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“GENTLEMEN OF FORTUNE”

CLASS DISCOURSES IN DANIEL DEFOE’S *A GENERAL HISTORY OF THE PYRATES*

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ABSTRACT:

While the phenomenon of piracy has existed for centuries and is still present in our times, few are as present in the popular imagination as the pirates of the Golden Age of Piracy of the Eighteenth Century. Despite the lack of primary sources and the sensationalism with which later works discussed this topic, a number of these pirates are still known today, their image shifting from that of a near-positive, romanticised hero to that of a dehumanised fugitive of the law. The purpose of this thesis is to analyse the portrayal of a few of the pirates present in Daniel Defoe's *A General History of the Pyrates* with the perspective of class and property in mind, connecting such notions to the time of publishing, the public opinion of pirates, and how these depictions helped create our contemporary images of Golden Age western pirates.

Keywords: naval literature, class, gentry, gentility, propriety, crime, buccaneering, Golden Age of Piracy, Daniel Defoe

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“This is a Proof how dangerous it is to Governments
to be negligent, and not take an early Care
in suppressing these Sea Banditti,
before they gather Strength”.

—DANIEL DEFOE, *A General History of the Pyrates*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Powerful is the allure of the monster, and, as such, sunken in veils of myth and wonder, the image of naval pirates has acquired a certain notoriety for their elusiveness, earning a charismatic and stereotypical portrayal that owes much to a set of pirates pertaining to a specific time and geographical frame: that of the Golden Age of Piracy, which lasted from circa 1650 to 1726. These enemies of the Crown were neither the first, nor the most numerous, nor even the most well-documented pirates that we know of. Such other examples as the Barbary pirates in the Mediterranean or the Malay pirates in the Indian Ocean may also come to mind. Yet, the combination of the response their society garnered for them and a considerable dose of appeal for the monster within helped set them apart from the rest, to the point their reality became foreground to all piracy, and with that, the myths and misconceptions surrounding them.

As it is, it is not solely the stereotype now linked to their personas that makes them elusive: the voice of these pirates, too, escapes us. Theirs is not only a literature, but also an account bereft of representation, given the extended illiteracy of the times within their social conditions —as well as the rush of life entailed with being a fugitive of the law, which plays against the viability of keeping written, incriminating, personal accounts other than letters home or the captain and boatswain's log. For this reason, the minority they constituted was further silenced due to their criminal nature and the attempts to preserve British propriety and civilization on land. What little one has of their times is laden with uncertainty, denouncement, censorship, or, at the other extreme, rigged with notions of sensationalism and hyperbolic, even romanticised, imageries of these characters.

Fortunately, one account survives which has served as the cornerstone of pirate literature regarding this so-called Golden Age of Piracy of the early eighteenth century in the Caribbean coasts. Published in London in 1724, and soon edited with an extended version including more original content, *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the most*

notorious Pyrates is considered the main source on the lives of these criminals. Published under the pen name of Captain Charles Johnson it is nonetheless mainly attributed to Daniel Defoe¹. This catalogue of portraits, presented as a historical guide for piracy, illustrates the lives of nautical pirates for the consideration of the civilised reader, and it comprises a combination of factors which feed into the shaping of the cornerstone it has become. For one, its genre is suggested in objectivity, unlike newsletters; the author also appeals to gentility and the responsibility of one's government, making the source material palatable to the readers of his time. Additionally, though he condemns them at times, the author treats the pirates with more consideration than they were given in trial registers, and speaks as a self-proclaimed captain himself, if not of the criminal variety. Lastly, its contemporaneity marks its reliability, as it was published right at the end of the Golden Age of Piracy, and thus would have been written before the effects of time polluted its narrative with even more misconceptions, or simply made it irrelevant. Added to that, the lack of other noteworthy primary sources or evidence of the lives of these pirates, shipwrecks that leave us with little material culture, pardons such as the *Act of Grace* (1717), or judicial evidence that focused solely on accountability of the accused crimes may contribute to single out *A General History of the Pyrates* as a one-of-a-kind narrative.

Though one might never possess the entire scope of the true nature and lives depicted so colourfully within Defoe's *A General History of the Pyrates*², one would still greatly benefit from the understanding of how these specific narratives were created and shaped, and how they may converge into our present imaginaries on criminals at high sea during the Golden Age. To that purpose, an approach on how its author, under the guise of someone in close contact with the objects of his study, defined these characters —the pirates, but also the author of *A General History of the Pyrates*—, and the effects their times had on its production and reception, would be of interest. As there are many considerations into play, from race and class to gender, as well as the literary techniques employed in this catalogue of portraits, this thesis endeavours to probe the class dynamics inlaid into the text. The Golden Age of Piracy, as designated by such historians as John Fiske and Marcus Rediker, was defined by imperialist and colonialist ideology centred on property, creating a divide between

¹ As will be explained afterwards, there is a line of criticism that contests Defoe's full authorship of *A General History of the Pyrates*. However, several scholars of eighteenth-century literature consider it to be written by Defoe himself, who throughout his career published under different pen names. Here we will follow Manuel Schornhorn's standard edition of the text, which credits Defoe as the author.

² Henceforth, this thesis will use this abbreviation for *A General History of the Pyrates*.

a privileged society of the land, and the *hostis humani generis*, the pirates³. That permeated into the lives of what had been initially conceived as this society, by then understood as the propertied—focused on property and materiality—, the gentry —the quality of those of upper, wellborn class— and those bearing gentility —the *habitus* of such people—. If the image of the pirates is conceived of as reactionary, it is because it was a response to these ideas of class, and, as a result, who they truly were and how history came to portray them stem from the game of property and the lack thereof.

The contrast between the romantic, insurrectionist, pirates and the bloodthirsty, heartless, pirates that has reached us through novels, films, TV shows or even re-popularised sea shanties fascinates me to no end, since few other groups of outlaws have garnered such stark duality, extolling and rejecting at the same time their sense of humanity. My hope was to better understand the men and women behind the myth, as people of flesh and bone, with their ambitions and their flaws, and for that I, wished to analyse why they are known to us the way they are, and whether that was already present in the foremost source of information we have on them. In other words, the intent behind these pages is to consider which was the social background and its structure that cast such a particular image towards such a particular group of people, specifically from the collection of portraits that their contemporary *A General History of the Pyrates* revealed. Thus, it is this very consideration that drives this research: an attempt at shedding light on how these specific discourses of class, in terms of gentry, gentility and propriety, not only were key in the development of the social phenomenon that is piracy, but also in the configuration that compelled its author to depict it the way *A General History of the Pyrates* is, bearing also in mind what that implied and how it affected later depictions of piracy from the early 1700s. To do so, the edition chosen is that of Manuel Schonhorn, which fulfils two purposes⁴. On the one hand, it defends Defoe's authorship of *A General History of the Pyrates*, while on the other it is one of the few modern reprints in English comprising both volumes, preceded by a critical prologue and accepted by the academia.

For the purposes of delving into such a study, the following research will proceed as follows. It will first begin with some theoretical/contextual considerations, comprising a social study of early eighteenth-century Britain and its colonies in the Americas, as well as

³ REDIKER, Marcus. "The Political Arithmetic of Piracy" in *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (2004): pp. 26–28.

⁴ DEFOE, Daniel. *A General History of the Pyrates* (Dover Publications, 1999) [1724-1728].

the geographical and cultural background that gave birth to this specific wave of piracy and its narratives, through selected literary sources. Once this first section is concluded, this thesis will explore a functional implementation of the state of the art exposed beforehand, and, with those considerations, analyse the text properly. The key figures that will be taken into account, so as to not overextend the length of the thesis and to offer an appropriate analysis of class dynamics and propriety, include five portraits from the first volume. That is to say, in order of appearance in *A General History of the Pyrates*, we shall comment on the portraits of Captain Bartholomew Roberts, Captain Edward Teach, Major Stede Bonnet, and the case of female pirates Anne Bonny and Mary Reed. As a complementary source of interest, a section titled “The Legacy of the Myth” will offer some considerations regarding the effects *A General History of the Pyrates* has had on the popular image piracy has acquired to our days. Lastly, some brief reflections on the sum of these two sections will mark the conclusion of the thesis.

2. SOCIETAL AND LITERARY BACKGROUND

To better understand the impression the pirates of this period of history left with their ventures, the following section will endeavour to illustrate both the times that enabled and recorded them and what had been said, as well as the existing perspectives and literature on piracy during the Golden Age and the aspects of Defoe's biography that might help to better contextualise the portrait of pirates discussed here.

2.1. PROPRIETORSHIP AND GENTILITY

During the European Age of Discovery, at the rise of imperialism and the birth of individualism, England's society was held upon pillars of morality and economic preoccupation, aspects that would later come into play with the response the pirates of the Golden Age garnered. The English society of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was, in short, defined not only by the colonial enterprise, but also by the growing market culture and social organisation.

Especially concerning urban territory, English society exhibited a great disparity between rich and poor, though one can not know for certain the incidence hardship and poverty had on the living standards of the lower classes⁵. All the same, the concerns about material inequality were foregrounded within English politics, for the betterment of the public image of the Crown, even if many had concerns that the enfranchisement of the poor would "engender corruption"⁶. The result of such a divide was a general sense of civic unrest. With the parliamentary concerns that followed the Revolution of 1688 and the dispute between the Whigs and the Tories, it was often the civilian's duty to regulate crime, a commitment many willingly enacted⁷, due to a sense of moral correctness —be it by Anglican, Catholic, Protestant, Huguenot or even Jew doctrine⁸, as England was by then a melting pot of religious pluralism. As such, when political disputes between more conservative Tories and parliamentary Whigs found it difficult to manage the social subtract beyond those of upper standing, the matter of politics the entire parliament found common ground in was that of property, to the point where the right of property was fundamental for

⁵ LANGFORD, Paul. "Just Authority" in *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman 1689-1798* (1991): p. 455.

⁶ LANGFORD, Paul. "Qualified Rule", op. cit. p. 284.

⁷ EARLE, Peter. "Civic Life" in *The Making of the English Middle Class. Business, Society and Family Life in London, 1660-1730* (1989): p. 243.

⁸ HUNT, Margaret R. "A Generation of Vipers" in *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680-1780* (1996): p. 48.

the functioning of society, and “it became almost impossible to conceive of rights and liberties except in terms which implied individual proprietorship⁹”. The parity of individual rights and property marked the organisation of English society, as it put emphasis on the market economy, and that judgement affected the enactment of the law and the attention that the entire society —especially those among the middling class— had on their bearing and possessions.

With a society keen on property, the ideal of the age became that of land and estate, over which one held complete authority and ownership¹⁰, without intervention from the Crown. The possession of land, as well as other goods, even acquired certain precedence over other values. Such considerations were not completely unanimous, as with the materialisation of life and goods many worried about the prostitution of the human spirit. Yet, many, like Defoe, would argue that “property begets affection”, positing “human acquisitiveness as the natural foundation of other, clearly desirable, sentiments and drives”¹¹. In fact, the intensity of this permeation of the economic drives into the foundations of the English world was such that the successes or failures one suffered in trading endeavours was often explained not by chance, but by Divine Providence¹², and it was deeply interwoven into a sense of community: for one, the morality of those who would owe their economic success to “the expense of one’s fellow citizens”¹³ would be highly criticised; and, on the other hand, they did not conceive of the possibility of a self-made man, as may be understood nowadays, but rather a system of families or business relationships. These impressions of the age of mercantilism made the duty of its citizens all the more imperative, as they ensured the social order and harmony necessary for one’s success.

The notions surrounding such social development —intertwined as it was with mercantilism— are all defined by property and bearing, as has been alluded to in previous paragraphs. This understanding of class comes with its complications, as the way to measure the people of these times cannot be done solely by documentary evidence or measures of wealth. The tendency of emulation¹⁴ of the upper classes, while not comprehensive of the totality of the population’s motivations and aspirations, would make it difficult to discern

⁹ LANGFORD, Paul. “The Propertied Mind”, op. cit. p. 1.

¹⁰ Idem, p. 67.

¹¹ Idem, p. 3.

¹² HUNT, Margaret. “Capital, Credit, and the Family”, op. cit. p. 34.

¹³ EARLE, Peter. “Introduction”, op. cit. p. 12.

¹⁴ HUNT, Margaret. “Introduction”, op. cit. p. 2.

between classes, whereas to their contemporaries “their dressing would have chided them immediately”¹⁵. Added to that, attempting to interpret the society of this turn of the century with modern terminology would mean limiting oneself to anachronistic interpretations. Their social standing was intertwined, as it has been through history, with notions of race, gender, and sexuality, not solely on class, and especially within urban or trading spaces. For these reasons, it is best to consider the perspectives of the men and women of the times: Defoe, for instance, divided the population into seven groups, the common people comprising the mercantile bourgeoisie being referred to as the Middling Class and the lowest being “the miserable that really pinch and suffer want”¹⁶ —tens of thousands just in London. This included casual workers, women, children, the elderly or the sick, and criminals. Decades later, in 1794, Johann Wilhelm von Archenholz would mark a distinction between the upper classes, of which we possess more information: he distinguished between gentry —wealthy proprietors not necessarily of noble birth— and the mere rich, these embodying a genteel or genteelmanly or ladylike appearance¹⁷, as it was common for men to measure their expenses by the image they wished to project of their circumstances rather than what they could actually afford —as per the theory of emulation. The concerns of this period of time, thus, are regarding the propertied upbringing, to the point where even liberty was second to property. Defoe even goes on to say, in his *Review*: “Pray, what is Liberty —but a Freedom to possess Property, a Liberty to enjoy it, and a Right to defend it?”¹⁸.

