

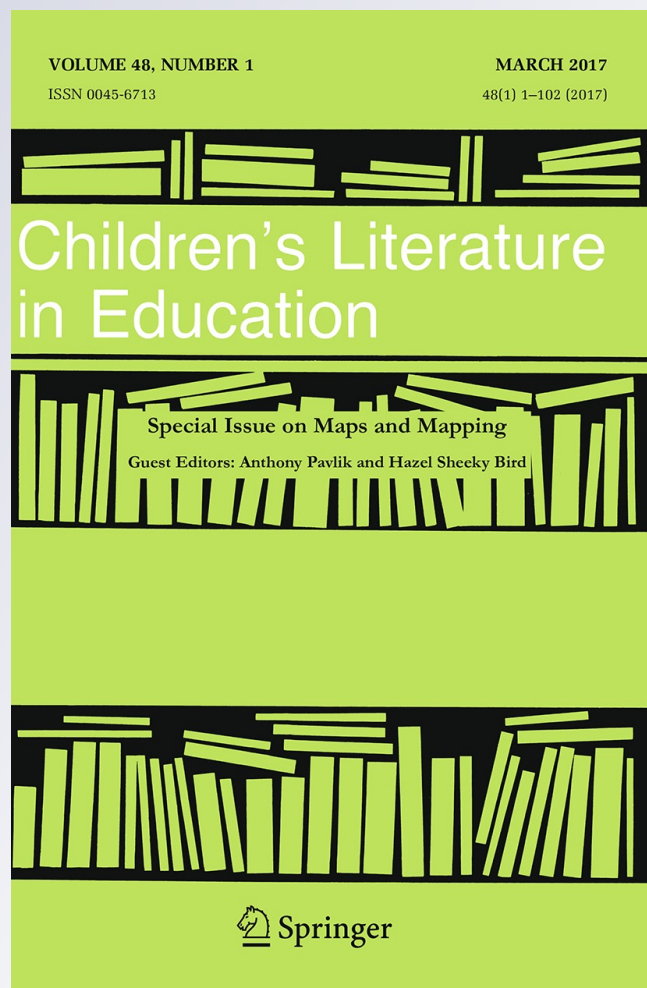
*X Marks the Spot—Not: Pirate Treasure
Maps in Treasure Island and Käpt'n
Sharky und das Geheimnis der Schatzinsel*

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Children's Literature in Education
An International Quarterly

ISSN 0045-6713
Volume 48
Number 1

Child Lit Educ (2017) 48:6-20
DOI 10.1007/s10583-016-9308-0



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X Marks the Spot—Not: Pirate Treasure Maps in *Treasure Island* and *Käpt'n Sharky und das Geheimnis der Schatzinsel*

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Published online: 28 December 2016
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Abstract This article explores the functions of paratextual and intra-textual pirate treasure maps in works of literature for children and young adults. Based on an examination of how the indexical X that “marks the spot” operates as the focal point of the semiotic endeavours of treasure maps, the article outlines the fragile stance of maps between referentiality (thus kindling readers’ imagination) and the potential to disappoint reader expectations (since maps are never congruent with the territory they refer to). The discussion is exemplified by specific consideration of the treasure map from Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island* (1883) and the map of the turtle island in the German children’s picturebook *Käpt'n Sharky und das Geheimnis der Schatzinsel* (2006), which are also seen as examples of treasure maps which play with the expectations of both readers and characters alike, all tied to the X found on any treasure map. The article ends with an analysis of the function of both maps and treasures in the context of open-ended reading games of imagination.

Keywords Treasure maps · Pirates · *Treasure Island* · *Käpt'n Sharky* · Semiotics

Raphael Zähringer has been obsessed with literary maps since he got his hands on a map of Tolkien’s Middle-Earth as a twelve year-old. He later worked on interrelations between maps and literature in his doctoral thesis (“Hidden Topographies: Traces of Urban Reality in Dystopian Fiction”). Now, he is working at the University of Tübingen, Germany as a research associate, and taught an undergraduate course bearing the title “Literature and Maps, Maps and Literature”.

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Introduction

Maps have been a common feature in children's and young adult fiction since the rise of adventure stories in the nineteenth century (Mathison, 2008, p. 175), and they can serve a vast number of purposes: as a tool of inspiration for the author (Stevenson 1986/1894); helping readers to track characters' movements and ensuring verification, as well as control of, literally, "where we are" in the story (Stockhammer, 2007, p. 63); providing a story with a territory on which the narratives can unfold (Piatti, 2009, p. 34); or inviting readers to an open-ended "reading game" of continuous re-imagination (Pavlik, 2010, p. 40). Of all these map types and operations, I want to concentrate on the open-ended reading games of pirate treasure maps, taking *Treasure Island* (1883) by Robert Louis Stevenson, and the German children's book, *Küpt'n Sharky und das Geheimnis der Schatzinsel* ("Capt'n Sharky and the Secret of the Treasure Island") (2006) by Jutta Langreuter (text) and Silvio Neuendorf (illustrations) as my examples. In doing so, I intend to show that pirate treasure maps primarily reveal—and invite their readers to reveal—in the imaginative reading game offered by the semiotic openness of the 'X' and the map's overall possibilities of interaction between reader and territory.

