The articles in this study guide are not meant to mirror or interpret any productions at the Utah Shakespeare Festival. They are meant, instead, to be an educational jumping-off point to understanding and enjoying the plays (in any production at any theatre) a bit more thoroughly. Therefore the stories of the plays and the interpretative articles (and even characters, at times) may differ dramatically from what is ultimately produced on the Festival’s stages.

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Cover photo: J. Todd Adams (left) as Ben Gunn and Sceri Sioux Ivers as Jim Hawkins in the Utah Shakespeare Festival’s 2017 production of Treasure Island.
Treasure Island

Contents

Information on the Play

Synopsis 4
Characters 5
Playwrights 6

Scholarly Articles on the Play

A Recipe for Gleeful Romance 9
Synopsis: Treasure Island

Mrs. Hawkins runs the Admiral Benbow Inn where Captain Billy Bones comes to stay, hiding from a “seafarin’ man with one leg.” The townspeople flock to hear his stories, though Dr. Livesey, the town doctor and magistrate, threatens to throw him out of town if he causes any trouble.

Black Dog the pirate finds Billy at the Inn and attacks him and runs, leaving him for dead. Mrs. Hawkins and Jim rummage through Billy’s treasure looking for money to cover the debts that he owed to her. They barely escape before pirates enter, but they do find a treasure map to the infamous pirate Captain Flint’s treasure. The pirates ransack the Inn trying to find Billy’s map, with no success.

Jim and the constable visit the wealthy Squire Trelawny and show him the map. In his excitement to find the treasure himself, he puts up money for a ship and crew to set sail immediately.

Their adventure starts off smooth enough—until Jim overhears the ship’s cook, Long John Silver, and other sailors discussing a planned mutiny after they find and load Captain Flint’s treasure. It turns out that Silver and most of the sailors were actually Flint’s pirate crew and they have no intention of letting the honest men onboard return alive with the treasure. Jim tells Squire, Livesey, and the ship’s captain, Captain Smollett, of the treacherous plan; and they decide they must create their own counterattack.

The ship reaches the island where the treasure is supposed to be hidden, and a group of pirates go ashore. Jim sneaks to shore, as well, and discovers a man named Ben Gunn who had been living there for the last three years, because he was marooned by his crewmates when they were searching for Flint’s treasure. He agrees to help Jim and his friends escape safely.

The honest men, led by Captain Smollett, decide there is more safety in abandoning ship and going ashore to seek shelter in an old shed depicted on the treasure map. They manage to get away from the pirates on board, find the shed, and hold their position against an attack by the pirates who came ashore. Jim manages to slip away from the group and returns to the ship. Through a series of fortunate events, he regains control of the ship from the pirates.

With people spread all over the island, adventure builds to a crescendo with a volley of skirmishes, desertions, truces, deceptions, bargains, and a fight for the hidden treasure! But only one side can win and find the hidden treasure. Which will it be?
**Characters: Treasure Island**

Jim Hawkins: The narrator of the story, Jim Hawkins is a young boy who gets a hold of a treasure map and finds himself on an adventurous search for pirate treasure.

Mrs. Hawkins: Jim’s mother, Mrs. Hawkins runs the Admiral Benbow Inn.

“Captain” Billy Bones: A boarder at the Admiral Benbow Inn, Billy Bones is hiding from other pirates. He was the first mate of Captain Flint and has his secret treasure map.

Doctor Livesey: The town doctor and magistrate, Doctor Livesey joins Squire Trelawney and Jim in search of pirate treasure.

Black Dog: A pirate, Black Dog attacks Billy Bones at the inn.

Pew: A blind pirate

Constable Dance: A village law officer

Squire Trelawney: A local wealthy hothead, Squire Trelawney finances a crew and a ship, the Hispaniola, to search for Capt. Flint’s treasure.

Redruth: Squire Trelawney’s servant

Long John Silver: Flint’s old sea cook, Long John Silver signs on with Hispaniola crew as the cook, but he is really the leader of the mutineers. He has a parrot and wooden peg leg.

“Captain Flint”: Long John Silver’s parrot

Ben Gunn: A marooned sailor, Ben Gunn has been alone on Treasure Island for three years before Jim finds him.

