

Piracy, Globalization and Marginal Identities: Navigating Gender and Nationality in  
Contemporary Hispanic Fiction

by

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For Lisa

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ABSTRACT:

Piracy, Globalization and Marginal Identities: Navigating Gender and Nationality in  
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This study examines the pirate as a subject of critical inquiry from the perspective of Spain and Latin America, beginning with a history of Early Modern piracy and an overview of the vast corpus of Hispanic pirate literature from the fifteenth century onward. My analysis centers on literary texts published between 1992 and 2003, which are evaluated in the context of the historical narratives, images (such as lithographs) and Hollywood films that inspired them. I argue that the recent boom in pirate literature from Latin American writers is due to the effects of globalization, which has put local identities into question and heralded a new admiration for piracy as a form of resistance to cultural and economic domination. I expose the multiple forms of piracy that manifest themselves in these recent works, which layer contemporary identity politics onto Early Modern subjects. Identity theft, intellectual property theft, and copyright infringement are proposed as contemporary analogues to Early Modern piracy, as is the notion of “gender piracy”—a term I use to refer to the conscious appropriation of gender by the female pirates, Anne Bonny and Mary Read, and their fictional counterparts in

Hollywood film and Hispanic literature by Jorge Luis Borges, Laura Antillano, Carmen Boulosa, Zoé Valdés and Alberto Vázquez-Figueroa. The multiple crossings that occur in pirate literature—which transcend linguistic, cultural, national, and gender boundaries—are understood with the aid of transgender and transatlantic theories by Judith Butler, Marjorie Garber, Judith Halberstam and Paul Gilroy, among others. Additionally, my reading of Zoé Valdés’s *Lobas de mar* is aided by the contributions of global theorists, such as Arjun Appadurai. I analyze Carmen Boulosa’s *Duerme* with the assistance of Chicana feminisms in order to discuss the main character’s articulation with *la Malinche*, Sor Juana and Catalina de Erauso—transgressive women of Mexico’s colonial history. Psychoanalytic feminism (Kaja Silverman, Cathy Caruth, and Laura Mulvey) is essential to my reading of male subjectivity in Carmen Boulosa’s *Son vacas, somos puercos*. Finally, my discussion of Mexican and Cuban nationalisms is enriched by the contributions of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Benedict Anderson, and Walter Benjamin.



# Chapter 1

## A Theoretical, Historical and Literary Introduction to Piracy in the Hispanic World

### The Pirate as Theoretical Subject

*...the pirate inhabits and crosses the permeable membrane that divides enemy from foe, civilization from its other.*

-Jon Beasley Murray

The pirate is a highly paradoxical figure who lies at a crossroads: neither neatly severed from the state apparatus, nor entirely operating from within its structures. Characterized as both outcasts and heroes, alternately hyper-masculine or effeminate, they seem to be whatever we want them to be, whatever is convenient or in vogue at the moment. In the sixteenth to eighteenth century Caribbean, pirates were shielded from punishment by their ambiguous political status which led officials to turn a blind eye to their illegal, non-state sanctioned activities, which “brought revenue to the sovereign, public officials, and private investors [...] weakened enemies by attacking their shipping and settlements [...] supplied European markets with scarce goods at affordable prices [and] broke competing states’ trade monopolies” (Thomson 107-8). In fact, French and British corsairs not only escaped punishment, but were rewarded with titles of nobility.

When their illegal practices became a menace to local officials in the early eighteenth century, however, “piracy was transformed from an ‘honorable crime’ to a crime against the human race” (Thomson 108).

While piracy has historically taken many different forms, pirates are generally admired today, especially by young people, for their anarchist ethos—their disregard for laws, social hierarchies and private property. They are emblems of the weak acting out against the injustices and abuses of the rich and powerful—the marginal subject sticking it to the central authorities. Paradoxically however, pirates have been mainstreamed in the past century, appropriated, commercialized and sold to the masses through film, popular literature, and a never-ending series of exhibits from Disneyland to science museums whose gift stores are filled with a cornucopia of pirate kitsch, in addition to informational resources. Pirate themes and paraphernalia, in fact, are a staple of port cities in coastal communities in and outside of the United States, including the shores of the Great Lakes. No matter how tacky or commercial, these homages to pirates are often historically grounded—that is to say that pirates did indeed frequent the area at one time, though the specificity of this history may be watered down or completely obliterated in the exhibit. At other times, the pirate themes are exploited in order to draw an audience, as I will discuss below.

The discovery of pirate treasure by Barry Clifford off the coast of Cape Cod in 1984 yielded him much more than its weight in gold. The historical value of the artifacts had layered value, not just upon the Spanish coins, but also upon the musket balls, clothing and bones of the now long deceased pirates. Clifford’s discovery earned him fame not only because he became an instant billionaire, but also because the artifacts

gave insight into history—hence the stories interest to *Time* and *National Geographic*. The museum that Clifford set up to showcase his discovery wonderfully blends kitsch, natural history and sensationalism. Located at the end of Provincetown’s main pier, surrounded by tour boats and rusty trawlers, the museum clearly hopes to catch accidental tourists. Its exterior is festooned with flags, skulls and crossbones and a replica of a pirate in gibbet á la Captain Kidd.

News articles touting found treasure plaster one of the front doors, while the other advertises in capital letters: “exhibit of world’s only pirate treasure.” The adjacent windows offer a view of the museum store: flags, tee shirts, wall-hangings and other such China made bric-a-brac available for purchase as souvenirs. The news articles are the only authenticating element visible from the museum’s exterior, which otherwise promises to be more theme hall than museum. Yet, unexpectedly, there is a complete change of tone between this glitzy sensationalistic exterior and the exhibit itself, which is somber and informative. Inside the museum, one can view informative videos and glimpse authentic artifacts from the pirate ship *Whydah*, which sunk off the coast of Cape Cod in 1717, enclosed and artfully arranged in glass cases. On my visit to the museum, one discovery in particular caught my attention as it certainly did many others. It was not the beautiful pistol laid out on crushed velvet or the syringe set atop a bed of musket balls, stones and Spanish coins, but the tattered silk stocking, boot and human leg bone that caused the most pause (see figure 1.1). These remains are the closest we will ever get to seeing these pirates in the flesh.