The notions of property and gentry affected the pirates at sea, even in spite of their status as outcasts. Those would be their very targets, and they were especially exemplified in the vessels of other Empires, when they first were considered privateers and their efforts were in favour of the Crown and against the Spanish or French navy, for example, but also, and most notably, in the pursuit of vessels of the East India Company through all the Golden Age of Piracy¹⁹. This heavily armed enterprise, as it co-dependended from the English Crown, symbolised both riches and power, and their shipment of goods such as tea would often equate the cargo to even 10 million pounds²⁰, which pirate captains such as Henry Avery and William Kidd would target, perhaps even inducing the change of perspective from privateers

¹⁵ EARLE, Peter. “The London Middle Class”, op. cit. p. 331.

¹⁶ Idem, p. 339.

¹⁷ Idem, p. 328.

¹⁸ *Defoe's Review*, V. 639 (1709). Extracted from LANGFORD, Paul. op. cit. p. 4.

¹⁹ THOMAS, James H. “Merchants and Maritime Marauders: The East India Company and The Problem of Piracy in The Eighteenth Century” in *The Great Circle*, vol. 36, no. 1 (2014): p. 83.

²⁰ Idem, p. 85.

to pirates to the English Admiralty. These attacks not only interrupted a flow of trade on which the Crown was dependent, but also put in jeopardy the relations the English had with the Mughal, which were already fragile as they were, due to the English colonial enterprises in India. As such, rather ironically, the concern for property and social status, the cornerstone of English society during the eighteenth century, became key in the development of piracy, which in turn was often based on the ostracism caused by these conditions. This, added to King George's *Proclamation for Suppressing of Pyrates* (1717), which was concerned with the "*Pyracies and Robberies upon the High-Seas, in the West Indies, or adjoining to our Plantations, which hath and may Occasion great Damage to the Merchants of Great Britain*"²¹, created a decidedly hostile atmosphere for pirates, on behalf of merchants, the legitimacy of English territory, and the rights of the propertied on their possessions.

Another concern worth remarking on is that of civil unrest, as it correlates with the rise of crime and piracy, as well as the need for the Crown to defend itself so fiercely against any threat, especially that of the rogue seafarers. The early eighteenth-century English society, while diverse and nearly bent on individualism, was still a propertied, white, male-dominated space, especially within commerce and the public image. The opportunities granted to those outside these considerations were, then, slim and caused some to turn to criminal endeavours, which was an incident mostly endemic to urban, industrialised areas, leaving the rural areas and the colonies mostly out of reach for the Crown's authorities. While common, the people of the eighteenth century linked such behaviours to immorality, hence the rise of the ideological movement called the Reformation of Manners²². What is more, while one of the largest sources of employment was domestic service, carriage by land and water and especially the profession of master mariners, garnered one of the best reputations of employment, placing them at the peak of "hierarchical pay structure in the merchant service"²³. What this meant was that those directly affected by the pirates' attacks were also central within the English economy and society, further heightening the danger they entailed.

Between the Reformation of Manners and the propagation of Puritanism, any breach of decorum and propriety or any attempt at crime acquired a negative response from the general public, or so the elites of the times contended. In truth, between the precarious conditions many lived in, the rampant crime prone to cities, and such wars as the recent Civil

²¹ DEFOE, Daniel. "The Introduction", op. cit. p. 40.

²² HUNT, Margaret. "Just in all their Dealings", op. cit. p. 102.

²³ EARLE, Peter. "The Metropolitan Economy", op. cit. p. 76.

War of England (1642–1649) between Cavaliers and Roundheads, gruesomeness and cruelty were not unknown to civilians. Even if distanced by the endless sea and station, the atrocities attributed, or even committed, by pirates, and those enacted by their own countrymen both at the colonies and in mainland England shared some commonalities, reflecting one another in their rejection of a constructed Other. On the one hand, colonial enterprises such as the Spanish one would continuously perform, as Bartolomé de las Casas denounced, “punitive attacks”²⁴ against the natives in the Americas for the sake of gold and power, in an attempt to submit—or even exterminate—them, due to a perceived otherness in their different physiognomy deemed as inferior or even subhuman. This perceived superiority in bearing or intellectualism would then legitimate acts of terror, and while many of the landed gentry would sneer at such behaviour, considering it Spanish barbarism, some of them, too, enacted such acts: it is the case of sir Francis Drake, who enjoyed a life of merciless privateering against the Spanish, or sir John Hawkins, who massacred and enslaved many Africans for profit²⁵. Even within the very streets of their cities acts of cruelty were legitimised through law enforcement, especially against minoritized groups. Let us remember, for instance, Edward VI’s Vagrancy Law, which “directed that if a vagabond loitered for three days, he would be branded with a red hot iron and condemned as a slave to the person who had denounced him as an idler”²⁶. That is not to say that the English society as a whole would look down upon the ostracised. As per the right of property, many of the gentries would defend the distribution of property so as to quell the needs of those Defoe called “the miserable that really pinch and suffer want”, even if they considered egalitarianism and would ultimately consider that “there will be rich and poor, diligent and sloth; this is industry, this is God and this is what makes civilisation; this is the foundation of commerce”²⁷. While compassion and humanity were preached and performed by their contemporaries, legitimised acts of scorn and brutality were not unknown to them either, and so the events from both sides of the ocean would mirror one another. The violence enacted against Anglo-American pirates, thus, was founded in a fashion not too unfamiliar to the English.

Additionally, even with our limited knowledge about this society, one may ascertain that their concerns for property and upbringing influenced education and the propagation of

²⁴ KOFFLER, Judith S. “Terror and Mutilation in the Golden Age” in *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1983): p. 118.

²⁵ *Idem*, p. 124.

²⁶ *Idem*, p. 125.

²⁷ *Defoe’s Review*, IV. 19 (1707). Extracted from LANGFORD, Paul. *op. cit.* p. 36.

literacy and literature. With the expansion of the market, so did the literary market of the printing world, and the necessity to instil upon the younger generations of trading families the ability to read and “write a good hand”²⁸. Besides, with the rise of the literary market, so did the extended practice of literary piracy, or culture of reprint²⁹, causing many authors, such as Defoe, to venture carefully with the publishing editorials in regard to intellectual property, as well as indirectly increasing the sum of literary sales. This urge allowed the lower classes to become more accessible to books, especially concerning literature depicting trading concerns, be it through theoretical frameworks or fiction, and that caused a *boom* in travel literature³⁰, considered the most widely-read genre during the times. What this increased literacy and awareness —together with interest in travel literature and the interactions with other worlds and peoples— meant for the trading class of the turn of the century was that the rise of piracy in the Americas also became of interest to the common people at home, not just for the Crown or the affected merchants.

Such were the times during which the Golden Age of Piracy was born and flourished, inlaid with deep regards for property and genteelness —matters that shed light on the heightened concern the English had over the rise of buccaneering around the Caribbean. Pirates attacked one of the cornerstones of English professions, as well as plundered the very core of their society: property. The act went beyond mere theft and the crimes that accompanied it —piracy was an affront against the morals of the gentry, the Crown and propriety. Still, while an understanding of the structure behind this phenomenon allows for a fuller picture of the times and their preoccupations, it is necessary to study piracy itself to achieve a stronger nuance on the topic at hand.

2.2. BEYOND ANGLO-AMERICAN PIRACY

Before delving into the particularities of the Golden Age of Piracy, I suggest a detour throughout comparable cases of piracy through history, in order to understand the concept of piracy and how the different geographical and political circumstances could play into it. After all, to venture into the deep waters in the name of profit was not an aspiration unique to the Anglo-American: for as long as the possibility of travelling by sea was possible and different societies enacted their tradings through these routes, piracy was a risk and a chance at hand.

²⁸ HUNT, Margaret. “A Generation of Vipers”, op. cit. p. 56

²⁹ COHEN, Monica F. “Imitation Fiction: Pirate Citings in Robert Louis Stevenson’s ‘Treasure Island’” in *Victorian Literature and Culture* (2013): p. 153.

³⁰ HUNT, Margaret. “Print Culture and the Middling Class”, op. cit. p. 188.

Most notably, specialists such as Philip de Souza have studied the effects and perspectives of piracy during the ancient times, and some of the considerations that come to light with the study of the piracy of the Golden Age appear as well within Ancient Roman mentality, for instance. Their respective cultural contexts and dimensions set the piracy of both times apart, yet they coincide in the political disdain their authorities held upon them, as well as some of the resulting defamatory imaginaries. Within the Roman Empire, there was an attempt to frame piracy further from the vague *leistes*³¹, “sea raiders”, that appeared in Homeric tradition. Instead, they sought to create a moral, even illicit, enemy of maritime hegemony, one which the very Romans exhaustively attempted to secure through a projection of their military power, even beyond their borders.

In circa 100 B.C, the Roman Empire issued the *Lex de provinciis praetoriis*, where, among others, their political allies were asked “to see that no pirate (*peirates*) use as a base of operations their kingdom or land or territories (...) and to see that, insofar as it shall be possible, the Roman people have them as contributors to the safety of all...”³². In other words, the concern for wealth, be it in the shape of cereals, wine, and slaves, or sugar, tobacco, and slaves once again, pushed both Empires to conjure narratives to demonise existing piracy, distorting it from whichever reality it entailed. The similarities do not end at the colonial effort to further legitimise its occupation through the appeal of property and fear, for the pirates of Ancient Rome would —like those of the Golden Age of Piracy— often employ sailors coming from impoverished and discontented social groups, in short, castaways and by-products of the Empire’s expansion³³. Whereas England’s affront against pirates would cast them as enemies of all mankind, those from the Roman Empire would consider pirates “not included in the category of lawful enemies, but they are the enemies of all mankind”³⁴. From that, the step from illicitness to the deprecatory, hyperbolic perspectives —or rather fears— becomes near-insignificant.

Another relevant instance of piracy which bears both similarities and striking cultural differences to the Golden Age of Piracy is that of the *wokou* around Eastern Asia’s coasts during the fifteenth century and the Ming Chinese dynasty. All around the globe, the general

³¹ De SOUZA, Philip. “Rome’s Contribution to the Development of Piracy” in *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome. Supplementary Volumes* (2008): pp. 71-96.

³² *Lex de provinciis praetoriis* Knidos III, lines 28-37; Delphi B 10-12; 100 BC. Extracted from De SOUZA, Philip. Op. cit. p. 78.

³³ De SOUZA, Philip. Op. cit. p. 85.

³⁴ Cicero. *De Officiis*. 3.107. Extracted from De SOUZA, Philip. Op. cit. p. 88.

idea of piracy often revolves around the subjects of this thesis, those of the Golden Age of Piracy, along with their stereotypes. Researcher Yuanfei Wang argues that this ethnocentric, Western perspective is linked to the common imageries of the sea, which Hegel relates to the European experience or heritage³⁵, that of the Mediterranean Sea. As it is, the Mediterranean sea is not required for one to conjure piracy, as the Golden Age pirates prove. This suggests that the possibility to draw connections from this time and that of the Ming dynasty exists, and that we would greatly benefit from it, as, like with the Roman Empire, there are a great many similarities between these two incidences of piracy. True, the buccaneers of the Ming era could not be strictly referred to as pirates—they were referred to as *wokou*³⁶, a rough combination of “Japanese” and “bandit”, though it referred to plundering seafarers coming from all Eastern Asia—, and the colonial interests of the Chinese Ming Empire differed from the more expansionist European Empires. Still, during the European Age of Discovery, the coastal East Asian populations were, too, concerned with trade and its affronts, with their own considerably constrained, strategic geographical references—the Caribbean and the Strait of Malacca³⁷—, products of interest—in the case of East Asia, porcelain, spices, and silk, among others— subject to plundering, once the trading was banned under the Ming era, and with an important resulting literature of “sea fiction”, appealing to “the subjectivity of marginalised individuals, and cultural fantasies about exotic islands and tropical archipelagos”³⁸. All in all, as Wang artfully puts it, “the bountiful and cruel ocean treats everyone equally”³⁹. No matter what drive had sent seafarers to sea, no matter its figuration as a haven for economic gain and possibilities, its hardships ruled all, licit merchants or illicit pirates, and the grand number of *wokou* during the Ming dynasty were hunted by the authorities, too, at the face of their crimes and the danger they posed.

Concurrent to the Ming dynasty *wokou* and the Golden Age of Piracy is the extended episode of the Barbary corsairs, which developed all through the European Age of Discovery and mainly concentrated in the Mediterranean. It is the piracy that harboured pirates the likes of Barbarouse, who in *A General History of the Pyrates* is exemplified as the cause of terror pirates ought to have on Governments⁴⁰. This form of piracy was initially not a direct concern

³⁵ WANG, Yuanfei. “Introduction: Chinese Discourse of Pirates and the Early Modern Global World” in *Writing Pirates: Vernacular Fiction and Oceans in Late Ming China* (2021): p. 4.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Idem, p. 1.

