kept on trying to ingratiate himself with all" (Stevenson, *Treasure Island* 220). Reuven Tsur pointed out that literary aesthetics was a special use of cognitive mechanism and in order to achieve art's end, "the process of perception" was "prolonged" (4). Why is Silver a charming character? The most probable reason is that the readers cannot easily end up commenting him good or evil. Readers' cognition of Silver is frequently disturbed, which greatly challenges their aesthetic as well as moral judgment of this character.

The mirror neurons in Silver's brain are constantly activated by his frequent witness and imagination of hanging, with fear, despair, loss, and remorse filling his life. Haunted by these mixed emotions, Silver has established a set of rules for survival, based on which a series of evil deeds are conducted. A simple attachment of the label "evil" to Silver is clearly not recommendable. The realization of the role of mirror neurons in Silver's thinking, and how those thoughts influence his actions, may drag us from recklessly making ethical judgment on Silver.

Conclusion

The "evil" buccaneer John Silver escapes and lives comfortably in Hawkins imaginary world, which prompts considerable speculation. Despite his villainous image, the positive character and conduct of Silver based on his maturely developed ToM leave an impression of his poetical talkativeness, frugality, self-discipline and trust in others. Besides, Silver's witness and imagination of buccaneers' judicial execution of hanging frequently activate his mirror neurons. With the mimesis of hanging physically in his brain, the blended sensation of horror, depression and regret buzzes in his mind. As a result, Silver sets up a principle of survival, with some altruistic behaviors as disguises. Silver's being loved and hated can

probably be attributed to the complexities of his character. The readers' cognition of Silver is constantly disturbed, challenging the aesthetic process of the novel. As J. R. Hammond put it, "in his novels and romances, Stevenson continually explore his lifelong concern with problems of duality and moral ambiguity" (18). The moral ambiguity and the duality of human nature in the case of Silver are the author's strategy to break through the traditional Western literature and signal the transformation of western literature to modernity. As is believed by Sandison, Stevenson's putative modernism is shown under three broad headings: "self-consciousness, textuality and authority" (4). This paper also believes that Stevenson's exploration of the ambiguity of morality and the duality of human nature represents another "future" feeling and trend of western literature.

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