Similar traveling exhibits, such as Odyssey Marine Exploration’s “SHIPWRECK! Pirates & Treasure,” which was recently shown at the Tampa Museum

of Science and Industry and the Detroit Science Center, play up the connection to pirates by appealing to “the universal fascination with shipwrecks, pirate lore and sunken treasure”.<sup>1</sup> In actuality, the exhibit revolves around a civil war era ship discovered in 2003 by Odyssey, an organization that, like Barry Clifford’s, actively seeks out shipwrecks (albeit by using less destructive techniques). Our fascination with pirates has ironically made them commodities to be sold in books, museum exhibits, and on the big screen. Both of these exhibits use sensationalism and commercialism to draw in visitors and offer them real information.



**Figure 1.1**  
Tibia and silk stocking from Whydah shipwreck

Pirates are distanced enough from our modern lives that we continue to celebrate them even in times of war and social instability. It is ironic that the *Pirates of the Caribbean* film series was launched to great commercial success precisely at the time when the US was recovering from the most fatal terrorist attack in its history. Historian Marcus Rediker, who himself gets wrapped up in the romantic appeal of the pirate has casually called them “terrorists *of a sort*”—but finds their terrorism to be justified

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<sup>1</sup> See Odyssey Marine Exploration’s website at <http://www.shipwreck.net/exhibits.php>.

because of their marginal status (5 my emphasis). But such “terror of the weak against the strong” might be used to defend any act of terrorism—such as the usurpation and ransoming of oil tankers by Somali pirates (Rediker 6). While they may be targeting the “strong” oil magnates, the primary victims of the attacks are the workers, whose lives are threatened if the magnates do not come through with ransom money. In this sense, contemporary piracy is no different than the Early Modern form, in which the victims were poorly armed and most likely poorly paid merchants.

Arguably, all piracy, even if its primary aim appears to be economic, can be traced back to political motives, and pirates can always use these distant reasons as a justification of unauthorized violent acts. The problem of Somali piracy, for example, has emerged during the escalation of civil war violence in a country lacking a central government. Applying the lessons learned from the dramatic yet spontaneous reduction in piracy in the Strait of Malacca, US consul Sean Stein reasons that “solving ultimately the problem of piracy in Somalia could be very difficult until the situation on the ground gets under control” (“Solving”). This is because “despite...efforts to combat piracy [in the Strait of Malacca], none of them were ultimately successful until [the Indonesians] were able to solve the conflict that was happening on the ground” (“Solving”).

Piracy has not always involved violence, and there are a great number of acts that might be classified under this rubric, including contraband and intellectual property theft. The latter is sometimes prized more highly than making direct economic gain. In the early modern period, for example, sea charts were prized intellectual commodities that contained the accumulated knowledge of countless sea voyages. Such charts, which noted currents, sea depths, tides, coastline features and the location of coves suitable for

careening and restocking water and food stores, were a priceless aid in navigation and extremely costly and time consuming to create from scratch. Navigational knowledge was also hoarded and feared in the hands of the enemy, because of the advantages it gave them. A successful mission, then, might recover such a chart in lieu of merchandise for illegal resale.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, the theft of intellectual property in modern times is often embarked upon for the fame and notoriety it might yield, with monetary wealth being secondary.

If intellectual property is a relatively new notion so far as it is protected by the law, it is certainly possible to identify publications that might be classified as apocryphal or illegitimate in the Early Modern period. One such text, which happens to be on the subject of piracy, is Alexander Esquemelin's memoirs of his experiences in the Caribbean in the late seventeenth century. The text, which I will review in closer detail in chapter five, suffered a great number of unauthorized translations that dramatically modified it by adding entire chapters or drastically altering the portrayal of certain historical figures for the benefit of the national interest. Interestingly, such changes were clearly not made with the aim of gaining personal notoriety, since the credit was attributed to Esquemelin. Yet there is no doubt that his intellectual property and persona were abused in subsequent publications.

The inverse situation of intellectual theft was certainly a concern in the Early Modern period and Cervantes plays with the notion in *Don Quijote*, posing his story as an apocryphal translation of a text authored in Arabic by the invented Cide Hamete

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<sup>2</sup> Sir Francis Drake, who stole sea charts off of Valparaiso in 1578, was said to carefully chart the coast, much to the consternation of the Spanish. One Spanish captive reported that Drake "carries with him painters who paint for him pictures of the coast in its exact colors. This I was most aggrieved to see, for each thing is so naturally depicted that no one who guides himself according to these paintings can possibly go astray" (Lane 47).

Benenjeli, who expresses outrage at Cervantes's publication of his story. This farce is taken to a new level by Borges's fictional Menard who embarks on a project to rewrite *Don Quijote* verbatim, without copying or translating, thus becoming himself the author. It is fitting that Borges, an author who often plays with notions of authorial and genre confusion (between fiction and essay, for example) should himself rewrite the history of several female pirates as fiction in the short story, "La viuda Ching, pirata." All of these examples aptly seem to revolve around the issue of linguistic translation, one that will arise again in my third chapter which centers on the linguistic and cultural appropriation of the story of the Anglo female pirates, Anne Bonny and Mary Read by Cuban expatriate, Zoé Valdés.

In addition to intellectual property theft, I explore an archaic form of *identity* theft in chapter four, that mimics the intellectual property theft in that identities are usurped, invented and falsely attributed against the will of the character. This is all achieved, not through social security or identification card scams, but through the exchange of dress, a commodity difficult to come by in the Early Modern period, and one that subsequently marked the identity of the wearer, if not as individual, then at least as a member of a sexual, racial or economic class.