³⁸ Idem, p. 7.

³⁹ Idem, p. 5.

⁴⁰ DEFOE, Daniel. Op. cit. p. 30.

for the English, seeing as it did not involve strictly territory or coasts of their property. In spite of that, there began to surface points of interest for the Admiralty, such as its geographical proximity —compared to the Anglo-American pirates of the Caribbean coasts—, their plunder of Mediterranean trade routes, and especially the connections the affair had with Anglo-American pirates and with Catholic Spain, by then arch-enemy of the English Crown. The concern of piracy was understood as an extension of the war between Christendom and Islam in Europe⁴¹, after all, and that entailed a clash of religion, culture and economy: the Barbary pirates, mainly employing manpower from Algiers consisting partly of European renegades and war prisoners often treated in poor conditions —this, both Cervantes and Defoe denounced⁴²—, battled with European forces —who, admittedly, also made use of Moorish prisoners⁴³—, but the lack of unity of both sides only prolonged the conflict. The identity of the Barbary European renegades meant, for instance, that they had made use of their knowledge of navigation and their enemy with attention: John Smith goes on to claim that English renegades “were the first that taught the Moores to be men of warre”⁴⁴, perhaps implying that if they were truly a threat, it was because European forces enabled them. Still, the English near considered allying with the Moors, if only to lessen the conflict they had with Spain⁴⁵, but eventually the interruption of the trading flow of Southern Europe became a dire concern for the English Crown. Added to that, the disarray of Barbary states in North Africa meant that the Anglo-American pirates would often freely perform their transactions there⁴⁶, where they would otherwise be limited in the exchange of illegally acquired goods. For this factor alone, the development of Barbary piracy directly affected that of the Golden Age of Piracy; yet, in spite of the considerable information available on the topic, the phenomenon has been somewhat sidelined by the pirates I here treat as the object of study.

Yet another comparison may be drawn with a recent case of piracy —that of the Somali Red Sea pirates, against which the Obama administration enacted its anti-piracy initiative. I suggest here this instance not only as a modern case of nautical piracy but also because the narratives that accompanied them, at the very least during the Obama

⁴¹ FUCHS, Barbara. “Faithless Empires: Pirates, Renegades, and the English Nation” in *ELH*, vol. 67, no. 1 (2000): p. 49.

⁴² CLARK, George N. “The Barbary Corsairs in the Seventeenth Century” in *Cambridge Historical Journal*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1944): p. 22.

⁴³ CLARK, George N. *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England and the Summer Iles* (1629). Extracted from FUCHS, Barbara. *Op. cit.* p. 51.

⁴⁵ FUCHS, Barbara. *Op. cit.* p. 50.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

administration, presented the issue with certain bias, accommodating to a mystified coverage. It may be argued that the perspective that would lead then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to say that “We may be dealing with a seventeenth-century crime, but we need to bring twenty-first-century solutions to bear”⁴⁷ is rooted in a misunderstanding of piracy as it is in Somalia, and why it was born to begin with. Whereas American policymakers would consider this surge of piracy only as a byproduct of postcolonialism, the Cold War and its failure as a state, as well —and most importantly— as a risk of an interrupted oil supply⁴⁸, they omit the other, local, conditions that enabled piracy in Somalia: its impoverishment, the illegal industrial fishing, and the toxic waste dumping, as well as a rejection towards the notion of the Somali state. Still, rather than concur and consider the recognition of Somaliland, like Puntland⁴⁹, to perhaps curve the rise in crime, the US administration still held onto a fictionalised image of Somalia and its pirates, and concentrated its attention on the danger they represented, for “even a so-called failed state, it seems, can effectively disrupt trade”⁵⁰. It would be reductionist to single out only the economic implications of this case of piracy, and how international powers react to them —the issue is not only complex; it is alive and, somehow, it bears the involvement of international powers. All the same, highlighting the connections the coverage of Somali piracy has with “a seventeenth-century crime” shows how relevant the forfeit of property and the perspectives of far-reaching political powers are in the understanding of piracy: both in the past and nowadays.

Even so, the weighty past, concurrent and posterior episodes of piracy still came second to those of the Golden Age of Piracy in regard to popular imageries, in spite of shared commonalities. This fixation, as authors such as Wang would argue, comes from a still prevailing Western ethnocentric narrative of Europe and the Northern Americas exploring and profiting from the rest, and this would reach its apogee during the early eighteenth century, thanks to the lack of precedence in such a monumental colonial endeavour and the swift diffusion of the denounce the authorities enacted upon these rogue buccaneers. If we can infer anything from this, it is the possible blueprint of pirate culture all through history: these criminal associations involved a generally minoritised or impoverished, somewhat egalitarian community of multiethnic men —for they are generally homosocial spaces, due to

⁴⁷ Extracted from TRUMBULL IV, George R. “On Piracy and the Afterlives of Failed States” in *Middle East Report*, no. 256 (2010): p. 18.

⁴⁸ TRUMBULL IV, George R. Op. cit. p. 15.

⁴⁹ Idem, p. 18.

⁵⁰ Idem, p. 17.

the respective cultural bias of their times and societies—, prone to violent lives and actions, which concerned the plunder of property and the affront against a determinate political power, often far-reaching empires that would create upon these pirates demonising images and reputations, to the point of unrecognition of reality.

Following this description, it is not difficult to assimilate them with the often idealised social bandits, their inland counterpart consisting of peasant outlaws, deserters, soldiers, ex-servicemen and impoverished country gentlemen⁵¹. They, too, emerged from economic transitional phases, and some even concurred in historical periodization with the pirates of the Golden Age of Piracy: this was the case for English bandit Dick Turpin, for instance, and, perhaps more importantly, French highwayman Louis Mandrin⁵², who enacted a series of smuggling crimes as retaliation against the *ferme générale* of France. In seventeenth-century Catalonia, for example, the figures of Perot Rocaguinarda and Joan de Serrallonga achieved prominence among the local bandits. European social bandits incorporated characters of diverse moral leanings, as pirates of the Golden Age did, and they too conjured upon the public opinion diverse images, from the mere violent freebooters, to the noble robber—in the fashion of Robin Hood—, primitive resistance fighters such as guerrilla units or haiduks, and the terror-bringing avengers⁵³, as Hobsbawm posits. And as these social bandits would go on to create legends of themselves inland, so would the Anglo-American pirates of the eighteenth century, affecting even the upper classes and inspiring characters such as Irish pirate Walter Kennedy and American Founding Father Benjamin Franklin with their enterprises⁵⁴. Their relevance and connection to pirates lie therein, but also in the affront they meant against their respective authorities, and how that would then turn them into symbols to different interests, in spite or perhaps due to their actions.

2.3. THE GOLDEN AGE OF PIRACY

Many were the written reports about the increasing attacks by sea that the English and French colonies were suffering during the turn of the century. Still, while most agreed that the phenomenon of piracy drew concerns in its intensity and its affront against merchants and the Crown, the denomination of “Golden” was, as is common in historical periodization, a later attribution, exploited by naval historians.

⁵¹ HOBBSAWM, Eric. “What is Social Banditry?” in *Bandits* (1969): pp. 13, 27 & 30.

⁵² *Idem*, p. 32.

⁵³ *Idem*, p. 15.

⁵⁴ REDIKER, Marcus. “Blood and Gold” *op. cit.* p. 173.

A possible contender for its first use may be George Powell, who, in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, reflected upon the effect that Stevenson's *Treasure Island* had had on his contemporaries' taste for the image of the pirate. He summarised the happenings on the island of Jamaica, where one "found the encouragement of the already popular industry of «Pyracy» to be «necessary»"⁵⁵, which only helped further push those who, tired of the ways of "old" England, "soon found their account in joining with the Privateers, forgot their old murmurs, acquiesced in the administration, and in short time all distinction of parties was quite lost (...) Such was the Arcadian state of Jamaica during what appears to have been the golden age of piracy up to the last decade of the seventeenth century"⁵⁶. Powell's concerns, thus, were in regard to literary context, and were by then distanced from the happening by a long century, showcasing how the image of these pirates had already begun to take shape, and had permeated into the general public, rather than vanished in anonymity due to their breach of moral integrity and human rights. Instead, pirates had both become a cautionary tale, even long after their end, which had distanced itself from its historical correspondence.

Naval historians soon after caught up with Powell's terminology, and we find the first evidence of it within John Fiske's *Old Virginia and Her Neighbours*. In his writing, Fiske reflects even on the chronology of the period, and posits that "Its Golden Age" ought to have extended "from about 1650 to about 1720"⁵⁷, a datation that corresponds with the ones attributed by later historians. Fiske titles the chapter with the denomination of the times' pirates, and goes on to say that "[a]t no other time in the world's history has the business of piracy thriven so greatly as in the seventeenth century and the first part of the eighteenth"⁵⁸, singling out reasons as to why the period would deserve such denomination, even in the face of past evidence of piracy, as was the case for Mediterranean piracy during the apogee of Ancient Rome, Barbary piracy, or even the Norse Vikings. Being a man of Victorian times, Fiske would argue that, unlike other forms of buccaneering, the pirates of the Golden Age were involved with "thorough and downright criminality", as enemies "to the human race, with whom no faith need be kept"⁵⁹. The historian's depictions abandon any notion of romanticism, and are closer to what their times would have labelled them as, even arguing, quoting Blackstone, that "every community hath a right by the rule of self-defence to inflict

⁵⁵ POWELL, George. "A pirates' paradise" in *The Gentleman's Magazine 1894-01*, vol. 276, no. (1894): p. 23.

⁵⁶ Idem, p. 23.

⁵⁷ FISKE, John. "The Golden Age of Pirates" in *Old Virginia and Her Neighbours*, vol. II (1897): p. 395.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Idem, p. 397.

that punishment upon him which every individual would in a state of nature have been otherwise entitled to do for any invasion of his person or property”⁶⁰. Fiske’s perspectives are key in the understanding of piracy during the Golden Age and its reputation, as it sidelines, with as much objectivity as one may conjure through writing history, part of the misconceptions tied with these pirates, while still maintaining a material perspective on the moral failings pirates enacted against the right of property, present during the time of Queen Anne and her successor King George, but also onwards.

Later, more contemporaneous historians such as Gosse and Cordingly would take Powell and Fiske’s definition, and solidify it to the precision it bears nowadays. Of the most recent literature regarding the history of this Golden Age, Marcus Rediker’s delimitations of the period seem the most extended among the academic community, distinguishing between three marked sub-periods within: the so-called “Protestant sea dogs of England, northern France, and the Netherlands”⁶¹ during the 1650s–1680s, the likes of privateer Captain Henry Morgan; the pirates of the Indian Ocean of the 1690s, the likes of Henry Avery and William Kidd; and, at last, the pirates of 1700–1726, those considered “the most numerous and successful of the three (...) among the greatest ever in the robbery by sea. They stood at the very pinnacle of what is called the golden age of piracy”⁶². What is more, Rediker even considers delving further into this gilded denomination, seeking a polyhedric perspective involving the very pirates that dominated this era: he suggests, by appealing to the mythical Golden Age of Ancient Greek culture, the possibility of this Age referring to the lives the pirates wished to have⁶³, better lives that gold could not buy, be it by greed or by the “monsters” they had become. Sufficiently distanced from the times and their moral concessions, Rediker’s take on the Golden Age of Piracy exhibits a balanced description of the turn of the century phenomenon, and highlights the very pirates, epitomised by Captain Edward Teach, known as Blackbeard, and Captain Bartholomew Roberts, who created “most of the images of pirates that live on in modern popular culture”⁶⁴. His depictions, greatly taken from reports such as *A General History of the Pyrates*, attempt to discern between the myth of dehumanised monsters and romantic antiheroes, as is the purport of this thesis.

⁶⁰Idem, p. 398.

⁶¹REDIKER, Marcus. “A Tale of Two Terrors”, op. cit. p. 8.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³REDIKER, Marcus. “Blood and Gold”, op. cit. p. 175.

⁶⁴Idem, p. 9.

The times surrounding the Golden Age of Piracy comprise, as said, a series of moral linings and economic preoccupation, all of which contributed to this specific, near-extolled, denomination, as well as the myths that would accompany it. Even though the very nature of this phenomenon denies the possibility of a comprehensive, detailed and objective collection of accounts, still one may extract from the many depictions made about these pirates an overall image of who they might have been, and especially, what they might have meant, and how that would have been translated into accounts such as *A General History of the Pyrates*.

2.4. READINGS ON THE PIRACY OF THE GOLDEN AGE

Past the theorisations of the period and its socioeconomic interests, as well as the connections it held with past and subsequent incidents of piracy, this section will take a look at what some of the perspectives were on the pirates of the Golden Age of Piracy, what their crimes were, and which effects it had, before their contemporary authors are properly discussed. After all, if the campaign against pirates reached eventual success, to their eradication in 1726, it was due to the combined support of “royal officials, attorneys, merchants, publicists, clergymen, and writers who created, through proclamations, legal briefs, petitions, pamphlets, sermons, and newspapers articles, an image of the pirate that would legitimate his annihilation⁶⁵”. The literary sources available on the perspectives on the Golden Age of Piracy by its contemporaries range from newsletters, court trials, and non-judicial reports, including literary fiction, memories, or biographic catalogues like *A General History of the Pyrates*.