Captain Smollett: Hired captain of the Hispaniola

Captain Flint: An infamous bloodthirsty buccaneer from England

Townspeople

Pirates/Sailors (Gray, Jim, Hands, Dick, Matthew, Anthony, Kasey, Tom, Alan, Morgan, George Merry, Troy, Johnny)
About the Playwrights: *Treasure Island*

By Don Leavitt

There is something whimsical in the way Mary Zimmerman describes her work. Zimmerman, the Tony-award winning director who adapted Robert Louis Stevenson’s iconic *Treasure Island* for the stage, prefers to produce her work organically, building in stages until the completed work feels right. “I have an unusual process that I’ve somehow just gotten away with for the last however many decades, and it’s that I don’t start with a script,” she has said. In the program book for Lookingglass Theatre’s Chicago production of *Treasure Island* (2015), Zimmerman tells literary manager and company dramaturg Marti Lyons that she writes and refines throughout the rehearsal process, using her cast and designers to tailor her adaptation to their unique strengths and experiences. “What I’m really doing is problem-solving and figuring out how to manifest something onstage which wasn’t originally intended to be onstage,” she said. “One of the greatest joys is trying to stage the impossible” (“In Conversation with Ensemble Member Mary Zimmerman,” http://fliphtml5.com/qzps/ybfk, p. 3).

The result is a deliberate attempt to have “a child’s openness and imagination.” In describing this approach, Zimmerman has paraphrased Willa Cather: “I’ll never be the artist I was as a child.’ I love that quote. It is a statement of my own belief that I’m at my best when I’m unselfconscious and using what’s in the room” (“Mary Zimmerman’s Life in the Theater,” www.mccarter.org/education/secretinthewings/page9.htm).

It is something Zimmerman feels strongly about, but it is not careless, haphazard, or immature; rather, she describes it as “a long, groping process.” When asked why she starts without a script, Zimmerman says, “I can only answer that my imagination doesn’t work that way; text is not separate from image for me. . . . Working this way doesn’t allow for much strategy. You pretty much have to let go. . . . The pressure is so intense it just cracks you open and you go with your secret, strange ideas, because you are desperate and don’t have time to think up any polite ones.” It is deliberate, intense work that tries to respect the fun of it. “They don’t call it a play for nothing,” she said. “We think of ‘play’ as a noun. . . . We forget that it’s also a verb” (“Mary Zimmerman’s Life in the Theater”).

For Zimmerman, the lifelong pursuit of childlike imagination and spirit is what led her to theatre, and not the other way around. “As a child I wanted to invent a machine that could record my dreams, so I could watch them in the morning,” she said. “Theater is that machine. I can make these images come to life and actually walk around inside them for a while” (“Mary Zimmerman’s Life in the Theater”). Her goal is to engage the audience’s imagination, “to make them believe or at least simultaneously see what you are doing. . . . The kind of backyard solutions we all employed as children to create entire worlds is what I’m still working with” (“In Conversation with Ensemble Member Mary Zimmerman,” p. 4).

Zimmerman arrived at this intersection of childlike imagination and theatrical artistry at a young age. Born in Lincoln, Nebraska, she spent a great deal of time in both London and Paris. “My parents were both professors, so we spent significant time overseas when I was a child,” she said. In a May 2014 Chicago Tribune article by Jenniffer Weigel, Zimmerman described her first encounter with the stage: she was five years old and “stumbled upon” an outdoor rehearsal of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in London. “At the end of the scene, Oberon ran off, and they all started laughing, and I think it was the joyfulness and seeing adults play like that [that] was as galvanizing to me as the enchantment and the fairy world. I was absolutely fascinated by it” (“Mary

She attended Chicago’s Northwestern University and dreamed of being an actress—a very brief stint as a composition and literature major lasted only two weeks. She earned a bachelor’s degree in theatre before joining a graduate program that helped her discover “the act of directing, creating and making theater—without being in it.” Zimmerman went on to earn master’s and doctorate degrees in performance studies, where she focused on “how to use the elements of staging” and “collaborated on adaptations of everything from Dickens novels to contemporary parodies” (“Mary Zimmerman’s Life in the Theater”).

While at Northwestern, Zimmerman also began working with Chicago’s Goodman Theatre and helped develop the Lookingglass Theatre. Today, she is an ensemble member of Lookingglass, the Manilow resident director at Goodman, and a professor of performance studies at Northwestern.

Her directing career has spanned more than twenty years: her numerous adaptations include Treasure Island, The Secret in the Wings, The Jungle Book, and Metamorphoses, for which she won the 2002 Tony for best direction; she is also a respected director of opera and the 1998 recipient of the prestigious John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Fellowship.