In Chapter five, it is theft of the body, rather than identity that is explored through a character (based on Alexander Esquemelin) who suffers psychologically from the aftereffects of indentured servitude.<sup>3</sup> Disconnected from his body which has been abused

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<sup>3</sup> The practice of indentured servitude was similar to slavery in that an individual was effectively owned by another and could use him or abuse him for any purpose he saw fit. Yet, unlike slavery, the practice entailed a fixed term of service. In the French East India Company, for example, European boys who could not buy their own freedom upon landing on the Island of Tortuga, entered into a seven-year contract in service to an individual purchaser. See John Esquemelin, Doris Garraway and Kris Lane.

physically and sexually, as well as exploited for labor purposes, he turns to piracy as a way to regain a sense of freedom and control.

Chapters two through five all deal to some extent or another with the notion of “gender piracy,” a term that I use to refer to appropriation of a masculine identity by a host of characters modeled after the female pirates Anne Bony and Mary Read (and indeed the female pirates, themselves). Alongside these instances of gender piracy, I explore effeminacy among male pirates, theorizing the pirate in contemporary culture as a drag figure.

### **A Question of Legitimacy: Piracy in Historical Perspective**

Pirate attacks were commonplace in the Mediterranean from the time of the Roman Empire, through the Middle Ages and well into the Early Modern period. The period from 1492 until 1580 was particularly hard on Spanish subjects navigating in the area as the expulsion of the Moors from the Iberian Peninsula and expansion of the Spanish Empire to the coast of North Africa led to resentments on the part of the Berbers and sympathy from the Ottoman Turks who became the defenders of the Barbary coast. This period saw the rise of the Barbarossa or Red Beard brothers, Oruç and Hayreddin, and their trusted captains Dragut, Sinan and Aydin who dominated the region for nearly half a century from 1504 to 1550, recapturing many former Muslim territories from the Spanish. The Ottoman domination of the Mediterranean was seriously challenged in the Battle of Lepanto in 1571, in which a conglomeration of European forces from Spain, Venice, Geneva and the Vatican converged to form the Holy League and defeat the Ottoman Turks.



Though the Ottomans re-conquered key territories in the Mediterranean after Lepanto, the superior force displayed by the Holy League during the 1571 battle persuaded the Turks to reach a treaty agreement with the Christian territories in 1580. Piracy in the region thereafter, though less organized, was hardly diminished, thriving until the mid-nineteenth century. Well before then, Spain's focus shifted to the New World where piracy had more devastating economic effects, and where port settlements were especially vulnerable. This shifting concern made its mark on Spanish language literary production with accounts of British and French corsairs dominating Spanish letters by the mid-1600s. Essentially, Mediterranean piracy did not pose a significant threat to the Spanish Empire after 1580, since territory was no longer under dispute and most of the attacks did not involve great sums of money, but were limited to the capture and ransoming of human captives. A greater amount of resources were put into establishing and securing territories in the new world and ensuring control of trade in the area and the protection of riches extracted from the colonies.

In the Early Modern Caribbean, the subject that we now universally call a pirate is difficult to define, for even operating within the same time period and region, pirates were a diverse lot of individuals originating from different regions of Europe, with a variety of motives and characteristic acts all deemed illegal by one sovereign or another. Referred to as corsairs (*corsarios*), freebooters (*filibusteros*), privateers (*corsarios*), buccaneers (*bucaneros*), and brethren of the coast (*hermanos de la costa*), few men in the Early Modern period would have actually considered themselves pirates, and most believed their cause to be righteous whether religious, political, or personally motivated. Of the terminologies listed above, privateer is the only one with a legal designation—at

least from the perspective of the attacking party. Privateers functioned as a sort of naval contractor for Dutch, French and especially English sovereigns who preyed on their political enemies, who were primarily the Spanish, though for a host of different reasons. From the Spanish perspective, a privateer's actions were no more legitimate than a pirate's. Indeed, privateers were characterized no differently than other rogue seamen carrying out illegal (and often hostile) acts with and against Spanish merchant ships and settlers.

These differences in opinion over the characterization of the individuals and the nature of the acts they carried out also bleed into the details of their deployment. From the Spanish perspective, exchanges of contraband between pirates and settlers were “strong-armed,” that is to say, that the settlers were threatened or otherwise coerced into trading with the pirates. The reality may have been quite different as the colonists were eager to purchase goods duty-free, and also obtain a broader variety of merchandise than that made available through sanctioned means. Historian César García del Pino goes a little overboard in his black and white portrayal of contrabandists and pirates as two totally separate groups of people. The historian characterizes pirates as indiscriminately and senselessly violent, while contrabandists are considered “amables mercaderes europeos” (García del Pino 17). In his estimation, strong-armed trade was a myth created by the locals in order to “apaciguar al distante soberano, asegurándole que se habían visto obligados a tratar con un feroz corsario o pirata, que amenazaba con arrasar la población y hacer una degollina general” (García del Pino 17). His well-researched and detailed history of piracy in Cuba in the seventeenth century nonetheless pays lip service to

sociopolitical ideals, opening with an epigraph from the Cuban head-of-state and a critique of “[l]a historiografía burguesa” (García del Pino 1).

Motives have been another point of contention from the point of historians. In Nina Gerassi-Navarro’s opinion, “European nations attacking the Spanish colonies often played up religious differences to justify their own economic interest in obtaining the precious metals and prices Spain had monopolized. Although religion was used as a means of justification, it was not the governing motive behind the attacks; securing a trade route and market was” (Gerassi-Navarro 17).

In separate studies, historians Kris Lane and José Bravo Ugarte divide Caribbean piracy into several phases, each dominated by pirates of a common origin and motive (Bravo Ugarte; Lane). The two scholars, however, do not agree on exact dates. Bravo Ugarte’s figures are considerably narrower than Lane’s by as much as 60 years, as he pinpoints the peak years, while Lane’s figures include all moments of activity, no matter how sparse, politically insignificant or loosely defined. As a result, Lane’s five phases give the sense of continuity in pirate activity in the Caribbean from 1500-1730, with different waves overlapping one another. Bravo Ugarte’s history on the other hand, highlights flash points of piracy, times in which activity was at its most intense, violent and politically disruptive, yielding a more sporadic history of piracy in the Caribbean, with periods of calm between each of his four phases.