In a substantial number of these pirate stories, maps find themselves in a fairly peculiar position: on the one hand, as world maps typical of fantasy fiction or children's/young adult literature, treasure maps tend to be printed on the endpapers, and are thus usually treated as paratexts in Genette's sense.¹ As paratexts, these maps offer their readers opportunities for inspiring interplay with the text in the aforementioned operations. However, and this seems to be a special feature of pirate stories, treasure maps are also given intra-textual existence *within* the story world because they are used by characters on their hunt for whatever can be found at the location of the indexical X which "marks the spot."² Thus, the double presence of the treasure map (that is, inter- and intra-textual), I argue, can be taken as an invitation to a double reading game since both the readers of the story as well as its characters go on a treasure hunt for whatever the X might refer to: the equivocal X, against the backdrop of the ambiguity of all signs, will be of crucial importance.

My approach, here, also takes its cue from Robert Louis Stevenson's essay "A Humble Remonstrance" (1911/1887), itself a response to "The Art of Fiction" by Henry James (1884/1888). There, Stevenson takes issue with James's assertion that he "has been a child, but he has never been on a quest for buried treasure"

¹ The concept of the paratext refers to all the texts around the main text of the story—for example, page numbers or publisher's notes (see Genette, 1997).

² Beyond the two pirate treasure texts discussed here, other notable examples include: Part IV ("The Money Diggers") of Washington Irving's *Tales of a Traveller* (1824), James Fenimore Cooper's *The Sea Lions* (1849), Douglas Stewart's *The Pirate Queen: or, Captain Kidd and the Treasure* (1867), the discussion on maps between Tom and Huck Finn in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), Hergé's *The Secret of the Unicorn* (1943) and *Red Rackham's Treasure* (1944), Douglas Wilson's *Blackthorn Winter* (2003), Gene Wolfe's *Pirate Freedom* (2007), Wayne Thomas Batson's *Isle of Swords* (2008), and Michael Crichton's *Pirate Latitudes* (2009). While all these narratives feature treasure maps, the origin of the X, and the phrase "X marks the spot" can be traced back to *Treasure Island*; the idea of pirate treasure buried on land, on the other hand, is usually said to have originated from Irving's tales (Rennie, 2013, p. 143).

(Stevenson, 1911/1887, p. 154) and, therefore, can only follow *Treasure Island's* story and realism to a certain degree; in his essay, Stevenson stresses that hunting buried treasure and sailing with pirates is an essential, if not universal, part of any child's playful imagination, especially fuelled by nineteenth-century adventure/pirate stories: "There never was a child (unless Master James) but has hunted gold, and been a pirate" (Stevenson, 1911/1887, p. 154). Using this approach, I will attempt to answer the question of why treasures in pirate stories are so elusive in general, and in stories for children in particular.

The following treasure hunt I would like to perform, therefore, will not end with huge piles of jewels and pieces of eight. In fact, historical accounts of real pirates rarely mention buried treasure; few real pirates were actually able to enjoy their gathered riches, and treasure seekers of later generations almost always return empty-handed. Usually, as noted by Ralph Delahayne Paine (1911, p. 4), "[t]he recipient [of a treasure map], after digging in vain and heartily damning the departed pirate for his misleading landmarks and bearings, handed the chart down to the next generation," who will again fail to find the buried riches. Treasure seekers of all kinds face various challenges: they must acquire the map, the map must be read correctly (when they have often been tampered with, or they pose some kind of riddle or puzzle that needs solving in the first place), they need to find the right spot the map refers to—and, ultimately, they need to cope with the fact that their expectations of the treasure and what they actually find at the X may diverge greatly.

The Treasure Is Buried

Before any crew can actually go on a treasure hunt there needs to be a treasure in the first place. When someone (often a pirate, for example *Treasure Island's* Captain Flint) buries a treasure, it starts as a concrete and tangible item (say, a chest full of pieces of eight); it is only through the act of burying (and thus obscuring) the treasure, and then marking its location on a map with an X, that the treasure is encoded and simultaneously made visible for everybody else. In other words, there is a compelling paradox between the physical treasure being encoded and buried—and thus rendered physically invisible—and the mark on the map creating a graphically visible signifier that would not have been there on the map before. The treasure is signified by an X on paper just as the territory where it is buried becomes represented on a map. Having an X instead of an exact description of the treasure is much more than an abbreviation: it plays a vital role in the cartographic game of imagination. Since map symbols are just that—symbols, which only refer to things without being the things, and which only acquire meaning by being different from other symbols—they largely depend on what readers expect them to signify. Therefore, as long as the nature of the treasure is not known, the X can stand for virtually anything: pieces of eight, jewels, barrels of rum, or something else completely. It can, thus, kindle its readers' imaginations and raise expectations.