The most comprehensive records available on the perception of piracy by the Admiralty and the English judges are found in court trials; at least, for those allowed the possibility. During the time prior to the turn of the century, the law did little attempt at negatively characterising those in judgement, no more than the crime committed would —by then, under the premise of privateering, and thus acting as an extension of the Admiralty and the Crown against Spanish, French and other European forces. It would not be till the *Act for the More Effectual Suppression of Piracy* reform of 1700 when English piracy jurisdiction would take affront at the very nature of the pirates, now detached from the Crown. This reform “made it far more straightforward to prosecute piracy, eliminating both the jurisdictional confusions and geographical limits of the old legal regime that made the

⁶⁵ REDIKER, Marcus. “To Extirpate Them Out of the World”, op. cit. p. 127.

temporal horizon of predation so clear of threats”⁶⁶. This course of action would have two significant outcomes: first, it increased the number of convictions⁶⁷, as it broadened the margin of what could be considered acts of piracy by not anchoring trials to specific temporal and geographical limits; secondly, and particularly after the Spanish War of Succession of 1701–1714, it increased the pirate attacks, as the fugitives of the law would escape conviction, or perhaps find the judgement provocative, even. The labelling of pirates at court, then, shifted from “Enemies of Merchants and Mankind” committing piracy, “only a Sea term for Robbery”⁶⁸, to “Disturbers of the Commerce of Mankind” and even “the Common Enemy of Mankind”⁶⁹, the latter in line with the popularised Latin court expression *hostis humani generis*. These definitions and condemnations target two main qualifications: that of the robbery of property and the distance of pirates from “Mankind” due to their innate immorality. With these considerations in mind, cases such as Governor Woodes Rogers’s “policy of hanging pirates”⁷⁰, the increased trials against pirates, and the eventual eradication of Anglo-American pirates towards the year 1726 acquire a more solid context, as they were attempts of the Admiralty and the court to vanquish those who would assault the very rights of property and moral correctness.

For further contextualisation of how these court trials evolved, along with the denouncement of piracy, the cases of Captain Kidd’s trial⁷¹, along with that of Major Bonnet⁷² and the men of “Arch-Villain Roberts”⁷³, deserve further analyses. Captain William Kidd’s trial and execution, both in May of 1701, spanned but three weeks from one another, and the case symbolises the switch from a pirate-tolerant policy to intolerance, perhaps even incentivizing the rise of piracy on behalf of the considered injustice of his judgement. Like privateer Henry Avery, Kidd and his crew had profited at sea by plundering mostly French

⁶⁶ NORTON, Matthew. “Temporality, Isolation, and Violence in the Early Modern English Maritime World” in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 48, no. 1 (2014): p. 42.

⁶⁷ *Idem*, p. 43

⁶⁸ As per judge Sir Charles Hedges during one of the trials of Captain Avery. Extracted from BARRINGER, Sarah. “Enemies of Mankind: The Image of Pirates in 18th-Century England” in *Primary Source*, vol. V, issue I (2014): p. 4.

⁶⁹ As per Dr. Newton, Advocate of the Admiralty, in the trial of Captain Kidd. See KIDD, William, and England And Wales. HIGH COURT OF ADMIRALTY. *The arraignment, tryal, and condemnation of Captain William Kidd (1701)*. [PDF] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <www.loc.gov/item/18011064>.

⁷⁰ THOMAS, James H. *Op. cit.* p. 86.

⁷¹ KIDD, William, and England And Wales. HIGH COURT OF ADMIRALTY. *Op. cit.*

⁷² BONNET, Stede, FORCE, Peter, and South Carolina. COURT OF VICE-ADMIRALTY. *The tryals of Major Stede Bonnet and other pirates (1719)*. [PDF] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <www.loc.gov/item/33008758>.

⁷³ *A Full and Exact Account, of the Tryal of All the Pyrates, Lately Taken by Captain Ogle, on Board the Swallow Man of War, on the Coast of Guinea (1723)*. [Internet resource].

ships, but had committed the accident of attacking a vessel property of the East India Company. Kidd pleaded for the delaying of his trial, for “I had a couple of French Passes, which I must make use of in order to my Justification”⁷⁴. The papers he referred to would have, most likely, helped his case, as they legitimised his attack, but they may have been purposely lost⁷⁵ to further condemn Kidd. As such, Kidd, “*not having the Fear of God before his Eyes, but being mov’d and seduc’d by the Instigation of the Devil*”⁷⁶, was tried for the murder of one William Moore, “a Gunner in the Ship, and this William Kidd abuses him, and calls him Lousie Dog; and upon a civil Answer takes this Bucket, and knocks him on the Head, whereof he died the next Day”⁷⁷, and for which he pleaded not guilty, to no avail. Other charges he was found guilty of were that of Piracy and Robbery, upon the *Quedagh Merchant*. The language employed defined his crime as follows:

*That William Kidd (...) did Piratically and Feloniously set upon, board, break, and enter a certain Merchant-Ship call’d the Quedagh-Merchant (...) and then there Piratically and Feloniously did make an Assault in and upon certain Mariners (whose Names to the Jurors aforesaid are unknown) (...) in the East-Indies aforesaid, and within the Jurisdiction upon said*⁷⁸.

To this, he claimed he was not guilty, once again, but Kidd did not have the luck Henry Avery had, surviving conviction in the name of privateering for the Crown. Instead, he was tried, as per the norms of the recent *Act for the More Effectual Suppression of Piracy*, and later hanged, unwittingly becoming a martyr for the cause of pirates of the time.

We have, on the other hand, approximately seventeen years after Kidd’s, the trial of Major Stede Bonnet, once part of the landed gentry from Barbados, and during the time of judgement a pirate, acquainted with Captain Teach. Notably, the trial takes place in the Americas, instead of mainland England, exhibiting the extension of the law as per the reform of the year 1700. During the proceeding, two events were highlighted: the theft of Captain Manwareing’s sloop and the pirate attack of Charlestown, two events distanced by months, but still judged within the same day so as to amplify the affront. This choice is incident when

⁷⁴ KIDD, William, and England And Wales. HIGH COURT OF ADMIRALTY. Op. cit. p. 3.

⁷⁵ Dawdy and Bonni claim that they were recovered by a historian in the London Public Records Office in 1911, see BONNI, Joe & DAWDY, Shannon Lee. “Towards a General Theory of Piracy” in *Anthropological Quarterly*, vol. 85, no. 3 (2012): pp. 673-699.

⁷⁶ KIDD, William, and England And Wales. HIGH COURT OF ADMIRALTY. Op. cit. p. 5. Unless stated otherwise, the italics are not mine.

⁷⁷ Idem, p. 7.

⁷⁸ Idem, p. 14.

set in a context by then long accustomed to the *Act for the More Effectual Suppression of Piracy*, as it showcases the intent of the court to condemn piracy in more ample terms. For this, the trial included a “Prefactory Account”⁷⁹, in which the court is reminded of an episode in which after an encounter with the Admiralty, Teach and Bonnet, “being then in want of *Medicines*, they resolved to demand a *Chest* from the Government, and detain them till they were sent”⁸⁰, by the retaining of hostages. It is worth mentioning how Teach was not in court, but still his crimes were listed in consideration for Bonnet’s trial. What is more, the laws on piracy also affected the language used, with a reminder to the jurors of the etymology of piracy⁸¹, and by placing more emphasis on the matter of property. The jury says:

I then shewed you, *First, That the Sea was given by God for the use of Men, and it is subject to Dominion and Property, as well as the Land.*

And then I *particularly* remarked to you, the *Sovereignty* of the *Kings of England* over the *British Seas*.

I then proceed, *secondly*, to shew you, *That as Commerce and Navigation could not be managed without Laws; so there have been always particular Laws for the better ordering and regulating Marine Affairs; with an Historical Account of those Laws, and their Origin*⁸².

Bonnet, tried for the events at Charlestown and for the attack on Manwareing, first pleaded not guilty, claiming that “though I must confess my self a Sinner, and the greatest of Sinners, yet I am not guilty of what I am charged with”⁸³, but later retracted once the evidence against him was proven. His case is complex, too, as he had no legal margin, like Kidd, to ask for a fair appeal, and his was the time in which piracy was most abhorred by the Admiralty. Still, by his genteel upbringing, he tried to appeal the court by the denial of the theft of property, and by acknowledging his immorality, even if it was, once again, to no avail.

Last but not least, is the case of the crew of Captain Bartholomew Roberts, a pirate who, like Teach, had acquired notoriety, and by his trial had already created an image of himself not too distant from the romanticised social bandits. His trial, on the date of the year

⁷⁹ BONNET, Stede, FORCE, Peter, and South Carolina. Op. cit. pp. iii-vi.

⁸⁰ Idem, p. iii.

⁸¹ Idem, p. 3.

⁸² Idem, p. 2.

⁸³ Idem, p. 40.

1722 and thus near the end of the Golden Age of Piracy, which is prefaced by the following fragment, praising Captain Ogle's capture of Roberts and his crew:

As the great Numbers of Pyrates lately infesting the Seas, have rendred Trade to Foreign Parts very hazardous and precarious, and prodigious Losses have accru'd to the Merchants, from the frequent Attacks, Robberies and unmerciful Behaviour of those Villains; so nothing could be of more universal Satisfaction to the Trading Part of the World, and of Great Britain in particular, than that happy and glorious action of Captain Chaloner Ogle⁸⁴.

The interest of the jurors in remarking the danger pirates symbolised upon England not only served to accentuate the verdicts and the punishments set on those sentences; they had turned to a source of delight in itself, for the “Attacks, Robberies and unmerciful Behaviour of those Villains”. By then, their captain, Roberts, had perished in a recent encounter with the same Captain Ogle, but still his actions were considered in the trial of his men: the conclusion consisted of seventy-four acquitted men and twenty-five sentenced to death⁸⁵. Of this trial, one may be made certain of the lack of lenience the Admiralty had against any who would proclaim themselves pirates, no matter their rank among the crew, but also on the increasing purge against their very existence, as was the case of Captain Ogle's pursuit.

The press media coverage for the pirates of the turn of the century focused mainly on the reports of the lost vessels product of their criminal activity and the trials conducted against them, often appealing either to sensationalism or to specific moral leanings, either in favour of the Admiralty or in favour of a slight romanticising of these figures. One given case that quite exemplifies this coverage is that of the “Account of the Life, Behaviour, &c.” of Irish pirate Walter Kennedy published in 1721 in the *British Gazetteer's Weekly Journal*⁸⁶. Within it, one could read of the confessions and regrets of Kennedy during his trial, which painted an image of ambition and poverty for those who ventured at seas with the pirates—not quite the image of the greedy bloodthirsty criminal the Admiralty employed, but neither was it the image of a noble anti-hero fighting for the people. Take, on the other hand, the contemporary attempts at objectively characterising piracy, with definitions such as the

⁸⁴ *A Full and Exact Account, of the Tryal of All the Pyrates, Lately Taken by Captain Ogle, on Board the Swallow Man of War; on the Coast of Guinea*, op. cit. p. iii.

⁸⁵ *Idem*, pp. 84–85.

⁸⁶ CHEVALIER, NOEL. “Treasures of the Imagination: Rethinking Pirate Booty in Pirate Narratives” in *Lumen*, vol. 37 (2018): p. 17.

New World of Words “Law-Definition” of robbery from 1706, describing it as “a felonious taking away of another Man’s Goods openly against his Will, putting him in Bodily Fear”⁸⁷.

Once translated to the plunder committed overseas, this would be the “Pillage and robbing at Sea; In former times the word was taken in a Good Sense, for a Person to whose care the Mole or Peer of a Haven was committed, and sometimes for a Sea-Soldier”⁸⁸. Both in media coverage and amid definitions, the image of piracy during the times was rather ambivalent, in recognition of their danger, but still without the scorn the court trials would exhibit: this latter definition of “pirate”, for example, implies a past “Good Sense” for the word, possibly in regard to privateering, which speaks of a negative consideration attributed less to the act and more to the characterisation of the persons behind it, especially when their actions could be considered legitimate and in favour of the Crown. That being said, it is difficult to determine whether what appeared in such reports, from media and dictionaries alike, would be representative of the general impressions towards piracy, only what those literate and with enough influence—the gentry and the propertied, most likely— would care to see printed.

The general perspective of the public saw a gradual progression in its depiction and consideration of pirates, from a more romanticised, heroic even, image, to sceptical disdain. This turn of events, as seen with the set of court trials exemplified above, was the result of the influence of the Authorities and the Crown, and it permeated with different degrees of success to the novelisation of the lives of these pirates. There is, on the one hand, the case of Theophilus Lewis’ *A Copy of Verses, Composed by Captain Henry Every* of the year 1694, rather inlaid with anti-piracy rhetoric due to his plunder of Mughal vessels⁸⁹, and thus enraging the East India Company; on the other hand, accounts such as Adrian van Broek’s *The Life and Adventures of Captain John Avery* from 1709, Defoe’s *The King of the Pirates* from 1720, and Charles Johnson’s⁹⁰ *The Successful Pyrate* from 1730, all of them depictions rather favourable to Avery.