Both versions of history hold a degree of truth, for, while piracy may have never disappeared altogether in the Early Modern Caribbean, there were certainly moments of marked intensity and comparative inactivity which coincided with politics on the ground. What is agreed is that the French dominated the scene in the first half of the sixteenth

century, with their activity peaking from 1521-1524, the years of the Franco-Spanish war. British privateers, sponsored by Queen Elizabeth were the force to be reckoned with in the second half of the sixteenth century, with the greatest density of attacks taking place from 1568-1596. Dutch maritime aggression menaced Spanish trade in the Caribbean during the first half of the seventeenth century, coinciding with the eighty-year war, which ended with the signing of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. Place of origin and inter-imperial aggression was no longer a factor in the longest period of piracy lasting nearly a century and concluding around 1730. Lane divides this final section into two phases with the latter portion from 1700-1730 being dominated again by the British, though perhaps more by chance than for political reasons. The first portion, however, was marked by the destructive activity of the settlers of the island of Hispaniola, hunters with a unique social structure who originally sold their dried meat to traders, but later took to the sea in search of greater riches.

Etymologically, the Spanish word *filibustero* and the English freebooter are of common origin, both deriving from the Dutch *vrijbouter*, a composite of the words “free” (*vrij*) and “booty” (*buit*) (*Oxford English Dictionary*). While the English word is a literal translation of the Dutch, *filibustero* is a Hispanicized pronunciation of the French pronunciation (*flibustier*) of the original (*Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*). In any European language, the term, which came into use in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, could be applied to any sea plunderer, regardless of origin, but was most often associated with piracy in the Caribbean.

Corsair or *corsario* is a much older word, originating from the Latin *cursus*, meaning race or race-course, which initially referred to the Muslim privateers operating

in the Mediterranean, but came to be used synonymously in Spanish with any sailor who carried a letter of marque or *patente de corso* authorizing their bellicose activities. In Spanish, then, a corsair's actions are legally sanctioned, distinguishing him from a pirate, while in English it is just the opposite. A more appropriate equivalent to the Spanish *corsario*, then, would be privateer, which explicitly refers to sanctioned individuals, such as those that served Queen Elizabeth's interests in the Caribbean. It is important to note, however, that although the corsair's legality was acknowledged by the Spanish, the term was considered an epithet because of its religious connotations. Originally used to refer to religious others,

[a]s the word continued to be used in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, it retained—at least for the Spanish—a certain religious connotation. When the Spanish used 'corsair,' they were probably alluding to the attacker's 'heretical' characteristics in addition to defining their political aggression. In fact, Francis Drake is known to have been extremely offended when the Spanish called him a *corsario*. This would explain why the Spanish generally used the terms 'pirate' and 'corsair' when referring to the English, whereas they preferred the word 'pirate,' 'buccaneer,' and 'freebooter' to refer to the [Catholic] French attackers. (Gerassi-Navarro 16-17)

A buccaneer or *bucanero* was not initially associated with seamanship, but was instead a hunter/trapper of wild cattle and boars on the islands of Hispaniola (modern day Haiti and the Dominican Republic) in the late seventeenth century. The term buccaneer "originated from the Amerindian-derived French word for the native style of barbecue, *boucan*. This was a process of slow grilling, smoking, and drying of meat, which would be so preserved for several months" (Garraway 100). The buccaneers traded with pirates and privateers who used the meat as a dietary staple during their voyages. The hunters thus became associated with sea plunder and the word became synonymous with *filibustero* or freebooter. It is also possible that many of the hunters, along with the

planters of the island changed careers to engage in piracy due to the scarcity of cattle and the increased popularity and success of freebooting.

The English, French and Spanish translations of Alexander Esquemelin's memoirs, which constituted an early history of piracy, attest to the diverse linguistic preferences of each language group. The French preferred *flibustier* (freebooter), the Spanish *pirata*, and the English buccaneer, while Esquemelin used *zee-roover* (sea-robber) in the original Dutch. It is not surprising that the Spanish use the most inflammatory term possible, while the remaining groups use more tempered and location-specific terminology. As I will elsewhere discuss, the terminology was not the only thing that was altered with these translations, some of which added entire passages or chapters that were falsely attributed to the Flemish author. Needless to say, the French, Spanish and English "translations" of Esquemelin, all exploited the text to some extent, effectively committing acts of piracy with their distortions and linguistic manipulations.

The motives of pirates of all sorts were often a combination of religious, economic and political factors, but different circumstances acted as the driving force for particular phases of pirate aggression. The Dutch privateers, for instance, were primarily concerned with gaining political and religious freedom from Spain in order to escape heavy taxation in the prosperous region of Flanders and also have relief from religious prosecution from the Catholic monarchs who punished the heretical practices of the primarily Protestant region. Their actions in the Caribbean were therefore punitive in nature. They acted, not out of greed, but from a profound sense of injustice and a strong desire for autonomy.

With the signing of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, which ended the Eighty Years war and created an independent Dutch state, the Dutch menace in the Caribbean virtually disappeared overnight. While it is easy to sympathize with, and even romanticize the plight of the Dutch Caribbean pirates, the nobility of their motives is undone by the viciousness of their actions, which routinely included the torture of Spanish subjects, with particularly gruesome punishments for friars (Lane 86). Their social structure also lacked the idealized anti-hierarchical configuration seen in other phases of piracy (Lane 70).

The British corsairs that dominated the Caribbean during the reign of Queen Elizabeth were contracted for less emotionally charged reasons. It was not reprisal or desire for autonomy, but desire for wealth and power that led to their clash against the Spanish. Spain monopolized trade and held the majority of the territory in the region and Queen Elizabeth wanted to claim some of that wealth for England. The fact that the British were Protestant and the Spanish Catholic, made the actions of the privateers more easily justifiable, but cannot be considered a main motivating factor for the Elizabethans as it was for the Dutch who directly suffered religious persecution under the reign of Felipe II.