During the treasure hunt, the map is obviously necessary in order to get to the location referred to by the X. Of all other possible routes, the one from the map

user's location to the X is singled out as the primary objective and, in terms of plot structure, forms the narrative's *syuzhet* (its specific plot configuration) in Lotman's sense—a *syuzhet* which other maps often lack (Stockhammer, 2007, p. 67). As soon as the treasure is excavated, though, the suspense around the X is effaced: the X is replaced by the treasure it referred to, which then re-actualizes the X as one particular item. This process ties in with what Barbara Piatti (2009, p. 34) has named the “Realisierungseffekt” (effect of realisation), an operation that is especially at the heart of maps which refer to fictional territories: as soon as a story is accompanied by a map referring to the fictional territory, a shift of location from nowhere to somewhere occurs because the map suddenly provides the fictional territory with a tangible, concrete artefact where the story can unfold and, just like the X on a treasure map, the map itself may substantiate what it refers to, but it maintains open ends regardless.

This openness of maps, and of composite sign systems in general, is due to the intricate relation between the map, the territory it refers to, and the map reader/producer (Stockhammer, 2007).³ While maps are often considered to be accurate, helpful, precise, or “true” to what they show, the mere fact that they—just like language, for instance—consist of signs in the broadest sense, signs which only unfold their meaning by being distinguishable from other signs, makes them highly questionable. Thus, “[r]ather than imitating the world, maps develop conventional signs which we come to accept as standing in for what they can never truly show” (Brotton, 2012, p. 7). Consequently, “[t]he map is not the territory” (Korzybski, 1949/1933, p. 750) because it only refers to the territory by means of abstraction. As a result, its function largely depends on the mapmaker's processes of map production and, therefore, world creation (instead of any re-production of the world; see Brotton, 2012, p. 7). Projecting a three-dimensional area onto a flat, two-dimensional surface inevitably results in distortions; additionally, mapmakers, for manifold reasons (artistic expression, or political, cultural and ideological agendas, to name but a few) may deliberately omit, select, exaggerate or downsize parts of the territory.⁴

Due to this degree of abstraction, maps offer their readers a lot of space to play with, as well as allowing readers to be active participants in this “playful” process. This general reading game, an “experiential relationship between map-reader and map” (Pavlik, 2010, p. 38) is even more striking in the context of paratextual maps in particular because readers are invited to engage with the map as well as the literary text. In a way, the interaction between map and text can be linked with researchers' more general interest in the interaction of text and image in picturebooks. However, it is important to emphasise that maps can be more than paratextual decoration or a means to set the tone for the narrative (Pavlik, 2010, p. 28). In fact, it seems that maps, even more than other pictorial elements, tap into the inherent irony of picture books. According to Nodelman (2004, p. 163),

³ For a model elaborating on Stockhammer's basic idea, see Zähringer (2017).

⁴ See, for instance, Brotton (2012, p. 15) or Schneider (2006, pp. 7–9).

the words in picture books always tell us that things are not merely as they appear in the pictures, and the pictures always show us that events are not exactly as the words describe them. Picture books are inherently ironic, therefore: The key pleasure they offer is a perception of the differences in the information offered by pictures and texts.

While all of the above applies to virtually all maps, there are some specifics about pirate treasure maps that need pointing out.

At first sight, these maps seem to be less open than others because of the X (and any potential accompanying instructions), which clearly suggests a destination. The vast multiplicity of potential routes and resulting *syuzhets* seems to be reduced to one trip to the location of the X. However, the X only suggests a destination, but not the exact route to it; thus, treasure hunters still need to orient themselves and engage with the map in order to figure out their personal actualisation of the suggested *syuzhet*. Additionally, the X itself remains fairly open despite hinting at a location—as the examples from *Treasure Island* and *Käpt'n Sharky* will show, the expectations of readers as well as characters of what to find there greatly differ from what can actually be found there; these thwarted expectations may then also produce additional routes, new storylines, or character development triggered by the unexpected finding. Furthermore, the very basic assumption that an X marks a spot should not be taken for granted. In terms of mathematical geometry, of course, an X (or, to be more precise, the place where the X's two lines intersect) is usually used to indicate a spot in a coordinate system. However, readers of coordinate systems and maps alike see not the spot, but rather two intersecting lines, and it is hard not to read them as the letter X (which, therefore, is conducive to the overall ambiguity of the map's signs). In a way, the X thus produces another of what Pavlik (2010, p. 39) would call, “blank space[s],” which encourage reader-map interaction in both actual, as well as in intra-textual, readers by simultaneously highlighting a particular reading performance.