Unlike most of her adaptations, Treasure Island is notable for not being “a great childhood favorite.” In fact, Zimmerman didn’t read Stevenson’s novel until just a few years ago. She discovered the book’s magic in an almost perfect setting—at a vacation home on an island off the coast of Maine. “The moment I started reading it, I was completely smitten by it,” she said, “and in an unusual way; instead of experiencing it in the filmic way one usually has when reading . . . I was very much seeing it on a stage—in a room, in a theatre” (“In Conversation with Ensemble Member Mary Zimmerman,” p. 3).

Still, she was hesitant to adapt the classic, particularly in light of the approximately fifty previous adaptations that have already been made. “It discourages me because I realize it isn’t a very original idea to dramatize this story,” she said, “but it encourages me in that many people have similarly found it or thought of it as stage-worthy” (“In Conversation with Ensemble Member Mary Zimmerman,” p. 3).

It is a tribute to Stevenson’s gift as a writer that his first truly successful novel should be so universally loved. Born in Scotland in 1850, Robert Louis Stevenson never had any real interest in the “family business”—lighthouse design—and instead pursued what was considered a life of adventure, including frequent overseas travel. By age twenty-five, he knew he wanted to be a writer; his early published works include numerous essays and travelogues, but it wasn’t until 1883, at the age of thirty-three, that he published his first work of fiction.

Treasure Island was inspired, in part, by a map that Stevenson drew with his twelve-year old stepson on a particularly rainy day. The map sparked an idea, and Stevenson began to write a grand adventure story which first appeared, in serialized form, in a children’s literary magazine under the name, The Sea Cook: A Story for Boys. It was, in fact, Stevenson’s editor, Mr. Henderson, who discarded the original title and replaced it with Treasure Island when the story was published as a complete work in 1883. It was an astounding success, launching Stevenson’s successful career and making him something of a celebrity. He went on to write some of the world’s most loved stories, including Kidnapped and The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Often in poor health, Stevenson died in 1894 at his home on the island of Samoa at the relatively young age of forty-four.

It seems ironic that a woman who values childlike wonder and imagination and employs it regularly in her career, should not discover a story, intended specifically for children, until well into adult-
hood. In his essay, “My First Book: ‘Treasure Island’”, printed in “Essays in the Art of Writing,” Stevenson declared, “It was to be a story for boys; no need of psychology or fine writing; and I had a boy at hand to be a touchstone.” Even as he developed his story, Stevenson seemed to grasp the power his writing would have to engage childlike imagination. “I had counted on one boy, I found I had two in my audience. My father caught fire at once with all the romance and childishness of his original nature . . . in Treasure Island he recognized something kindred to his own imagination; it was HIS kind of picturesque; and he not only heard with delight the daily chapter, but set himself acting to collaborate” (ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/s/Stevenson/Robert_louis/s848aw/part5.html).

It is a sentiment that Zimmerman clearly shares. “Children play in order to survive,” she said. “They’re practicing at life in order to cope and survive later in life. Plays do the same thing. They’re teaching us how to cope with situations...And we can sit back and observe” (“Mary Zimmerman’s Life in the Theater”).
Jim Hawkins: From Boy To Man

By Christine Frezza

Robert Louis Stevenson and his adapter, Mary Zimmerman, have given their audiences a skilled and nuanced portrait of the young Jim Hawkins, and his development through interactions with good men and villains to becoming a good man himself is portrayed scene by scene throughout the entire play.

Jim’s first words (as narrator) are interrupted by Billy Bones, who sets the given circumstances of Jim’s innocence by commanding him: “You there” (Mary Zimmerman, adaptor, Treasure Island [unpublished manuscript, last modified May 17, 2016; all quotes are from this manuscript). As the first scene continues, both Jim and his mother are at the old pirate’s beck and call, even though Billy pays nothing. Jim is the lower of the two, attentive but silent for nearly the first two pages. Only when Billy gives him a task to fulfill, does Jim venture to ask a question and is answered with sharp commands, first from Billy then Jim’s mother: “To Bed, Jim. Now”.

Except for one timid interjection, Jim is silent till Black Dog appears. Even then he is obedient to this new visitor, until the lodger, Billy, falls ill. With the simple words “Are you hurt?” we sense that he has grown fond of his companion, and that he will become more than a background figure.

Jim’s first contact with villainy is with Pew, the blind pirate. Even though Pew hurts him twice, Jim obeys in the manner of a polite servant, and calls for his mother when the meeting goes horribly wrong.

Mrs. Hawkins continues as Jim’s superior and drives the decision-making to find the money she is owed for Billy’s lodging. “Find the key! Open his shirt!”