The most unique phase of piracy is that of the multinational buccaneers, whose unique society deserves an in depth elaboration, as it has inspired a great many works of literature in all languages. The buccaneers were largely opportunists, disengaged from imperial politics and relatively disinterested in the religious wars. Though some of the settlers were renegade slaves originally sent to the new world as recalcitrant Protestants, they freely practiced their religion in the Caribbean territories and thus had little

motivation to engage in religious reprisals. Others were members of the lower classes lured to the French Caribbean by private trading companies with false promises and subjected to indentured servitude for a period of three to seven years. Freed or runaway slaves of French origin formed the bulk of the buccaneer stock, but there were also a fair number of Brits, including the famous captain Morgan, who was a sanctioned privateer at other points in his career. Persons of Dutch, African and even Spanish origin also signed on to buccaneering ventures. Such a motley crew waged their attacks out of a desire for a more lucrative lifestyle than that available to them by hunting or farming, the other two modes of subsistence on Hispaniola and its surrounding islets.

The buccaneers operated primarily out of the port of Tortuga, a small island off the northwest coast of Hispaniola (modern day Port-de-Paix, Haiti) where trade restrictions were lax. The island was governed by a private trading company and therefore not bound to the regulations of any state and did not pay tariffs to any sovereign. Among other things, the buccaneers are famous for their egalitarianism, which caused them to divvy up their earnings more or less equally among all participants in a given venture, with extra shares going to the captain and those injured in battle. They have also gained notoriety for their practice of *matelotage* or male partnership, which has been likened to same-sex marriage because it often included an inheritance clause. Though he does not use this term, Alexander Esquemelin describes the custom in his early history of buccaneering:

It is a general and solemn custom amongst them all [planters, hunters and sea-rovers of French origin] to seek out for a comrade or companion, whom we may call partner, in their fortunes, with whom they join the whole stock of what they possess, towards a mutual and reciprocal gain. This is done also by articles drawn and signed on both sides, according to what has been agreed between them. Some of these constitute their surviving companion absolute



heir to what is left by the death of the first the two. Others, if they be married, leave their estates to their wives and children; others to their relations. This being done, every one applies himself to his calling, which is always one of the three aforementioned. (Esquemelin 39-40)

Some have been captivated by the homoerotic potential of this society of men, particularly by the custom of men going afield together in pairs for months and sometimes years at a time and willing their wealth to each other (Burg *Perception*; Burg *Pirate*; Burg and Van Buskirk; Turley).<sup>4</sup> Such speculations have only been reinforced by historians who stress that *matelotage* is made necessary by the absence of a wife (Haring). Regardless of sexual practices, the pirates and hunters considered themselves to be brothers and baptized themselves the “Brethren of the Coast.” Shared wealth was a hallmark of their society and *matelotage* perhaps a mere extension of this economic ethos. Doris Garraway has proposed that

[t]hese male-male relationships were not necessarily synonymous with homosexual desire. Rather, coupling fit into they cycle of upward mobility and labor renewal. Du Tertre explains that once a European servant’s contract to his master expired, he would join efforts with another freed servant, and together they would clear a plot of land and begin their own plantation with the purchase of indentured servants and slaves. While emphasizing that *matelotage* was meant to be provisional—each partner was in a sense awaiting a wife with whom to found a traditional family—Du Tertre admits that *matelots* would often stay together in the presence of a woman, so strong was the homosocial bond. (Garraway 126)

I would stress that it is not just the “homosocial bond” that keeps them together, but economic necessity, as *matelots* pooled their wealth in order to launch successful business ventures. In this sense, the presence of a wife (at least the type of wife that one would acquire in those regions, who was unlikely to possess a dowry) is in all practicality

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<sup>4</sup> B.R. Burg’s two general histories of homosexuality in seafaring, *Sodomy and the Perception of Evil* and *Sodomy and the Pirate Tradition* are at times forced and unsubstantiated. His biography of Philip C. Van Buskirk’s erotic encounters on the high seas, *An American Seafarer in the Age of Sail*, is much more convincing however. Turley’s *Rum, Sodomy and the Lash*, on the other hand, is more sensationalistic than historically accurate. Notably, the title is identical to that of the Pogues’s second album (1985).

irrelevant. Though she might inherit from her husband, she is not likely to help in the establishment of the family business, making *matelotage* attractive to married and unmarried men alike.

## **Pirates in Hispanic Literature: A History**

The 1990s were years for another “boom” in Hispanic literature, one focusing on the subgenre of pirate fiction, which has great commercial appeal and, occasionally, equal literary merit. While the last century has seen only a handful of novels and short stories published on the subject, nearly all of these narratives appeared on bookshelves during a twelve year period between 1991 and 2003, written overwhelmingly by Latin American authors.<sup>5</sup> In and outside of the Hispanic world, pirates have always spoken to issues of power and money and the nineties were years of profound economic change for Latin America, characterized by the transition from government-led industrialization to a “new system based on the dominant role of transnational corporations” (Sáinz 1).

While foreign money has been an integral part of Latin American economies since the 70s, the influx of transnational corporations in the 90s was much more insidious, because they permanently displaced domestic business, rising in the region to nearly half of all major enterprises by the end of the decade (Sáinz 2). This “new system” effectively produced a new age of imperialism with the US as a lead player, and Spain a close second (Gabilondo 91). Populist presidents, such as Hugo Chávez and Evo Morales who have recently dared to nationalize these foreign assets have been regarded

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix at the end of this chapter.

as modern day “Pirates of the Caribbean” because of their bold challenges to US economic domination and their efforts to redistribute some of the wealth on both global and domestic fronts (Ali). This wave of pirate literature also begins right around the *Quinto Centenario*, the five hundred year anniversary of the “discovery” of the Americas (1492-1992), and as such could be read as a “rediscovery” of the history of conquest and the insidious myths that have arisen to explain it (Rubert de Ventós 11). Given this context, it is little surprise that piracy has recently held such resonance in the imagination of Latin American writers.