Treasure Island: Great Expectations

As mentioned above, while maps are often considered helpful in terms of orientation, they are simultaneously open-ended and ambiguous. Since they are sign systems that refer to areas, they are mere representations of areas—but not the territory itself. The act of distancing the reader or mapmaker from the territory by confronting them with the referential symbolism of a map opens up endless possibilities of interpretation and misinterpretation, recognition and misrecognition, and of objectivity and subjectivity. Maps, despite their apparent promises of precision and orientation, are highly problematic in their function as tools of control and verification (Harley, 1989, p. 12; Wood and Fels, 1986). These problems figure quite prominently in *Treasure Island*.⁵ With the map of the island, which gives the novel its title, printed not only in the book but also occasionally as its

⁵ The map of *Treasure Island*, perhaps the most famous and iconic treasure map in Western literature, has received a lot of attention over the years. It is so striking because Stevenson created it before he turned to writing the novel; in fact, the map spawned the novel, as Stevenson explains in detail in “My First Book”

cover, the notion of treasure hunting is ubiquitous in *Treasure Island*; the novel's title, the island's name, the map itself, and the X simply stating "Bulk of treasure here", constantly dangle in front of readers' noses, inviting them to join the reading game lurking behind the map, the X, and the treasure. Against this backdrop, the map (and its X) becomes a "compelling substitute for the treasure itself, in a connection more emblematic than material" (Kelley, 2011, p. 244).

The inevitable dominance of the X can also be observed in the story's plot structure, which depends heavily on the power exerted by the intra-textual map of *Treasure Island*: Jim's discovery of the map sets the plot in motion and, as soon as it is in Jim's hand, there is no stopping the plot. Jim takes the map to Livesey and Trelawney, who then immediately buy a ship and prepare the sea voyage. During the voyage, the map is an artefact that needs to be consulted and protected from suspicious eyes. On the island, the map remains a dominant element in the story because it is crucial for figuring out "the spot" and, therefore, the destination of the *syuzhet*. The map is crucial in the context of narrative agency, as the characters follow the map just as the reader follows the story.

Furthermore, numerous characters become obsessed with the map's power; virtually all of the adult characters behave as if being in possession of the map is equal to being in possession of the treasure itself, while a considerable number of them will get no closer to actual possession than catching a glimpse of the referential X.⁶ Thus, the map of *Treasure Island* becomes more than an object of desire—it becomes a necessity for the characters and the plot structure since both become dependent on it and the decoding of its instructions; right from its discovery it is an "essential guide to success" (Buckton, 2007, p. 111).

Conversely, the map is not always helpful: having arrived at the island, Dr Livesey expresses his concerns about what to expect on the treasure hunt: "I don't know about treasure," he says, "but I'll stake my wig there's fever here" (Stevenson, 2009/1883, p. 71). The map may show an X, but there might be no treasure; the map does not show the potential of catching a fever on the island, but the threat is quite real. Additionally, in the context of cartographic power and desire, quite a few characters are shocked when they, or their superiors, lose possession of the map. Again, these reactions show the mediating power of treasure maps and their impact on readers. Long John Silver's frustration, for instance, is quite telling: on the *Hispaniola*, he is granted a look at a map of the island—but not *the* map. Instead, what he sees is a manipulated copy, stripped of all vital instructions: "Long John's eyes burned in his head as he took the chart; but [...] I knew he was doomed to disappointment [...] Sharp as must have been his annoyance, Silver had the strength of mind to hide it" (Stevenson 2009/1883, p. 63). Silver's frustration can be located in the map's restricted effect of realisation: looking at the inferior map with missing instructions is a restricted operation because the crucial openness of the

Footnote 5 continued

(Stevenson, 1986/1894), and many scholars have demonstrated its impact on Stevenson's writing in particular and realist writing in general (see Eidam, 2012, pp. 51–57, and Kelley, 2011, pp. 241ff.).

⁶ On the pirates' behaviour, see Kelley (2011, p. 244); see Valint (2015, p. 21ff.) for the Squire's and the Doctor's reaction to the map.

promising X is missing, the result being that the map neither grants him access to control and verification (which are vital operations in the treasure hunt at hand), nor the pleasure of the reading game revolving around the X. Thus, the reduced version of the map thwarts Silver's expectations of treasure hunting and unimaginable wealth.

Yet, the non-manipulated original also problematises notions of both control and verification. After having followed the map's detailed instructions, and having finally arrived at the spot the map refers to with an X, the *Hispaniola's* crew realise that "[t]he *cache* had been found and rifled: the seven hundred thousand pounds were gone!" (Stevenson 2009/1883, p. 180). When the X is finally decoded, it is not actualised as seven hundred thousand pounds, but as an empty hole in the ground, and all the treasure hunters' expectations are thwarted. Thus, the reading game can, or even has to, continue. Luckily for Jim, the alliance with Ben Gunn (who had dug up the treasure and hidden it somewhere else) enables the crew around him to get their hands on the treasure.⁷ However, even having the treasure does not live up to readers' and certain characters' prior expectations.