These instances are, however, not representative of the perspective on all pirates, as Avery was both considered alike to a social bandit and could still be considered both a pirate and a privateer, unlike his fellows of the eighteenth century proper. Even some, as was the

⁸⁷ PHILIPS, Edward. *New World of Words* (1706). Extracted from BARRINGER, Sarah. Op. cit. p. 2.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ BARRINGER, Sarah. Op. cit. p. 3.

⁹⁰ Not to be confused with the author of *A General History of the Pyrates*.

case of Jonathan Swift, in novels such as his *Gulliver's Travels* of 1726, would depict pirates both with awe and appallment, referring to them as an “execrable Crew of Butchers (...) given to all Acts of Inhumanity and Lust”⁹¹, and some, like privateer Woodes Rogers in his *Life aboard a British privateer in the time of Queen Anne* (1712), would go on to condemn “such romantick accounts of their adventures, [which] told such strange stories”⁹². Still, many authors, such as English satirists John Gay and Defoe himself, would employ the image of pirates in their works⁹³, both as a source of fascination and as a means to criticise men of the upper classes with whom they found similarities in their morals. As is the case nowadays, the literature based on the Golden Age of Piracy of the eighteenth century ranged from apologetic, to satirical, and defamatory, with space in between for the many considerations these pirates were subject to. As a diversified population, even within the gentry, those who would write would have a broad array of opinions and nuances, rather than feeding solely into the narrative the Admiralty proposed or a complete defence of the pirates.

Last, but not least, I draw attention here to one particular account of piracy, as it may set *A General History* in perspective within other products of its kind. Thus, I highlight here the primary accounts of Alexandre Exquemelin. A buccaneer, writer and barber-surgeon, he is most known for his *Buccaneers of America*⁹⁴, where he gives an account of the voyages he had been part of during the seventeenth century. The relevance of his work lies in its depictions of the lives and customs of the privateers and pirates he sailed alongside, and those who had somehow influenced his journeys, if indirectly: that is the case, for instance, of Pierre le Grand from Normandy, the first pirate at Tortuga⁹⁵, and privateer Sir Francis Drake⁹⁶, the English national hero who gave name to the Isla de la Plata of present-day Ecuador —both of these islands Exquemelin had visited. However, Exquemelin is best known for his accounts of Captain Henry Morgan of Wales⁹⁷, with whom he had sailed and whom he described in a manner that fluctuates from privateering to piracy. Exquemelin's

⁹¹ *The Prose Writings of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Herbert Davis (1939-68): 11: 294. Extracted from BAER, Joel H. “The Complicated Plot of Piracy. Aspects of English Criminal Law and the Image of the Pirate in Defoe” in *The Eighteenth Century*, vol. 23, no. 1 (1982): p. 23.

⁹² ROGERS, Woodes. *Life aboard a British privateer in the time of Queen Anne : being the journal of Captain Woodes Rogers, master mariner*, edited by Robert C. Leslie (1889 [1712]): pp. 4–5.

⁹³ BARRINGER, Sarah. Op. cit. p. 8.

⁹⁴ EXQUEMELIN, Alexandre O. *The buccaneers of America : a true account of the most remarkable assaults committed of late years upon the coast of the West Indies by the buccaneers of Jamaica and Tortuga, both English and French*, edited by William S. Stallybrass (1976 [1678, original in Dutch]).

⁹⁵ A Haitian island where many buccaneers would trade during the seventeenth century, and which he reached in his voyages in service of the French West India Company. See EXQUEMELIN, Alexandre O. Op. cit. p. 56.

⁹⁶ Idem, p. 345.

⁹⁷ Idem, p. 119.

depictions influenced the literature that followed him significantly, setting the genre of *A General History of the Pyrates*⁹⁸ with the descriptions of pirates from proximity. Beyond this, his *Buccaneers of America* exemplifies the new concerns over buccaneering, the activity of “a Robin Hood of the waters, who preys only on the wicked rich, or the cruel and Popish Spaniard, and the extortionate shipowner”⁹⁹. While Exquemelin himself had joined the life of piracy, where he “was received with common consent both of the superior and vulgar sort”¹⁰⁰, he wished to communicate to the broader public the realities of buccaneering, destigmatising a life that he considered, by his own experiences, undesirable.

From this array of depictions one can understand just how divided the valorisation of pirates was, even during their times. The result of such a great number of pirates and their many attitudes and activities—all unique and spanning from the more subdued, as is the case of Captain William Kidd, to the more vicious, such as Captain Ned Low—made it difficult for the public to form a confident, inflexible judgement on them. Through time and the progression from ‘social bandit’ Henry Avery, belonging to the age of the privateers, to the last pirates, past Roger’s zealous policy of hanging pirates¹⁰¹, this eclectic community of outlaws lost the few tolerance they had harboured from the Admiralty. Still, they retained, if not in life, in their legacy, an aura of humane ambivalence that drew the attention of many, and Defoe, prolific writer and a figure contemporary to this phenomenon, was no different.

2.5. ON DEFOE

As the biographers of Defoe¹⁰² seem to concur, if there is something to be said with certainty of the man, beyond his involvement and influence in a great array of English affairs of the late seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century, it was that the image we have of him is, mostly, a construction through his writing, rather than through his life. The prolific writer and passionate mercantilist, who declared that “writing on trade is the whore I really doated on”¹⁰³, is one of our main sources for understanding the times’ protestant and

⁹⁸ DEFOE, Daniel. Schonhorn’s “Introduction”, op. cit. p. xviii.

⁹⁹ EXQUEMELIN, Alexandre O. Op. cit. p. xiii.

¹⁰⁰ This being motivated by his liberation by a surgeon after a harsh period of being a slave to one Governor of Tortuga. See EXQUEMELIN, Alexandre O. Op. cit. p. 22.

¹⁰¹ DEFOE, Daniel. “The Introduction”, op. cit. p. 39.

¹⁰² I have focused, for my research, on the works of Richetti and Faller, which also refer to other well-known biographers of Defoe, such as Furbank & Owens, Moore, Novak, and Schonhorn.

¹⁰³ As per his last issue of his *Review*, ix. 106 (1713). Extracted from CLARK, Robert. “The Ambiguities of Captain Singleton, Defoe’s Piratical Novel” in *XVII-XVIII*, vol. 76 (2019). Retrieved from OpenEdition Journals, <<http://journals.openedition.org/1718/1860>>, para. 8.

mercantilist structure and preoccupations, yet his side occupations —mainly his role as a spy agent for one Robert Harley— called for certain privacy. This added to Defoe’s apparent distance to familial domesticity —of which we know little beyond his marriage to Mary Tuffley in 1684, from which they produced perhaps eight children, for whom he was not around to take care of—, creating a vacuum of knowledge on the man¹⁰⁴. Daniel Defoe (London, 1660 or 1661–1731), nee Daniel Foe¹⁰⁵, was a man shaped by dissident Protestant ideals raised in a world ruled by the male propertied, and saw his life being shaped by events such as the War of the Grand Alliance (1688–1697), the bubonic plague of 1665 —which he recorded in *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722)— and the Monmouth rebellion in 1685, though his specific role eludes us. Most relevant to this study, Defoe was contemporary to the developments of colonial England in the Americas, as well as the rise and fall of the Golden Age of Piracy, allowing him to form a focused perspective on the phenomenon. Aided by funding from men such as Dalby Thomas, who at the time controlled the African slave trade monopoly¹⁰⁶, Defoe was deeply invested in reckless trade, suffering even bankruptcy, imprisonment and defamation, and he was also sent to prison and the pillory as a result of his involvement in subterfuge, a profession that he maintained with Harley for a decade since 1704¹⁰⁷. As such, Defoe was highly knowledgeable both on the mechanics of mercantilism and the nature of crime during his time, believing the knowledge of the trade to be superior to that encouraged in the schools of his time, more theoretical, even if it created on the merchant certain solitude¹⁰⁸, one that seems to accompany him through his economic endeavours as well as with the depictions of his characters, as will be shown afterwards. In short, Defoe, neither of the Whigs nor of the Tories, but always in support of the policies of William III¹⁰⁹ and a deep respect for the status quo, was a firm advocate for Parliament and the inviolable right of property¹¹⁰, for which he gave his extended opinion in his writings.

Despite his notorious public image, it is difficult to ascertain whether his popularity would have influenced the literature that came after him directly. Defoe had been involved in

¹⁰⁴ RICHETTI, John. “Dissenter, Merchant, Speculator, Writer” in *The Life of Daniel Defoe* (2005): p. 9.

¹⁰⁵ Richetti posits that “this Frenchified aristocratic prefix” took place after an episode of bankruptcy, after 1695. See RICHETTI, John. Op. cit. p. 18.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ RICHETTI, John. “Political Agent and Journalism”, op. cit. p. 113

¹⁰⁸ ARAVAMUDAN, Srinivas. “Defoe, Commerce, and Empire” in *The Cambridge Companion to Daniel Defoe* (2008): p. 46.

¹⁰⁹ RICHETTI, John. “Political Journalism”, op. cit. p. 78.

¹¹⁰ NOVAK, Maximilian E. “Defoe’s Political and Religious Journalism” in *The Cambridge Companion to Daniel Defoe*, op. cit. p. 31.

economic successes and failures, as has been mentioned, and this, if perhaps to a lesser degree, would also permeate the reputation of his written work. As per the nature of the man, most of his literature was concerned with trade, though he would not be initiated in his career as a pamphleteer until 1697, past some business disappointments. His civic-leaning work was bent on the improvement of society through his political views, which is visible in pamphlets and journal publications such as his infamous *Reviews* (1704—1713), *The True-Born Englishman* of 1701—a defence of William III on behalf of the xenophobic criticism he had received—, conduct books such as *The Family Instructor* (1715—1718) and *The Complete English Tradesman* of 1726, and more polarising works, as is the case of *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* of 1702 and his *Jure Divino* of 1706—both employing heavy, misunderstood satire in their portrayals of the High Church¹¹¹, causing him great backlash. Through them, one may understand Defoe’s fixation with property, divine providence, and economic structure, all tied with a profound sense of traditionalism and the *status quo*. While widely read during his time, his work seemed to do little changes regarding English politics or morals, though not for this were they any less influential.

However, to the general public, Defoe is better known for his literary ventures, regarding his renowned *Robinson Crusoe* and his colourful depictions of marginal or criminal protagonists, such as *Roxana* (1724), *Moll Flanders* (1722), or *The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard* (1724). As evidenced by this selection, he was inspired by the young genre of criminal autobiographies, which were by the time popularised due to the interest in the literary market and the available sources on it¹¹², especially to men of Defoe’s upper standing. His characterisation of these lawless characters is psychologically nuanced, if perhaps lacking in its regards of the body beyond its materialist conception—in other words, his characters are better defined by their moral journeys than by their physical descriptions. In fact, most of his characters, aside from Crusoe, lack a true name¹¹³, as if their identity battled between anonymity for their crimes and vindication for the telling of their story. Aside from this, their manner of speech is bound to a necessity of spiritual self-contemplation, often with a certain long-windedness and unaffected by the boundaries of time. This, Faller argues, is to encourage “readers to take an especially critical view of what they are saying”¹¹⁴.

¹¹¹ RICHETTI, John. “Political Agent and Journalist: Queen Anne to the Hanoverians”, op. cit. p. 195.

¹¹² PERALDO, Emmanuelle. “De la biographie criminelle à l’autobiographie spirituelle: emprunts, réécriture et autoréécriture chez Defoe” in XVII-XVIII, vol. 76 (2019). Retrieved from OpenEdition Journals, <<http://journals.openedition.org/1718/1701>>, para. 2.

¹¹³ BROWN, Homer O. “The Displaced Self in the Novels of Daniel Defoe” in *ELH*, vol. 38, (1971): p. 562

¹¹⁴ FALLER, Lincoln B. “The Copious Text” in *Crime and Defoe* (2008 [1993]): p. 88.

Arguably, Defoe's novels are characterised by their fluid reconciliation of fact and fantasy, and they possibly draw from the Spanish picaresque literary tradition¹¹⁵, in its penchant for social outcasts and their cunning approaches to criminal life to survive, blended with Defoe's eye for their moral and autobiographical flair. The mindspace of social outcasts such as Moll allows Defoe to explore his own society—even his social standing of the propertied: for example, Defoe uses Moll's inner reflections on her second husband to emphasise the potential corruption of merchants in their pursuit of gentility, reflecting on the distance between tradesmen and a true gentleman. Whereas one could hardly disentangle trade from moral scandal, still there remained the chance to distinguish the roguish traders from the genteel, by the reflection of property and the act of theft, and especially how those may play a satirical image of the “supposedly legitimate entrepreneurs”¹¹⁶ of the upper classes given to corruption, which was of great interest to Defoe. It seems as if Defoe has an interest beyond the psyche of his character: rather, he plays with a Hobbesian state of nature, on human social relations and the conversions necessary to free oneself and insert oneself in civilisation—even if his characters, mostly criminals, will be bereft of this providential salvation. Ultimately, by his frenetic pursuit of knowledge, attention to detail regarding the legal proceedings of trade and politics, and perhaps by his own experience, his prose acquired a level of detail and realism¹¹⁷ quite particular to the times, in which the line between the novel, press coverage and actual confessions was considerably blurred.