If recent pirate literature responds to the forces of cultural and economic domination by adopting and celebrating “foreign” (non-Spanish) pirates, this history of piratical appropriation has its roots in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. To begin with, the question of Spain’s place within the world economy was postured centuries ago with texts that presented the Spanish as rightful traders, legitimate landowners (of territories on the peninsula as well as Africa and the Americas) and ultimately innocent victims of pirate attacks by a delegitimized Other. Individual pirates, such as Sir Francis Drake and the Armenian Mamí, were repeatedly appropriated and deployed for political purposes by peninsular and *criollo* writers. Narratives, poems and plays featuring these pirates sought to stir the concern of the general public with the hopes of persuading officials to invest in defense. Through these pieces of writing, the actions of a single individual come to embody the values and behaviors of an entire nation, race or religious group. Such tendencies are in stark contrast to the pirate literature of the English speaking world. Stories such as *Treasure Island*, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Peter Pan* contain strong lessons about morality, but are virtually devoid of political tension. In

such texts, the pirate is not a foreign enemy, but a fellow countryman gone bad. Deployment of the pirate in Hispanic literature, on the other hand, is always political. Pirates are overwhelmingly religious, linguistic and cultural Others, vilified for the purpose of defining foreign enemies and solidifying the socio-political identity of the Spanish Empire (which is, of course, cast in a positive light). Literature on the Puerto Rican pirate Roberto Cofresí presents an exception to this rule, because the freebooter is considered a native son. But unlike Captain Hook, Long John Silver, and other Anglo pirates of their ilk, Cofresí is portrayed in late nineteenth and early twentieth century literature as inherently good, and therefore a source of national pride.

Though I identify political economics as a driving force behind the mass production of twentieth and twenty-first century pirate literature, the central issues to the characters revolve around gender, sexual and national identities. As I will explore in more detail below, we can see the seeds of many of the issues in texts dating as far back as the Medieval period. A particularly popular theme involves the exploration of deviant gender, in particular the centrality of strong, cross-dressing women. This is complimented by a less frequent recurrence to effeminate, cross-dressing or man-loving men.

## **Medieval**

The earliest example of pirate literature is a short story from 1435 by Gutierre Diéz de Gamez, which can be classified as a medieval text for both its year of publication and the themes that it presents. The two page story relates to magic and superstitions regarding women at sea, a theme that I explore further in chapter 2. As with many of the

pieces of literature that emerge in the following century, the references are to maritime aggression in the Mediterranean between North African Moors and Spanish Christians as an extension of the *Reconquista*. In this short tale, the Iberian sailors that engage in armed combat with Moorish pirates are not credited with defeating their foe. Instead, it is Queen Dorotea who conquers them with black arts which she practices below deck. Though a woman is credited in this story as a conqueror, her power is invisible and passive. She does not directly fight, or even show her face to the pirates that she defeats. As we will see in the following section, literary women take a more active role in fighting off pirates in the Early Modern period in works by Catalina de Erauso, Miguel de Cervantes and María de Zayas.

## **Early Modern**

If piracy had always been a menace in the Mediterranean, pirate attacks became a major concern for Spanish sovereigns in the Early Modern period due to the expansion of their empire to North Africa and the Americas. Such expansions led to an increased Spanish presence on the seas that made the possibility of opportunistic maritime attacks more likely. Spanish hostilities against Turks and Berbers made them even more vulnerable to retaliatory actions and assaults launched to defend or regain territory in the Mediterranean. With Spanish seamen vulnerable to attack, and hordes of Christian soldiers and civilians taken captive and sold into slavery or put up for ransom, the issue of piracy became a concern for the general public in the Iberian Peninsula.

Not surprisingly, piracy was increasingly explored as a literary theme, with authors writing about attacks that occurred closest to home. In other words, peninsular

authors tended to write about piracy in the Mediterranean while American authors wrote about piracy in the Caribbean and South Seas. Regardless of the vantage point of the author or the origin of the pirates they featured, literature produced by authors on both sides of the Atlantic tended to cast the pirate in a negative light by emphasizing their excessive brutality, criticizing their religious and moral inferiority and characterizing their attacks as illegitimate and motivated by personal greed. Ample references are made as well to the vulnerability of the Spanish subjects who are not adequately protected by garrisons or men-of-war. As such, the Spanish crown is criticized for its poor military response to the crisis and urged to do more to defend its subjects at sea and in coastal communities vulnerable to attack.

Conflicts with Turks and Berbers in the Mediterranean were explored extensively in the literature of Miguel de Cervantes, who as a Spanish soldier was captured at sea and imprisoned in Algiers for five years (from 1575-1580). These personal experiences with piracy informed Cervantes's writing, receiving mention in narratives such as *La Galatea*, *La española inglesa*, and *Don Quijote*, in the dramas *El trato del Argel* and *Los baños de Argel*, as well as several poems. Many of these literary allusions to piracy draw on his own experiences, describing the prisons or "baños" in Algiers where he was held prisoner, referencing his real-life captor, the renegade Armenian (or Arnaut), Mamí, and even casting himself as a character.<sup>6</sup>

Arguably, many of Cervantes's literary characters who have fallen victim to piracy may be versions of himself, but none more so than the character Sayavedra in the *comedia*, *El trato de Argel*, whose name is an altered spelling of Cervantes's second

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<sup>6</sup> Mamí emerges as a character in *Don Quijote* as well as in *El trato de Argel*, *La española inglesa* and *La Galatea*.

surname, and whose discourse calling for King Felipe's help in freeing Christian captives in Algiers through military might is reminiscent of Cervantes's own letter written to King Felipe II's secretary from captivity (Cervantes Saavedra *Epístola*). Sayavedra, who later appears in Lope de Vega's version of Cervantes's play as Sahavedra, is an exemplary Christian, often recommending that others keep their faith while in captivity (Vega). It is possible however, that aspects of Cervantes's persona are parceled out to several characters in this drama, and Henryk Ziomek maintains that the captured Spanish soldier referenced in the comedy constitutes the "real" Cervantes (Ziomek 470).