With the treasure map and the island's name losing their purpose after the X has been re-actualised, the major tension of the novel is, it seems, resolved: everyone receives their share and returns to England, wealthier than before. Everything seems to have worked out in the end. However, even then, the function of the treasure is problematised. While it is easy to accept that the pirates are unable to enjoy the treasure (Flint was driven mad; Long John Silver needs to go into hiding; his crew is either dead or marooned on the very island that held the treasure), the group of imperialist heroes around Jim Hawkins is also affected by negative aspects of desire. Jim may admit that he "never had more pleasure than in sorting" the coins (Stevenson 2009/1883, p. 183), but the pleasure can be traced back to the fascination with the plethora of foreign coins rather than the mere fact of being rich. In fact, as Valint (2015, p. 21) observes, "[s]orting the treasure is actually a painful activity" for, as Jim states, "my back ached with stooping and my fingers with sorting [the coins] out" (Stevenson, 2009/1883, p. 186). As Valint (2015, p. 21) also notes, Jim "expresses no desire to possess, save, spend, or calculate the money." Instead, looking at the strange coins seems rather to trigger Jim's imagination of faraway places and adventure. Obviously, Captain Flint had travelled very far while accumulating the treasure, and the coins hint at the magnitude of his dubious career by summoning the names of famous seafaring countries ("English, French, Spanish, Portuguese"), types of coins ("Georges, and Louises, doubloons and guineas and moldores and sequins"), by tapping into history ("the pictures of all the kings of Europe for the last hundred years"); and by triggering the young boy's imagination for further mysteries, secrets, and adventures: "strange Oriental pieces stamped with what looked like wisps of string or bits of spider's web [...] and pieces bored through the middle, as if to wear them round your neck" (Stevenson, 2009/1883, p. 186). Captain Smollett, on the other hand, simply retires from all further adventures, and his desire for treasures seems to be satiated.

⁷ Thus, the name of the island—Treasure Island—still holds true to a certain extent.

Interestingly enough, as Valint (2015, p. 22) observes, there was no point in the other men adding the treasure to their riches anyway since Dr Livesey and Squire Trelawney in particular “do not even need the money; the excess of money is the entire point for them.” These men, it seems, draw their pleasure not from the treasure, but from the adventure itself. Ben Gunn, on the other hand, blows his share “in nineteen days, for he was back begging on the twentieth” (Stevenson, 2009/1883, p. 190). He obviously revelled in having the treasure, but he is unable to maintain it. Long John Silver escapes with a sufficient sum and is never heard of again, thus reducing the other men’s overall satisfaction even further. Finally, Jim Hawkins himself remains quite equivocal. First, he avoids stating what he did with his share. More importantly, he knows that all the silver, and thus a second treasure, is still on the island, waiting for him: “certainly they shall lie there for me” (Stevenson 2009/1883, p. 190).

At the same time, though, Jim is adamant that he will never again set foot on “that accursed island” (Stevenson, 2009/1883, p. 190). Why would he not go back? Scholars have argued that the underlying horrors of the island are simply too much, and that they are still haunting Jim (Buckton, 2007, p. 123ff.). Starting with his arrival, any reference to Treasure Island makes his heart sink: “from that first look onward, I hated the very thought of Treasure Island” (Stevenson, 2009/1883, p. 69). Conversely, the novel’s final words, the parrot’s cry “Pieces of eight! Pieces of eight!” (Stevenson 2009/1883, p. 190), will haunt him forever. Another answer might be that now, after the adventure, Jim’s place is no longer on a ship heading for adventure but, in the tradition of the *bildungsroman* and coming of age stories, in the safety of society: the journey, one might say, enabled him to grow up and to find his place back in England (see, for instance, Sandison, 1984). Obviously, gold is what one might expect from a pirate story, but it is hardly what the protagonists end up living happily ever after with.

Alternatively, one could simply state that pirate stories for children and young adults, besides providing a good deal of adventure, take a pedagogical turn by replacing material treasure with a more abstract reward. *Treasure Island*, if read as a coming of age story, seems to argue along this line: Jim, uncaring for the treasure, is made a grown-up member of society after having been on the *Hispaniola*. That one should *not* aim for the material treasure seems to become fairly apparent at the close of the novel since *Treasure Island* ends with the haunting words of mad Captain Flint (as uttered by the parrot) which, after all the adventuring, still reverberate in Jim’s mind, and warn all readers and treasure hunters about the dangers of becoming obsessed with gold (“pieces of eight”). Thus, the story’s primary objective could be located in teaching an adult ideology and morality to the young readers for whom the story is intended.⁸ A third option, as I will now argue, is that Jim is aware that the reading game, as a specific figuration of cartographic desire, has to continue.

⁸ For a compelling negotiation of this issue, see David Rudd (2004).

The Game Goes On

After the adventures of *Treasure Island*, Jim is torn between his nightmares of the island's horrors and the nagging knowledge that there is another treasure just waiting for him. It seems to be quite hard to let go of the notion of desire tied to a buried treasure; I repeat Jim's remark about the silver coins still buried on the island: "certainly they shall lie there for me" (Stevenson, 2009/1883, p. 190). Indeed, Jim's ambiguous statements about his knowledge of the silver hint at the fact that "the possibility of another quest for treasure has not been convincingly ruled out by Jim's narrative" (Buckton, 2007, p. 124). He is aware that there is another treasure to be found, another treasure hunt to be performed, another X to be decoded. While *Treasure Island* as a novel took one specific route—the one to the gold treasure—the unexcavated silver figures as another route not yet actualised, and this can be linked with the notion of the open-ended reading game because there always remains an unactualised *syuzhet*, a narrative gap, or an open question that is worth pursuing (Pavlik, 2010, p. 37). One X on one map may have been decoded, and the treasure it points to excavated, but there is always another treasure that is going to be buried (or has been buried already), another map, another journey—and again, these rely on readers of maps and novels alike taking an active part in interpreting the map's and the text's signs, while also being open to the necessary potential of imprecision and false expectations.