Lastly, the sea presents Defoe and many writers of his time a unique opportunity as a writing setting, which is why the topic of piracy is so prevalent in his works, beyond *A General History of the Pyrates*. Defoe writes the following in his *Jure Divino* on the nature of men: “Who shall his Nature search, his Life explain? / If in the Ocean of his Crimes we sail, / Satyr, our Navigation, all will fail; / Shipwreck'd in dark Absurdities of Crime?”¹¹⁸. The sea is, then, a space prone to crime, and, already initiated in the literature on piracy by *Robinson Crusoe*, and presumably knowledgeable on its bureaucratic, juridic and social regards due to his travels and his amities with men such as Providence's Governor Woodes Rogers¹¹⁹, Defoe capitalised on the figure of the pirate as his criminal character by antonomasia, be they fictitious, as is the case of *Captain Singleton* (1720), or based on the lives of real buccaneers,

¹¹⁵ RICHETTI, John. “Crime and Narrative”, op. cit. p. 236.

¹¹⁶ FALLER, Lincoln B. “Imitations of an Invisible Hand”, op. cit. pp. 112 & 141.

¹¹⁷ PERALDO, Emmanuelle. Op. cit. para. 22.

¹¹⁸ As seen in Defoe's *Jure Divino* (1706). Extracted from BAER, Joel H. Op. cit. p. 3.

¹¹⁹ In fact, Defoe seems to have been inspired by his accounts and the rescuing of castaway Selkirk. See ROGERS, Woodes. Op cit. p. 51.

as is the case of *The King of the Pirates* (also 1720), based on the life of Captain Avery, or, ultimately, *A General History of the Pyrates*. This formula bore success, for not only were these figures concurrent to him and his public, and had already garnered certain attention: travel literature, fictitious or real, was also considerably popular¹²⁰, and the literature on piracy, like Defoe's, often explored distant lands such as Africa and the Americas. Added to this and the previously mentioned psychological and moral examination Defoe conducted of his characters, while mostly denouncing the act itself of piracy and promoting Roger's enactment of the *Act* of 1718, Defoe found also the space in his piratical subjects to explore the bounds of their humanities, a factor that is most prevalent in *Captain Singleton's* episode with the drifting slaves and the character of Quaker William, a figure of the "pragmatic (...) Enlightenment moralist as well as a shrewd casuist and efficient manager"¹²¹. After all, pirates were the embodiment of that very loneliness the merchant of the times felt¹²², isolated from all by their way of life and by the metaphorical dimension at sea. Still, *A General History of the Pyrates* does not benefit solely from the veil of fiction: it operates under the presumption of historical cataloguing, thus acquiring perhaps more rigour and moral sensitivity, more aligned to the popular perceptions of the times.

It is worth mentioning that Defoe's elusive biography intertwines with the problem of his literary canonization, a matter that has divided his biographers due to Defoe's many pseudonyms —even *Robinson Crusoe* was not first attributed to him in its first editions, despite being one of his most identifying works. Most notably, Furbank and Owens established in 1988 *The Canonisation of Defoe*, which presented a critical approach to the authority of the works that had been attributed to Defoe, and their selection reduced the nearly five hundred attributed works to half, excluding among others *The King of the Pirates* and *A General History of the Pyrates*¹²³. As will be explained in the following section, I have gone in my research for a non-restrictive approach of to canonisation, since there seems to be an agreement that, if not directly, he still had an influential hand in their conceptualisation.

¹²⁰ RICHETTI, John. "Robinson Crusoe", op. cit. p. 175.

¹²¹ RICHETTI, John. "Travel, Politics and Adventure", op. cit. p. 229.

¹²² BAER, John H. Op. cit. p. 4.

¹²³ RICHETTI, John. "Notes", op. cit. p. 381

3. *A GENERAL HISTORY OF THE PYRATES*

Published first in Charles Rivington's library of London, on the 14th of May in the year 1714, one Captain Charles Johnson offered *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pyrates* to the world, a work that would shape the literature on piracy to come. Its release did not come in a single edition: a second edition would soon follow in August, and, in quick succession, a third and fourth edition in 1726¹²⁴, complemented with a second volume in 1728, with an addition of unpublished pirates and descriptions. Though it is difficult to determine whether it was due to a literary success or "a copyholder's desire to expand their market"¹²⁵, there were already eleven published editions of *A General History of the Pyrates* by the end of the eighteenth century—most of them differing in matters of typesetting and order, rather than content¹²⁶—, and were soon translated to Dutch, French, and German¹²⁷. The two volumes comprise a list of thirty-four pirates considered noteworthy, mostly captains save exceptions such as Mary Read and Anne Bonny, included in Captain John Rackam's chapter. Aside from that, the author includes a selection of legislative documents such as pirate trials, and even illustrates the images of a few of the pirates with a selection of artistic renditions, attributed to B. Cole¹²⁸.

As Michael Shinagel notes in his *Modern Philology* review¹²⁹, Manuel Schonhorn's edition, originally from 1972 and re-edited in 1999, is the first and one of the few complete commented editions made since its publication in the eighteenth century, save David Cordingly's edition of the first volume of *A General History of the Pyrates* in 1998. Based on Woodward's fourth edition of 1726 of the first volume and the edition 1728 of the second volume, Schonhorn's edition, used in this study, innovated in its incorporation of informative

¹²⁴ SHINAGEL, Michael. "Review: A General History of the Pyrates by Daniel Defoe and Manuel Schonhorn", in *Modern Philology*, vol. 72, no. 3 (1975): p. 314.

¹²⁵ JAMES, Rebecca Louise. "Conclusion" in *The Captain and his Fellows: Reading Editions of A General History of the Pyrates, 1724-1734* (Ph.D. Diss., University of Southampton, 2021): p. 190

¹²⁶ Ingrid Reiche has devoted her Master thesis to a comprehensive digital edition of *A General History of the Pyrates*, showcasing these editorial differences: <http://ingridreiche.com/Resume/Thesis/DCE.html>

¹²⁷ The complete Spanish translation, by Francisco Oliver Torres in Editorial Valdemar, did not appear until 1999. A partial Catalan translation by David Arnau, titled *Històries de Pirates*, had been published earlier by Granica in 1985. This edition only focuses on captains Misson and Tew.

¹²⁸ MORRIS, Adam R. "From 'Notorious' to 'Noted'" in *Of Pyrates and Picaros: The Literary Lineage of Charles Johnson's A General History of The Pyrates* (M.A. thesis, San Houston State University, 2017): pp. 3–4. Morris also notes how the Dutch edition included different illustrations for Bonny and Read, in a manner more feminine (p. 17).

¹²⁹ SHINAGEL, Michael. Op. cit. p. 315.

paratexts, including an index of nautical and piratical terminology among others, though its most notable consideration is the attribution of authority to Daniel Defoe.

Defoe's *A General History of the Pyrates* had been published under the pen name "Captain Charles Johnson", commonly agreed to be a pseudonym or the result of the "collaborative space of eighteenth-century print culture"¹³⁰. A second recollection of portraits appeared under the same name in 1734, this being *A General History of the Lives and Adventures of the Most Famous Highwaymen, Murderers, Street-Robbers, &c*, but by its contents and the drastic change of style in the descriptions between highwaymen and pirates, many attribute the work to a montage¹³¹ between the work of study and Alexander Smith's *A Complete History of the Lives and Robberies of the Most Notorious Highwaymen* from 1714. Whereas there was a contemporary Charles Johnson, author of the unsuccessful play *The Successful Pyrate*, their writing styles present too many incongruences¹³², and it was not until 1932 that the attribution to Defoe was singled out. Officially supported in his *Defoe in the Pillory and Other Studies*, John Robert Moore, scholar of Defoe, listed the similarities in style and theme between Captain Johnson and Defoe, and his hypothesis was well received by the academia until the rebuttal of Furbank and Owens in the previously mentioned *The Canonisation of Defoe*. Recently, Arne Bialuschewski conceded on the possible hand of Defoe in some of the portraits, and also argued the involvement of printer and owner of the *Weekly Journal*, Nathaniel Mist, on behalf of the Stationers' Company registering *A General History of the Pyrates* "for Nathaniel Mist" and Mist's past at sea¹³³. For now, the consensus for the authorship behind Captain Johnson still supports Moore's attribution, if perhaps the narratives are more agreeable to a result of collaborative work in the prints: Maximilian Novak, also a scholar specialised in Defoe, argues that his hand was certainly behind some of the portraits, such as Misson, Tew, and Bellamy, and that "Nathaniel Mist was behind the publication of 'Johnson's' volume, and of course Defoe was one of Mist's chief writers"¹³⁴. As has been mentioned in the section devoted to Defoe, most of the works now attributed to him were by then not linked to him, due to his political professions, which might also speak for the disagreement over his authorship. However, this study does not attempt to solve the

¹³⁰ REICHE, Ingrid. "Literature Review" in *Digitizing the Pyrates: Making a Digital Critical Edition of Captain Charles Johnson's A General History of the Pyrates (1724-1726)* (M.A. thesis, Carleton University, 2016): p. 21.

¹³¹ Idem, p. 19.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ BIALUSCHEWSKI, Arne. "Daniel Defoe, Nathaniel Mist, and the General History of the Pyrates" in *Papers of the Bibliographic Society of America*, vol. 98, no. 1 (2004): pp. 25–26.

¹³⁴ RICHETTI, John. "Notes", op. cit. p. 381.

matter of *A General History of the Pyrates*' authorship, even if I have chosen to follow the attribution to Defoe, as per Schonhorn's edition —for the sake of brevity, and since I find Moore and Novak's conjecture positively favourable based on the evidence provided, I have opted to refer to the work's author as Defoe.

Before delving into the individual pirates, I wish to briefly connect Defoe's ambiguity to his position in depicting his pirates, which generally follows his positioning in his other works, both about piracy and about social rejects, the likes of Moll. In his preface, Defoe suggests the reading so that "it may be a Direction to such as those, what Lengths they may venture to go, without violating the Law of Nations"¹³⁵, for he considers a certain fault within those who willingly became pirates, but also within the legal structures behind the trials of piracy. This sentiment, which is echoed through the different portrayals of pirates, seems mostly intent on "de-romanticizing the idea that pirates were motivated by socio-economic hardships to create new, more equitable societies"¹³⁶. Sailors were sufficiently tailored to weathering circumstances, such as the demands of harsh discipline, punishments (like the cat-o'-nine-tails), and the separation that the unforgiving sea would cause. For this, they would know fear and resilience, as Rediker notes, and by the very same defiance that would allow them to invent strikes in 1768¹³⁷, many would be driven to piracy. Defoe, while agreeing to policies the likes of Rogers —a man who knew the pirates he was putting on trial— denounces the government's measures on employment, such as fishery, and affirms:

It would be well worth our while to establish a National Fishery, which would be the best Means in the World to prevent Pyracy, employ a Number of the Poor, and ease the Nation of a great Burthen, by lowering the Price of Provision in general, as well as of several other Commodities¹³⁸.

Defoe's pirates are quick to notice the hypocrisy of the landed gentry and the Admiralty, which he enacts to fictionalised dialogues and even recounted theatrical representations by the same pirates. Still, as Frohock posits¹³⁹, Defoe's pirates become both satirists and the object of satire, when their fate as perpetual outlaws, as "Desperadoes, who were the Terror

¹³⁵ DEFOE, Daniel. "Preface", op. cit. p. 3.

¹³⁶ FROHOCK, Richard. "Satire and Civil Governance in *A General History of the Pyrates*" in *The Eighteenth Century*, vol. 56, no. 4 (2015): p. 471.

¹³⁷ REDIKER, Marcus. Op. cit. p. 25.

¹³⁸ DEFOE, Daniel. Op. cit. p. 4.

¹³⁹ FROHOCK, Richard. Op. cit. p. 475.

of the trading Part of the World”¹⁴⁰, is not forgiven, even in the depictions that come close to praising their cunningness. Faller argues¹⁴¹, concerning Defoe’s other historical depictions, that his ability to portray characters such as Moll with such profoundness is bound to their fictional nature, then owing no responsibility for their portrayal. Even with Defoe’s tendency for traditionalism and social order, one could make the argument that Defoe’s pirates, even as defiant as they are often illustrated, cannot be held in the same regard as characters like Moll, for they have to answer, like Defoe, to social expectation. This, along with Defoe’s general values on property and amity with Rogers, factors into how they are described, in a balance of violence and unrepentance and the lament at knowing part of the blame lies on the class disparities these pirates constantly attacked.

3.1. CASE STUDY: PORTRAITS OF NOTORIOUS PIRATES

Complex as these colourful characters are, I devote the following pages to the overview of just a few of the pirates included in *A General History of the Pyrates*¹⁴², taking into account the public opinion they may have garnered and how issues of class and property shaped their histories. For this reason, the pirates studied here are Captain Bartholomew Roberts, for the first part, Captain Edward Teach and Major Stede Bonnet for the second part, and pirates Anne Bonny and Mary Read, for the third part.