The author-as-prisoner is also mentioned in part one of *Don Quijote* in the story of the captive who makes brief mention of a fellow prisoner, "un soldado español, llamado tal de Saavedra," whose multiple attempts at escape "quedarán en la memoria de aquellas gentes por muchos años" (Cervantes Saavedra *Ingenioso* fol. 237r-v). Cervantes humorously lauds himself through the words of his fictional character who maintains that Saavedra's story is much more entertaining than his own. This comment, though laudatory of Cervantes's actions as a soldier, could be read as a self-criticism of his talent as an author of fiction, since his personal history is deemed more interesting than the story that he invents. The tale of the captive is also illuminating in so far as it paints the Mediterranean as a hotbed for plunder by Christian Europeans in addition to Ottoman Turks and Moors. Upon his return to Spain, the captive and his party are overtaken and robbed by French corsairs who thankfully spare their lives and facilitate their return to Spanish soil. The French receive a bad name in *El trato de Argel* as well, with seafaring Christians on the lookout for "algún bajel de Génova o de España, / o de otra nación, con que no fuese / francesa" (Cervantes Saavedra *Trato* act 2, vv. 501-3).

Other works of Cervantes, including his two poems written to the Spanish Armada— “Canción nacida de las varias nuevas que han venido de la católica armada que fue sobre Inglaterra” and its sequel “Canción segunda, de la pérdida de la armada que fue a Inglaterra”— reference historically significant maritime conflicts in which the author did not take part. These two poems reference the armada’s failed retaliatory action against the British after Sir Francis Drake’s devastating attack on Cádiz. As with Sayavedra’s appeal in *El trato de Argel* and the *Epístola* on which it was inspired, Cervantes urges Felipe II to approach the enemy with maximum force, in order to defeat once and for all “el pirata mayor del occidente” (Cervantes Saavedra *Poesías* vv. 27). In this sense, pirates of all sorts, whether Christian or Muslim, are seen by Cervantes as posing a grave threat to the Spanish Empire and as such should be treated with equal measures of force.

Part two of *Don Quijote* offers a more whimsical look at piracy with the story of the fair Morisco, the captain of a Turkish pirate ship that is captured off the Eastern coast of Spain in the province of Tarragona. The imagined actions of this fictional character follow in the tradition of Diego Ortuñez de Calahorra who related an episode about a female pirate in his tremendously popular chivalrous novel, *Espejo de príncipes y cavalleros* (1555). Since the *Quijote* in essence plays off of the chivalrous novel in order to ridicule its antiquated popularity and predictable tropes, the episode from the third book of *Espejo* was most likely a point of reference for Cervantes. As such, I will first begin with Ortuñez’s text.

Chapter (XVI) of *Espejo* relates the story of the Empress Claridiana who happened by chance upon a pirate attack in progress and decided to intervene in order to



come to the aid of a distressed lady. Dressed in full armor, Claridiana was taken for a man by the fierce pirate Cleónidas and the two engaged in combat for over an hour to determine the fate of the captive lady. The Empress was able to hold her own in battle without drawing suspicion about her sex. In fact, “los que los veían eran mucho maravillados de su grande fuerza y ardimiento, pareciéndoles los más fuertes caballeros que hubiesen visto” (González de Vega 65). Claridiana eventually prevails in the battle, killing Cleónidas and five of his men and freeing the captive lady.

Cervantes puts a further twist on an already unusual story line, because Ana Félix’s “lady in distress” is in fact a cross-dressed man. As it turns out, Ana Félix’s tale involves a double cross-dressing, because her fiancée, Don Gaspar Gregorio, “uno de los más gallardos y hermosos mancebos que se podía imaginar,” had been dressed in a Moorish woman’s habit in order to protect him from the Turkish sodomites (*Segunda fol.* 246v). Ana Félix maintains that “entre aquellos bárbaros turcos en más se tiene y estima un mochacho o mancebo hermoso que una mujer, por bellísima que sea” (*Segunda fol.* 247r). The gallant lady is deposed of her rescue mission by a group of sympathetic Spanish men who save don Gaspar from the perils of Islam. The following chapter finds him free from the Moorish woman’s habit and safe as well from the threat of performing a woman’s sexual role. The derogatory insinuation about the sex and sexuality of Muslims is reinforced in other works by Cervantes, such as *El trato de Argel*, in which one character refers to Muslims as a “secta fermentada” (*Trato Act 3 v.* 349).

Though Ana Félix is eventually proven to be a Christian woman, she is initially presumed to be an Islamic pirate, and her reception at the Spanish port resembles that of the real-life pirates, Anne Bonny and Mary Read, who would not be known for another

hundred years. Like Bonny and Read, Ana Félix is sentenced to death by hanging but ultimately spared the gallows. The pirate captain's sentence is initially stayed because the Viceroy, still believing him a man, finds Ana Félix "tan hermoso, y tan gallardo, y tan humilde" (Cervantes Saavedra *Segunda* fol. 245v). Those present are all surprised to hear the young man confess that he is actually a Christian woman who had been taken to Algiers by force and was attempting to secure a safe passage back to Spain for herself and her fiancée.

In addition to Ana Félix and Claridiana, there are two more Hispanic literary women of note that emerge in the Early Modern period whose stories involve cross-dressing and piracy. Interestingly, the two authors are themselves women who broke with the gender norms of their time. The first is Catalina de Erauso, the Basque aristocrat who escaped the convent and adopted a man's dress. After residing for a couple of years in Spain in the service of various masters, she set off for the new world where she was employed as a soldier and conquistador in Chile and Perú. Erauso's autobiography was not discovered or published until the nineteenth century, but her incredible exploits have been corroborated by historical record, with some doubt remaining about whether her autobiography is apocryphal or truly written in her hand.