Another hint that the reading game itself (to which the X on the treasure map is an essential means) is of paramount importance can be found in the unknown fate of Long John Silver. Many critics have admired Stevenson's character design, while also wondering why Stevenson lets his villain escape, a typical conclusion being that Silver, being able "to manipulate different factions on either side" (Maxwell and Trumpener, 2011, p. 121), is simply too fascinating a rogue to see him fall in the end. However, in context of the reading game that has to continue, it is quite remarkable that Silver escapes with parts of Flint's treasure. The novel itself is silent about his fate but, as noted earlier, the literary tradition, as well as historical accounts of pirates, teaches us that most pirates rarely enjoy their riches for long; either, as Ben Gunn, they revel in debauchery and gambling for a short time—and if so, they need to find another treasure, or they end up "hanged, shot, or drowned with empty pockets" (Paine, 1911, p. 400), or else they have to bury their booty for various reasons: they might have to flee from the authorities, they may not be able to transport it all, or legal issues may prevent them from immediately spending it. In any case, the pirate himself is hardly ever the one to come back and dig up the treasure (Paine, 1911, p. 3), the result being that the pirate in question leaves behind a map with an X for others to follow.⁹

⁹ See Ralph Paine (1911, p. 416ff.) for one of the very rare cases of an historical pirate, Francis Drake, returning to retrieve a previously buried treasure, only to realise that parts of the booty had already been dug up by someone else.

Käpt'n Sharky: Turtles and Treasures

While Jim Hawkins in *Treasure Island* clearly belongs to the group of gentlemen loyal to the British Empire, the *Käpt'n Sharky* picturebook series takes another route by having its main protagonist, a young boy named Micha, sail *with* the pirates. In the first book in the series (which I focus on here), Micha is captured by Sharky and his crew (initially consisting of a rat and a parrot) and, from the outset, the book simultaneously places itself into the tradition of pirate stories and plays with its readers' expectations. Since *Käpt'n Sharky und das Geheimnis der Schatzinsel* has not really received academic scrutiny yet, the following section will also partly sketch the story. I open with a few words on the map printed on the front endpapers (Fig. 1).

The map features a bright red X “marking the spot” and a compass rose, but no scale and no text. Thus the map, as with most maps in children's literature, provides “no indication of the rules of transformation between representation and represented” due to its avoidance of fully-fledged systematisation (Pavlik, 2010, p. 34). The model of Sharky's ship, partly placed on the map as a paperweight, is conducive to this strategy: the ship appears to be far too large compared to the island and contributes to the map's (and the territory's) elusive arrangement. In addition, the ship also seems to be moving towards the island, and it is quite striking that the ship is about to cross over from the blue surface (the uncharted sea) onto the map/paper.

As soon as the book is opened, the reading game of the treasure hunt can begin, even though the characters themselves have not yet started it. In this context, the map is also supported by the story's title: *das Geheimnis der Schatzinsel* (“Capt'n



Fig. 1 Käpt'n Sharky's Treasure Map (illustration used by kind permission of Silvio Neuendorf and Copenrath; Langreuter, Jutta and Silvio Neuendorf. *Käpt'n Sharky und das Geheimnis der Schatzinsel*. © 2006 Copenrath Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, Münster)

Sharky and the Secret of the Treasure Island”), in combination with the map; this immediately points to the fact that the paratextual map refers to a treasure island, that there is a certain secret to be unravelled, that the ship will arrive at the island over the course of the story, and that the story will culminate in whatever can be found at the X's location. Furthermore, readers may also notice that the island is shaped like a turtle—a fact that already hints at the secret mentioned in the title. If readers notice the suggestive shape, it immediately creates further suspense and expectations, and fosters the readers' role as semioticians in a game of decoding signs. In addition, the design of the island also taps into the aforementioned inherent irony of picturebooks: readers *not* noticing the shape of the turtle may turn to the map again after the revelation, and realise that the major hint to the story's big surprise had been there all along.

The story, then, begins *in medias res* as Micha, a boy of five or six years of age, hears the voice of Sharky (who is about to board Micha's ship).¹⁰ Immediately, reader expectations are thwarted, for Sharky may be a pirate, but he is not fearsome at all; he is smaller than Micha, carries a blankie, and Micha is not afraid, but excited, to finally see something happen. After Sharky has come aboard, he is seen explicitly looking for gold and jewellery (as any stereotypical pirate would). However, this endeavour is quickly abandoned as Sharky finds some chocolate. With this unexpected turn, the way is paved for a friendship between Micha and Sharky because the pirate and his crew are far happier to find sweets than to find riches. Additionally, the turn again strengthens the story's *leitmotif* of thwarted expectations against the backdrop of map reading and hunting for treasure. Slightly later in the story, the map as an intra-textual item is introduced: Sharky shows Micha (now sailing *with* the pirates instead of as their prisoner) a message in a bottle that he cannot get out. Micha, in a highly symbolic performance, manages to fish the piece of paper out of the bottle by using a key: in a way, Micha functions as Sharky's key to the map he has had in his possession for quite a while, and to take the entire crew on a treasure hunt as soon as they can take a look at the piece of paper.