3.1.1. PIRATES: GENTLEMEN OF FORTUNE

The portrait Defoe depicts of Captain Bartholomew Roberts, hailing from London, is by far the most extensive¹⁴³ of the descriptions of the pirates among the two volumes published, this being justified in the preface by “*he having made more Noise in the World, than some others*” (“Preface”, p. 6). Inlaid with details of the functioning of what he refers to as the “Pyrate Commonwealth”, as well as a lengthy description of the cultural aspects of Brazil, Defoe’s retelling of Roberts is not necessarily that of the most famous and wealthy pirate, if he perhaps would rank closely. However, it is all the same one of the narrations that better—with more depth and nuance, that is—reflects the image of the pirate as a social bandit, the failed and satirised mirroring of the ways of law and civilisation back at land, and the image

¹⁴⁰ DEFOE, Daniel. “The Introduction, op. cit. p. 26.

¹⁴¹ FALLER, Lincoln B. “Closing comments”, op. cit. p. 250.

¹⁴² During this section, when referring to *A General History of the Pyrates*, the pages will be cited in the text between parentheses.

¹⁴³ To that effect, Robert’s chapter is one of the few accompanied by an illustration of his character, reproduced in pages 232 and 233.

of the picaresque found within their endeavours as a result of their unsatisfactory circumstances.

As he often proceeds with the rest of his descriptions, Defoe begins Roberts' biography by way of describing his origins, that he had "sailed in an honest Employ, from London aboard of the *Princess*, Captain *Plumb* Commander, of which Ship he was second Mate" (p. 194), but that he had been taken by Captain Howel Davis on the *Rover* soon before Davis perished and left him the mantle. While his initial reluctance to such a life is exposed, as well as his later change of heart, Defoe opts to fully describe Roberts' appearance and character only after his trajectory is concluded, enacting a narrative pact that incorporates descriptions, fragments of legal records such as the trials of his men, and the reproduction of direct dialogue alike. This latter element is prevalent throughout the whole chapter, including dialogue from Lord Dennis, defending the naming of Roberts as their captain (p. 195), a "pathetical Speech" pronounced by one Valentine Ashplant in defence of his fellow crew mate (p. 223), and Roberts' proclamations themselves, such as his affirmation of the way of piracy:

In an honest Service, says he, there is thin Commons, low Wages, and hard Labour; in this, Plenty and Satiety, Pleasure and Ease, Liberty and Power; and who would not ballance Creditor on this Side, when all the Hazard that is run for it, at worst, is only a sower Look or two at choaking. No, a merry Life and a short one, shall be my Motto. (p. 244)

This literary resource creates then a balance of biographical historicity and narration, by its way of proximity to the mind and the true happenings of the captain and his crew through a seamless paralepsis that is close in similarity to the works of Thucydides and his interpretations of the speeches pronounced in his *History of the Peloponnesian War* of the late fifth century BCE, or Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* of 370 BCE, in its depiction of Cyrus the Great's life and achievements as an educational example: this is evidenced by extradiegetic remarks such as the following, remarking a sentiment found in near all chapters on pirates:

Thus we see what a disastrous Fate ever attends the wicked, and how rarely they escape the Punishment due to their crimes, who, abandon'd to such a profligate Life, rob, spoil, and prey upon Mankind, contrary to the Light and Law of Nature, as well as the Law of God (...) impending Kaw, which never let them sleep well, unless when drunk. (p. 210)

By Defoe's iterative literary references, such as when they are docking at Caiana for provisions, because "as *Sancho* says, *No Adventures to be made without Belly-Timber*" (p. 205), or when he narrated the dire state of Roberts' crew during a becalming, stating that "here, like *Tantalus*, they almost famished in Sight of the fresh Streams and Lakes" (p. 206), one may argue that the similarities in this *quasi* mirror for princes may either be intentional, or at the very least motivated by similar purposes. Still, where one may find fault at the unfounded subjectivity and the creative licence of his assumptions, Defoe's exposition, serving both an intent of fidelity and moralism, results in turns of phrases embedded with rich imagery, such as with Robert's death: "He had now perhaps finished the Fight very desperately, if Death, who took a swift Passage in a Grapeshot, had not interposed, and struck him directly on the Throat" (p. 235).

With this line of narration and disposition, Defoe manages to place his pirates' nature in the foreground, creating a subtle opportunity for class discourses in relation to their background, the circumstances that led them to take on such a life, their actions of piracy, and the fault that may or may not be found in them or the law of the courts. The struggle of Roberts and his crew in the face of class difference is not omitted: from the beginning of the chapter, even if Defoe claims Roberts had little excuse to defend his profession, Roberts accepts his title as a pirate captain, for "it was better being a Commander than a common Man" (p. 195), and his hatred for the King and Parliament for this such matter and the epithet they had branded upon all pirates of *hostis humani generis* resulted even in his refusal of the *Acts of Grace* (p. 217). Still, they mimic the customs of the landed gentry by the realisation of trials—the nature of which Defoe commands, compared to "several other Courts, that have more lawful Commissions for what they do" (p. 222) that are liable to corruption—; a confection of articles regarding the rights and duties of the crew (as seen in pages 211 and 212)—perhaps an attempt by Roberts, a man described as diplomatic, sober and gallant, to quell his crew's more rambunctious moods—; and by the very name they claimed, beyond a descriptor of their profession: "gentlemen of fortune" (p. 235). This choice of words (used for the title of this thesis) is rather revealing, and also speaks of Defoe's depiction of the pirates: in spite of their previous circumstances, the property they acquire and Roberts' creation of a legislative, equitable code, still by their crimes they are treated with certain satire, and cannot ever, despite their chosen descriptor, be equal to landed gentry.

3.1.2. PIRATES, GENTRY, AND SERVING THE CROWN

These “gentlemen of fortune” did not all behave as Roberts did: some would accept the *Acts of Grace* of 1717 to renounce piracy—or at least create the pretence to—, and some even had a chiasmus of the social mobility formula. It is for this reason that I explore the chapters of Captain Edward Teach and Major Stede Bonnet as follows, for they both enacted the former course of action, and Major Bonnet experienced indeed the latter, serving perhaps as a mirror to Captain Teach—the effect of which is further enhanced in the order of the chapters, which places one after the other, respectively.

As for Captain Teach, also known as Blackbeard¹⁴⁴, the Bristolian man is considered to be of the most famous and menacing of the pirates of the Golden Age of Piracy, both by our standards and by Defoe’s. As he describes, “In the Commonwealth of Pyrates, he who goes the greatest Length of Wickedness, is looked upon with a kind of Envy amongst them” (p. 85), and Teach careened his image especially for this effect, growing his beard—which Defoe likens to the Ancient Roman tradition of taking names from “odd Marks in Countenance” (p. 84)—and lighting matches under his hat¹⁴⁵, as well as sexually exploiting his many wives (p. 76) and enacting violence even towards his own crew, to which Defoe claims that “he only answered, by damning them, that if he did not now and then kill one of them, they would forget who he was” (p. 84). What is more, Defoe goes on to introduce yet another stereotype of the pirate, beyond the violent presentation of Teach: that of the buried treasure. The night before his fatal combat with Lieutenant Maynard upon his *Queen Ann’s Revenge*—and, by this possibly fictionalised episode, lies too a certain element of prolepsis—, Defoe describes the following exchange:

(...) one of his Men asked him, in Case any Thing should happen to him in the Engagement with the Sloops, whether his Wife knew where he had buried his Money? He answered, that no Body but himself, and the Devil, knew where it was, and the longest Liver should take all. (p. 85).

Whereas with Roberts there was a balance of the mannered man and the aggression against England and all nations, and whereas Teach appeased to the *Act of Grace*, as his old captain Hornigold had years before him, and gave his services to the Governor of North Carolina as a

¹⁴⁴ In *A General History of the Pyrates*, the name is styled as “Black-beard”, but the hyphen has fallen out of use in modern times.

¹⁴⁵ His illustration, reproduced in page 73, depicts him in such a manner, accompanying the text’s descriptions.

privateer, “it did not appear that their submitting to this Pardon was from any Reformation of Manners, but only to wait a more favourable Opportunity to play the same Fame over again” (p. 75). Teach is decidedly described with nuance and complexity. At times, he is but a human driven by his passions, acknowledging at the very least his fellows and even inviting one inexperienced Major Bonnet to “live easy, at his Pleasure, in such a Ship as his, where he would not be obliged to perform the necessary Duties of a Sea Voyage.” (p. 72). Yet, at others, he would divide his company, marooning a great number of his crew which were fortunately rescued by the same Bonnet. Here, the discourse of class is somewhat tainted by the gruesomeness of his operations, even if they are cunning, and he is not likened to social banditry as Roberts was. Still, he denounces it in his own satirical way, by his hair and beard twisted “with Ribbons, in small Tails, after the Manner of our Ramillies Wiggs” (p. 84), and even so, Defoe describes his demise by Maynard with certain dejection: “Here was an End of that courageous Brute, who might have pass’d in the World for a Heroe, had he been employ’d in a good cause” (p. 82).

The case of Major Bonnet¹⁴⁶, also known as Captain Thomas Edwards, is decidedly peculiar, as revealed by the title given to him: while he was indeed a Captain, still Defoe and the court trials desist from labelling him as such. This pirate, whose trial had already been mentioned in this study in comparison to Kidd’s trial, was one of a kind among the pirates, having hailed from a heritage of landed gentry and plenty of property in Barbados. By birth, he was no common man, as most of the other pirates, but rather a Gentleman *de facto*, who confounded all by his turning to piracy. Since Bonnet’s background caused many to pity him rather than condemn him, “believing that his Humour of going a Pyrating, proceeded from a Disorder in his Mind (...) occasioned by some Discomforts he found in a married State” (p. 95), and he also was no seasoned sailor—as seen with his episode with Teach, for whom he later bore “a mortal Hatred for some Insults offered him” (p. 97)—, referring to him as Major rather than Captain might have been an attempt at mollifying his status as a pirate. This possibility, as it is, is furthered by how Defoe describes the reaction of his trial, which was received with certain compassion, but that by Bonnet’s attempts at escaping, had “become too notorious, and too dangerous a Criminal, to give Life to” (p. 111).

¹⁴⁶ While some editions of *A General History of the Pyrates* include illustrations of him, this is not the case for Schonhorn’s.

If the relationships Roberts and Teach had with class had already been complex, Bonnet's circumstances are described with even more perplexity, the man coming from a privileged upper class many pirates could not even dream of—and thus they were driven to hatred towards it. Defoe laments his lack of answers at Bonnet's motivations, which drove him to a life of crime at sea upon a vessel he paid for in its entirety by himself, but he does care to make mention of Bonnet's regret, in yet another instance of moralising paralepsis:

“After the folly, He reflected upon his past course of Life, and was confounded with Shame, when he thought upon what he had done: His Behaviour was taken Notice of by the other Pyrates, who liked him never the better for it; and he often declared to some of them, that he would gladly leave off that Way of Living, being fully tired of it; but he should be ashamed to see the Face of any *English Man* again” (p. 96).

Yet, despite Bonnet's change of heart after Teach's actions, and despite him eventually pleading the *Act of Grace* in North Carolina, like Teach, he too returned to piracy soon thereafter. Any attempt Defoe could make at trying to categorise pirates and successfully determine their motivations often failed, for he observed not all were ambitiously bloodthirsty, neither were all in need of a better life, in lack of opportunities. Still, to these pirates he applied his beliefs of divine providence, and a character introspection that could at least explore the possibility of guilt within such men.

3.1.3. PIRATES BEYOND CONVENTION

One last set of pirates who defied convention in such a manner that attracted Defoe to include them among his compilation of “Robberies and Murders of the most notorious Pyrates” appear in Captain John Rackam's chapter, and, for once, it is not the captain of the crew who garnered such notoriety. Having garnered attention from many scholars¹⁴⁷, the depictions of Mary Read and Anne Bonny are showcased already on the cover, under the title —“With the remarkable Actions and Adventures of the two Female Pyrates”. From there on, they go on to occupy a considerable space, compared to their captain, and are even illustrated in an accompanying engraving of the two¹⁴⁸; to such a degree are they a unique case, that even the narration of their lives is different. In both of their biographies, their pasts become foregrounded, an attempt at explaining their luck and what might have driven them to piracy,

¹⁴⁷ Most notably, stands Jo Stanley's *Bold in Her Breeches* (1995).

¹⁴⁸ Found on page 160, it depicts Read and Bonny in piratical male attire, in the exact manner of the other pirate illustrations.

and the manner in which these are told is not too far from the picaresque literary tradition, but, even more, they are especially connected with the characters of Roxana and Moll, also from Defoe. Whether the reason was due to their gender, or if it were due to the voyages of social mobility in spite of it, we do not know.