The contrast between adult and child is evident when Jim drops the key and Mrs. Hawkins swears. Jim swears in response, but is rebuked by his mother, showing (a) he’s not old enough for such language; and (b) she’s aware of protocol even when desperate.

The first step on the ladder to adulthood comes when Jim decides to take some papers from Billy’s chest. His speech after that drives the scene: Mrs. Hawkins wants to take just what’s owed her, no more, and is fascinated by the foreign currency; Jim shouts at her to hurry up, there isn’t time, and finally “Take it all.”

The last two lines of the scene show the mother ceding control to the boy. Mrs. Hawkins: “I’m going to faint!” Jim: “Into the ditch. Hide! Hide!”

After the villains have fled from the inn, Jim calls Constable Dance but won’t give him the paper. His mother thinks they’re ruined without money, but Jim knows better. So the audience has seen his growth through words, interactions with his elders, and now Jim’s ability to plan and protect his future.

Escorted to Squire Trelawney’s by the policeman, Jim’s story is greeted with admiration, and he is admitted to the counsel of the powerful; Dance has supper in the kitchen, but Hawkins dines with Livesey and Trelawney. The adults acknowledge he treasure map as Jim’s property and open it only with his permission.

With this step, it seems Jim’s growth is complete, but his reasoning ability and his judgement are not yet fully developed. First, he undergoes a strange, cold parting from his mother, who has quickly found a boy to take his place. Despite Jim’s protestations, he will not confide his destination to Mrs. Hawkins, and she realizes that he’s grown beyond her, by fitting him with a new jacket in recognition
of his new status.

With Jim’s realization that he is not only superior to one adult, but equal to others, he discovers that his equals don’t always make the decisions (Trelawney talks about the voyage to all.) As if to underscore Jim’s belonging to this unskilled trio of treasure-hunters, Trelawney also decides unwisely and, like them, falls for Long John Silver’s charm and rejects Smollett’s Cassandra-like warnings about the crew in general.

Jim’s growth takes a giant leap during the voyage in the Hispaniola, when he overhears Silver, Israel Hands and Dick plotting to kill the map holders as soon as they reach the island. He speaks first to Livesey, who gets Trelawney and Smollett to listen to the plot. Another stage in Jim’s growing up is reached with Smollett’s reaction: “I propose we salute Jim Hawkins for his courage, luck, and service to the ship.”

Jim’s impulsive decision to accompany the landing party leads him to both danger and safety; two murders occur, followed immediately by his meeting with the castaway, Ben Gunn. Jim’s promise that Ben “shall have cheese by the stone” when they get back to the ship and his instant confiding in Ben underscore the moral goodness which balances his recklessness.

Fights and deceptions transpire, but those which mark Jim’s passage to adulthood are both small and large. First, Jim learns of the death of Redruth, Trelawney’s servant (the first to have addressed him as an adult). Next, we hear him admitting he doesn’t know how to shoot.

Paired with a sailor, Gray, Jim’s decision to get Ben Gunn’s boat is compared with Gray’s timidity: “I don’t like the sound of that. . . . It’s too danger[ous]. . . . The sun will be down . . . wait!” But Jim has gone, and, with no-one to stop him, rows the boat to the Hispaniola and boards her.

Having outfaced Gray, Jim’s hubris is apparent in thinking he can command Hands. He rebukes him for putting up the pirate flag and killing a shipmate. Lest the audience think that Jim’s pride will ruin him, when Hands pulls a knife, Jim shoots him dead, in an ironic climax to Jim’s having previously rebuked the pirate for that very same action.

This is a false climax; Silver offers Jim a choice: to join the pirates or not. Jim tells Silver of all his discoveries and offers the pirate a chance to surrender, much as Smollett had. He’s willing to die rather than join the side of evil.

For a moment, it looks as though the other pirates will revolt against Silver, throwing him and Jim into uneasy partnership. Silver tells him: “I’ll save your life—if I can—from them. But see here Jim, you save Long John from swinging.”

There’s a moment where Jim seems too afraid to continue, but his fear of torture is that he might give away the hiding place of the treasure.

Such courage and derring-do deserve a happy ending, and so it comes to pass. The achievement of the objective (the treasure, capture of pirates, rescue of Ben Gunn, voyage home on the ship) passes quickly, and the villain is removed in a sentence or two. The growing-up Jim is subsumed by the grownup (narrator) Jim, who tells us what happens to everyone else but him. No self-reflection is necessary. Jim’s humility has him leave us with the memory of a great, life-changing voyage, and “Pieces of Eight! Pieces of Eight!” ringing in our ears.