The message in the bottle is immediately identified as a treasure map, and the first striking feature to catch Sharky's eye is, of course, the X. He immediately assumes it to refer to a treasure: “Is that a treasure map?” asks Micha, excited. “Of course, hoho!” cries Capt'n Sharky—“do you see the X there—there has to be a treasure there. But where do we have to go?” (Langreuter and Neuendorf, 2006).¹¹ The X stands out against all other components of the map's sign system, triggering expectations of buried treasure. The question of the island's location is conveniently answered by Micha who can already read a little bit (while Sharky cannot) and is able to spell the word “Schild-krö-ten-strand” (“turtle beach”) (Langreuter and Neuendorf, 2006).¹² Immediately when Sharky is provided with this information, he knows which island it is, and how to get there: “‘What? I know where it is!’ laughs

¹⁰ The narrator says Micha is a first-grader, and children in Germany usually enter first grade at age five or six.

¹¹ All English translations from *Käpt'n Sharky* are the author's.

¹² The word does not show on the paratextual map, either the intratextual map slightly differs from the one printed in the book, or the word is written on the back.

the small pirate. ‘It’s on the island where all the little turtles hatch!’” (Langreuter and Neuendorf, 2006) Thus, he needs the treasure map in order to realise that there is a treasure on the otherwise unspectacular island. Yet, why is he unable to ascertain that the island on the map is the turtle island he already knows by merely looking at the telling shape of the island? It seems as if a possession, similar to the one affecting *Treasure Island*’s pirates, has befallen him: the mere fascination with the map’s power, and the implicit anticipation of treasure, makes him blind to the suggestive design of the map—again, mere possession of the map is almost equated with already having the treasure. The bright red X, the map’s most prominent sign, plays the major role in Sharky’s reading game, distracting him from the island’s overall shape, and Micha joins him in being focussed on the X: “‘And here—look—the cross belonging to the treasure is underneath the palm tree closest to the water’, says Micha” (Langreuter and Neuendorf, 2006). Thus, holding the map in their hands, the two engage in a reading game with the aforementioned dominance of the X as its *syuzhet*—and it is striking how the convention of the X being inevitably linked with buried treasure is ingrained into Micha’s mind (“belonging to the treasure”: “das Kreuz für den Schatz” in the original German).

After arriving on the island, Micha and Sharky immediately head to the location suggested by the map’s X: the palm tree closest to the water. In a way, this instruction, derived from the reading game, follows an implicit coherence of reference between map and territory; obviously, the crucial point about a treasure map is that the instructions have to be correct so the reading game and the treasure hunt can be performed. While the map is still not to be confused with the territory, instructions and Xs on pirate maps seem to function as means of protection against changing conditions in the territory they refer to (for instance, the palm tree might have been felled, or another one might have grown even closer to the water). Since the entire point of the treasure hunt is to arrive at the X, and since the journey itself has been so unspectacular that it is not even worth narrating, it is of vital importance that the map (despite all the potential problems mentioned earlier) is actually helpful.¹³

The excavation of the treasure, though, bears a surprise: Micha and Sharky do not find a chest full of gold or any other typical pirate treasure; instead, as they start digging, they discover a nest of turtle eggs. Micha and Sharky decide to leave the nest alone because they do not want to damage it, but they already talk about another voyage to turtle beach on another day. On the one hand, this seems to be an allusion to James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Sea Lions* (1849/1965), where protagonist Roswell Gardiner laughs at the deacon’s order to sail to a small key: “‘Nothing

¹³ In this context, it is worth pointing out that the sea voyages—deliberately, I would argue—lack detailed narration. In *Treasure Island*, the voyage is narrated to some extent, but it mostly revolves around having or not having the map as a tool of power and the resulting mutiny of the group around Long John Silver. Besides that, the journey turns out to be fairly unspectacular, and complies with Trelawney’s expectations before setting sail: “To-morrow I start for Bristol. In three weeks’ time—three weeks!—two weeks—ten days—we’ll have the best ship, sir [...] We’ll have favourable winds, a quick passage, and not the least difficulty in finding the spot” (Stevenson, 2009/1883, p. 34). *Käpt’n Sharky* does not even bother with providing any details, as the narrative directly jumps from finding the treasure map to the arrival at the turtle beach: “It is not far. Portside! Hoist all sails! We are on the right course! South-south-west!’ cries Capt’n Sharky. [...] Then they arrived” (Langreuter and Neuendorf, 2006).