After describing the life and captaincy of John Rackam, Defoe deftly introduces the lives of Bonny and Read, in the shape of two convicted pirates aboard Rackam's crew, who had escaped execution by pleading "their Bellies, being quick with Child" (p. 152). While Defoe acknowledges the possibility of the readers disbelieving these depictions, he states that, after their trial, "the Truth of it can be no more contested, than that there were such Men in the World, as *Roberts* and *Black-beard*, who were Pyrates," (p. 153). The English pirate Mary Read, for one, is described as a militarily trained woman, who, "being resolved to make her Fortune one way or other" (p. 156), eventually found herself roped into piracy, thereafter becoming a dedicated fighter, if perhaps with a penchant for love driving her away from her duties. Defoe employs adjectives as he would for any other pirate, curiously, and even goes on to say "that in Times of Action, no person amongst them was more resolute, or ready to board or undertake any Thing that was hazardous, than she and *Anne*" (p. 156). Within Read, the dimension of class collides with that of gender, in a manner that they cannot be understood separately. She was raised in precarious conditions, her father having passed away and her mother depending on her mother-in-law, for which she was socialised as a boy. After this, she soon enlisted herself upon a Man of War, among other military occupations he followed before being a pirate (p. 158). Her class status, thus, was intricate to her social mobility, and thus was deeply linked with her becoming a pirate. In fact, Defoe places the following speech on her, when asked about the hanging of pirates:

(...) were it not for that, every cowardly Fellow would turn Pyrate (...) that many of those who are now cheating the Widows and Orphans, and oppressing their poor Neighbours, who have no Money to obtain Justice, would then rob at Sea (...) and no Merchant would venture out; so that the Trade, in a little Time, would not be worth following (p. 158–159).

Read's statement is loaded with satire and reproach of the life of crime, poverty, and the dependence of maritime trade alike, and it paints a sombre, de-romanticized image of the pirates that Defoe was partial to.

Anne Bonny's depiction follows a similar fashion to Read's. Bonny was energetic and impetuous, and Defoe relates the description of her foul temper to the stories reported of her upon her condemnation, "much to her Disadvantage, as that she had kill'd an English servant-Maid once in her Passion with a Case-Knife", or, when being nearly forced by a man to sexual relations, "she beat him so, that he lay ill of it a considerable Time" (p. 159). Additionally, as was the case with Read, the matter of class and gender were present in the struggle that led her to piracy, if perhaps to a lesser degree than Read's. The Irish pirate did not hail from impoverished circumstances and the lower classes, but still she suffered a similar kind of social stigma, being an illegitimate child —the nature of which Defoe explains in lengthy detail, occupying more space than her life at sea. She, too, was initially "put into Breeches, as a Boy, pretending it was a Relation's Child he was to breed up to be his Clerk" (p. 164), but the farce was short-lived, and soon after the scandal affected her father too much, they moved to Carolina, where her father would turn to Trade and Plantation, and where she would elope, twice, the second time with Rackam, employing once more men's clothes. Hers was a path distinct to Read's, but still Defoe seems to imply in her depiction that the condition of her birth made her all the more amenable to the social marginalisation she would acquire with being a pirate, along with a link to her violent predisposition and the crimes she would enact at sea.

While one can hardly tell what Defoe's opinion on their rise to piracy was, beyond his usual distant contempt towards such lifestyle, the narrations of Read and Bonny's lives appear with a lesser judgement on behalf of their decision, and the matter of their gender as pirates does not seem to detract from their positive qualities: whereas many pirate crews would dissuade from the inclusion of women aboard, vessels being predominantly male homosocial spaces, Rackam "kept [the discovery that Read was a woman] a Secret from all the Ship's Company" (p. 157), and Defoe, upon the execution of Bonny's lover, Rackam, claims she only had to say "*that she was sorry to see him there, but if he had fought like a Man, he need not have been hang'd like a Dog*" (p. 165). Added to that, their ends are rather unique: not only do they escape execution, Read unfortunately perishes from a fever at prison, but Bonny was eventually acquitted, and Defoe claims to know not what became of her, "only that she was not executed" (p. 165).

4. LEGACY OF THE MYTH

The many influences stemming from this Golden Age of Piracy spread out to nearly all artistic genres and mediums, to the point some of this rich imagery has shaped certain mindsets on authorities and property. We cannot owe this huge cultural motif, as it has become, to one sole source—that is, *A General History of the Pyrates*. As I have tried to illustrate through this study, while successful and significant during its times, this recollection of pirate descriptions also owes to the works of its contemporaries, especially the work of Exquemelin as a literary precursor and Rogers' experience as a primary source. Still, Defoe's catalogue is an undeniable wellspring of inspiration for its many successors, serving both as a logistical and thematic reference for many of the Anglo-American pirates. This influence is evidenced in the series of stereotypical elements that have permeated our imageries, such as the pirates' violent descriptions, but also by the admitting of the inspiration.

The extension of influenced works is wide, having the image of the pirate of the early eighteenth century become a popularised caricature of what it was. Commonly referred to as swashbuckling adventures, in regard to literature, two of the most recognised influenced works are that of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1881)—and from this influential work, it is worth remarking how the idea of property and the divide of 'gentlemen of fortune' and 'gentleman born' are still present in Stevenson's his time¹⁴⁹, distanced as he was to Defoe's time—and James Matthew Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1904), both having in turn further influenced the stereotyped image of the Anglo-American pirate of the Caribbean—with elements including the treasure map and the peg legs)—, but it is also worth mentioning depictions such as Gasset's *Cahiers de Le Golif*¹⁵⁰ (1952), as well as more modern works such as Eiichirō Oda's manga, *One Piece* (1997–), and Patrick O'Brian's sea fiction series *Aubrey–Maturin* series (1969–2004), which comprise either a long cast of pirates or further explore the conflicts at sea that the privateers faced, elements present in *A General History of the Pyrates*. The piratical tradition also permeated the big and small screen, with early productions such as Michael Curtiz's *The Sea Hawk* (1940) or Raoul Walsh's *Blackbeard: The Pirate* (1952), the recent TV series by Jonathan E. Steinberg and Robert Levine's *Black Sails* (2014–2017), or the influential *Pirates of the Caribbean* (2003)

¹⁴⁹ COHEN, Monica F. Op. cit. p. 160.

¹⁵⁰ This forgery had been until the twenty-first century considered a veridic recollection of reluctant pirate Le Golif, drawing extensively from Exquemelin as Defoe's works and portrayals of pirates.

and its sequels, the latter having enhanced another set of piratical stereotypes. Lastly, one brief glance at other media illustrates more instances of the diffusion of the images from *A General History of the Pyrates*, permeating both pop art and tattooing with patterned anchors, parrots, ships, and booty, but also in music the likes of *The Longest John*'s folk band based on sea shanties, and even videogames, with examples such as *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag* (2013). In short, the list of instances of popular media reflecting what *A General History of the Pyrates*, in a way, ignited, is far from brief, and showcases a myriad of formats having adopted this piratical trend. While depicting a concentrated period of time, and perhaps not directly alluding to Defoe's work, they all owe to the portraits he constructed, and thus also helped popularise this specific instance of piracy among the many others having transpired around the world.

Lastly, I wish to explore how piracy, as a whole, has also affected our way of living, especially in regard to intellectual property. As anthropologist Alexander Dent argues¹⁵¹, there is relevance to piracy in anthropology, as it examines the relationship between the consumer, economic and social structures, and the "adequate or inadequate" forms of consumption—that is, the legitimacy of the property. In fact, through its many instances in history, including the modern piracy of the Digital Era, piracy is understood as the collective interruption of "customary flow of goods and ideas through real or symbolic violence"¹⁵², and as such creates a divide between those who would consider themselves pirates—rebels, defiant towards their particular power, state, or institution—and those who had been labelled pirates—those attempting against property, be it material or symbolical. Better yet, the mechanisms through which these institutions attack piracy, be it digital or the Golden Age of Piracy, behave rather similarly¹⁵³: pirates are labelled as inadequate members of society and are gravely punished for their law-breaking crimes. For reasons such as this, some anthropologists (Bonni, Dent, Shawdy) argue that our times demand an anthropology of the pirates, both to better understand the times that shaped these individuals and the times we now live in, and why our perceptions are moulded in such a way. It is for this reason that the study of works such as *A General History of the Pyrates* may become updated rather than outdated, and even may acquire new and significant perspectives and valorisations.

¹⁵¹ DENT, Alexander S. "INTRODUCTION: Understanding the War on Piracy, Or Why We Need More Anthropology of Pirates" in *Anthropological Quarterly*, vol. 85. no. 3 (2012): p. 660.

¹⁵² Idem, p. 666.

¹⁵³ BONNI, Joe & DAWDY, Shannon Lee. Op.cit. p. 693.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Our enjoyment of pirates stems from our strangled relationship with violence, which fascinates many once a proper distance to it has been achieved through time or fiction. I refer to Rediker, once again, who concludes in his study of the Golden Age of Piracy as follows:

We love pirates most of all because they were rebels. They challenged, in one way or another, the conventions of class, race, gender, and nation. They were poor and in low circumstances, but they expressed high ideals (...) These outlaws led audacious, rebellious lives, and we should remember them as long as there are powerful people and oppressive circumstances to be resisted¹⁵⁴.

These swashbuckling antiheroes are not the Anglo-American pirates of the Caribbean that they originated from, nor were the ones depicted during the times of colonial England a perfect mirror of their collective identity. In fact, to define a pirate, be it digital or from any period of time, is to be subjected to the lens of the society portraying the analysis. What results from this, then, is an understanding of a collective identity always composed of dual takes: the one who is branded a pirate, and the one who claims it; the authority that orders the sentence, and the pirates labelled *hostis humani generis*; the unrepentant Captain Low, and the yielding Captain Kidd; the discriminating court trials, and the idealistic playwrights, and so on. Even within one side, there stands no absolute framing of the protagonists of this Golden Age of Piracy. As I have indicated, the process of chagrining pirates put England at odds, as they had been at once, during the seventeenth century, the tools and paragons of their imperial reach, and their actions, whenever legitimised, could comprehend the plunder of violent action against other nation's sloops. The existence of figures the likes of privateer Woodes Rogers set for a wondrous oxymoron, as it admitted the recognition of the pirates as men —and the occasional woman— amenable to change, not too distanced from the honourable merchants and the ambitious landed gentry. Yet, it also set these seafaring criminals as completely distanced from civilised, propertied humanity, in part for their violent wrongdoing, but mostly on behalf of the symbolic and literal theft of property —the cornerstone of mercantilist England, and a mark of their imperial reach in the Americas. With such complexity, some would argue it would be better to talk in terms of pirate culture, talking from an anthropological perspective, and this study of mine strived, in a way, to

¹⁵⁴ REDIKER, Marcus. "Blood and Gold", op. cit. p. 176.

position them as humans first, so as to better understand what the fictionalised figments that became of them came from.

I maintained earlier that these multidimensional figures do not correspond with their literary counterpart, for I find their fluctuating images as an entity of their own. They require an understanding of their origins, for better nuance, but if the very definition of pirates depends on the constructed narratives made upon them, one cannot consider works such as *A General History of the Pyrates* solely an ethnographic literary work, but perhaps should also include them in the border literature of pirates, acknowledging the weight of these narratives, especially when the tangible reality of our study is so underrepresented from the pirates themselves. I have attempted here to understand the cultural and literary circumstances that led to Defoe's work, as well as the influences it carried on to our times, and for that purpose, I stressed the role that property and social standing played into the images there depicted.

The conclusions arising from this study are varied: on the one hand, the already mentioned issue that these disenfranchised, contentious personalities are more elusive than the certainty of their depictions attests to; on the other, that the powerful institution of the English Admiralty had a considerable grasp on the narratives shaped around them, as seen by Rogers' contribution to *A General History of the Pyrates* and the description of the legal proceedings that Defoe examines, and that it did not do so seamlessly, but rather engaged in multiple incongruities that often depended on external agents—mainly, the East India Company, the concurrent relationships England had with other nations, and the influence of the gentry *and* merchants themselves—; and, lastly, that Defoe's portrayals of what he considered the most noteworthy of the pirates of his time puts us at odds with our reactions towards them. The portraits of the pirates of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries carry with them an illicit violence that surely owed to a historical reality, but that certainly did not apply to them. Already in 1724, they were considered a heterogeneous community and culture, if perhaps they were united by the crime of their plunder and their existence, and both in those times and in present days they profess upon the reader a certain compulsion, as was intended by Defoe. We may be swayed to repulsion towards them, in rejection of their criminality and their attempts against the right of property. We might also consider them another iteration of the romantic social bandit, rebels against the authorities of their times, disruptors of their mechanisms of power, and symbols of resistance nearing the image of myth. Or, perhaps, we may find ambivalence in the combination of these two reactions,

acknowledging both their symbology as dissenters of the traditional order while also considering the means by which some would go in their defiance. Remarkably enough, the latter sentiment would not be exclusively modern: the contemporaries of the Golden Age of Piracy, too, could be at the divide of the reconciliation of the multidimensional pirates that appear in Defoe's work.

Daniel Defoe's *A General History of the Pyrates*, despite its intricacy in the legal world of piracy and the vast information it provides us on its characters, is a flawed account—as any of the times would have been, being concurrent with such a polarising subject. It is not the only source available to us, nor is it responsible for all the subsequent pirate narratives that followed it, yet it is hard to contest its significance and influence. It defined our knowledge of the Golden Age of Piracy, while at the same time, it defined a bold narrative and literary tradition: the book set the Anglo-American piracy of the eighteenth century as the primary image of piracy altogether on the general public, and it ventured just enough between reality and fiction to attract a popularity that would follow it to the end of its author's life and beyond, reaching us, centuries after, as an uncontested referent of the history of the times' pirates. If there are to be any closing remarks, let it be the possibility of *A General History of the Pyrates* offering a conversation on our responses to piracy: on the necessity of the image of an uncompromising underdog fighting the powers that be, and the responsibility of the masses to set judgement on their fault or legitimacy.

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