grows on these keys but a few stunted shrubs, and nothing is ever to be found on them but turtle. Once in a while a fellow may pick up a few turtle, if he happens to hit the right key” (p. 99). Thus, Micha does explicitly what Gardiner hints at: instead of finding and excavating a treasure, he picks up a turtle. However, the turtle nest also elaborates on the intricacy of the expectations tied to the X: in a way, the nest of eggs seems to be quite unspectacular when compared to gold coins, but it turns out to have held an even greater treasure at the close of the story. Back on the ship, the turtle inside the egg hatches to great effect: it becomes Micha's animal companion, a new crew member, and the turtle's appearance also prompts the parrot of the crew to talk for the first time. The thwarted expectation thus leads to the true treasure of *Käpt'n Sharky*: friendship, one can say, trumps gold. As Micha thinks, “Much better to meet this pirate [Sharky] again someday than to have a treasure right now” (Langreuter and Neuendorf, 2006).

Once again, as in *Treasure Island*, one could stop here and highlight children's pirate stories' pedagogical thrust by replacing false expectations of material riches with actual friendship. However, this book and the rest of the series rather hint at the fascination of the (map) reading game, which has to go on. In the context of cartographic desire, the point of treasure hunting is not triumphantly holding the treasure in one's hands, but the reading game itself, which always starts with looking at a new-found treasure map for the first time. This emphasis on the reading game elaborates on the surprising decision of Sharky and Micha to simply leave behind the assumed treasure. In other words, by leaving without checking whether there is a treasure at all, they keep alive the mystery behind the X on the map, and so the hunt for treasure can continue. And the hunt for treasure does indeed continue: in the eighth book of the series, *Käpt'n Sharky bei den Wikingern* (“*Capt'n Sharky and the Vikings*”) (2014), Micha and the crew around Sharky sail back to the turtle island in order to excavate the treasure, their reward being a chest full of silver. And even then, the game of hunting and hiding treasure does not stop: while they use the larger part of the treasure to help out some of the Vikings they meet in the story, it is revealed at the end of the story that Sharky's crew sewed the rest of the treasure in their clothes. Thus, there is another split treasure that was hidden and then retrieved, similar to the share taken by Long John Silver during his escape. Furthermore, the series' fifth book, *Käpt'n Sharky und der Riesenkrake* (“*Capt'n Sharky and the Giant Kraken*”) (2010) is about another treasure hunt that does not end with an excavation: instead, Micha and Sharky choose to leave it inside the sunken ship they have found because a giant kraken considers both treasure and ship its own property. Admittedly, this treasure is not referred to by an X on any map, but Micha's and Sharky's knowledge of the treasure figures as a precondition for creating such a map: after all, virtually all Xs on treasure maps stem from pirates who know the location in question (Paine, 1911, 3ff.). These examples all demonstrate the fascination that exudes from the compelling reading game related to treasure maps instead of simply giving into the alluring riches.

Conclusion

Both *Treasure Island* and *Käpt'n Sharky* end with unexcavated treasures. At first glance, leaving behind these riches primarily seems to promote the pedagogical function of, for instance, friendship, a valuable moral or lesson learned, or having come of age in order to find one's place in society. However, in connection with the concept of the open-ended reading game of maps, pirate narratives featuring a treasure map provide a specific figuration of reader-map-text interaction. The indexical X is crucial in this regard because it highlights what is paramount in any such performative interaction: it stresses the role of readers as active semioticians who actualise the aforementioned individual performance, thus going beyond the mere physicality of ink on paper and unlocking new meanings while remaking the represented territory. The X thus functions as a specific blank, visualising what would otherwise remain hidden—after all, the treasure is buried, so it does *not* show on the actual territory. At the same time, the X also conceals the treasure because it does not give away what the treasure precisely consists of. The semiotic interplay of stating outright that something has been hidden offers possibilities of imaginative reading games; similar to a mathematical equation, the X on a treasure map functions as a variable that needs decoding.

With the treasure dug up and the X erased at the end of any treasure hunt, however, a most compelling part of the reading game dies, leaving the map without an obvious *syuzhet*. The open-endedness of both *Treasure Island* and *Käpt'n Sharky* (with regard to their endings as well as their negotiation of mapping and referentiality) sheds light on the admission that a treasure map loses a significant part of its charm when its X is re-actualised as a particular treasure—not only because the treasure might have been moved, cursed, or not be what its hunters falsely assumed it to be, but because the excitement of the reading game is about to come to an end. Thus, both narratives also display a tendency to leave behind parts of the treasure, to hide or bury parts of the treasure somewhere else, so that the reading game, as an essential part of children's literature and young adult fiction, can continue. Children, as stated in “A Humble Remonstrance,” may be children because they hunt for treasure, but the point of treasure hunting is not to be found in the details of the journey towards the treasure island in question, nor in the treasure as a commodity, but in the experiential relationship between reader, map, and territory. Thus, “It would seem that, in the adult world, heroes can attain some wealth, but not the untold wealth of an imaginative child” (Mathison, 2008, p.183) tapping into the open-endedness of maps in general and pirate treasure maps in particular.

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