Like her literary predecessors, Erauso is not a true pirate (at least not from the Spanish perspective that she writes from) but like Cervantes, she finds herself a captive on one of their ships after her vessel is sunk in a counterattack off the coast of Lima. The event corresponds to a successful assault by the fleet of Dutch pirate Joris Van Spilbergen in 1615, who managed to sink somewhere between one and four Spanish ships sent out to apprehend the interlopers. Their intentions could not have been very sinister, however,

for though they prevailed, they did not launch an attack on land or kill their prisoners, who were set free after twenty six days. Though Erauso claims to have been treated poorly, her only complaint is of the “*burlas i desprecios*” that she and her fellow men endured (Erauso *Vida* 96).

Erauso’s contemporary, María de Zayas, may not have cross-dressed in the literal sense, but she did appropriate a man’s role by taking up the pen, which she did with prowess (much unlike the former whose chief skill lay in armed combat). Furthermore, her writing often features strong women and cross-dressers, such as the beautiful Estela in her novella “*El juez de su causa.*” Estela, who had been betrayed and lured away from her homeland in Valencia is saved by the Prince of Fez (Morocco) from the impure intentions of her kidnappers. Having gained her freedom, Estela dresses as a man and sets out for Tunis, to help Charles V fight the pirate Barbarossa. The young woman becomes a distinguished soldier and highly esteemed favorite of the King.

All of these literary cases of female “pirates” from Ortúñez to Zayas are dissimilar from the twentieth century accounts inspired by Anne Bonny and Mary Read in that most of these brave and valiant women are pirate *fighters*, rather than pirates themselves. Cervantes’s heroine is neither, merely mistaken for a pirate because of the circumstances in which she arrives at Spanish shores (in a ship manned by Turks, then the chief enemy and aggressor in the Mediterranean). Nonetheless, these literary forbearers might be considered an inspirational element for twentieth century female pirates. Thus, contemporary authors have “pirated” the Early Modern models of piracy.

One very important aspect of the Early Modern “pirates” is that they are all cross-dressers who pass easily for men, and the revelation of their true sex comes as a shock to

those who have met them. In the context of their cross-dressing, their actions become even more admirable to their fictional contemporaries. They are admired, in fact, for the mere feat of passing successfully as men. Though there are no true female pirates from this literary epoch, I will argue in chapter two, that such women be considered “gender pirates” for their successful and unsanctioned appropriation of male identity. In the Early Modern period, the designation of these women as non-pirates is essential to their acceptance by literary characters and readers alike. Because pirates were unequivocally considered the enemy from the perspective of both peninsular and American Spaniards during this era, a true female pirate would by necessity be foreign and grotesque.

In the twentieth and twenty-first century, these literary prototypes are adopted and their identities fused with the female pirates Anne Bonny and Mary Read, resulting in cross-dressing women who commit acts of piracy. The political distance from the age piracy makes it possible for these women to be considered in a positive light, to be seen as feminist heroines of their time, despite the fact that they raided Spanish ports and ships. In fact, the stories of real and fictional female pirates are adopted into the national histories of Cuba, Mexico and Venezuela, as I will later argue. Furthermore, the loosening sexual norms for women allows the contemporary characters to be seen as sexually active. They are no longer universal virgins who managed to protect their chastity while dressed as men, but prostitutes, wives and lesbians with active sex lives. In this sense, they come to embody some of the identities of contemporary society, by expressing sentiments of gender dysphoria and sexual identification. Female pirates of contemporary literature, then, relate to power not just through physical strength, but also through sexuality.

Apart from cross-dressing bellicose women (which are of course, not the exclusive property of the pirate genre), another recurring character in pirate literature of the early modern period was sir Francis Drake, who was especially prominent in epic poetry of the colonies. Juan de Castellanos's "Discurso del Capitán Francisco Drake," published in the chronicle in verse, *Elegías de varones ilustres de Indias* (1589) lays out the history of Drake's nautical accomplishments, including his circumnavigation and his attacks on the Spanish Empire. Castellanos gives the most attention to Drake's 1586 attack on Cartagena (which is later related in Soledad Acosta de Samper's *Piratas en Cartagena*) and its devastating effects, describing the pirate as heretical and cruel. But the poem also contains harsh criticism of the colonial government as foolishly underprepared, overly confident and lazy. These unsavory characterizations led to the poem's censorship in 1591 (Gerassi-Navarro 40, 44-5). Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora's *Infortunios de Alonzo Ramírez* (1690) resuscitates such criticisms, but manages to do so less overtly. Unquestionably influenced by Castellanos's poem, Soledad Acosta de Samper makes almost identical critiques in her nineteenth century narration of Drake's attack.

Martín del Barco Centenera's epic poem *La Argentina* (1602), which relates the history of the future country oddly portrays Drake in glowingly positive terms. His only sin lies in the fact that he is Lutheran, which automatically makes him morally inferior, even if his actions are admirable and honorable. This contrast is apparent from Drake's introduction in the twenty-second song, in which the "noble caballero" and "buen soldado" is described with the following list of adjectives:

Astuto era, sagaz y muy artero,  
Discreto, cortesano y bien criado,

Magnánimo, valiente y animoso,  
Afable, y amigable y generoso.

Mas, como lo mejor y necesario  
Le falta, que es amor de Jesu-Cristo,  
Emprende de hacerse gran cosario,  
Y fúelo tal cual nunca se hubo visto. (245)

Juan de Miramontes y Zuázola's version of Drake in *Armas antárticas* (circa 1610) vacillates in its presentation of the pirate who is more noble and brave than his compatriot John Oxenham. Drake shows promise in the beginning of the poem when he vows to convert to Catholicism, but his admirable actions turn sour by the end of his tour.

Pirate literature of the Early Modern period culminates with Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora's controversial *Infortunios de Alonso Ramírez*, which is believed by some to be a legitimate chronicle authored by Alonso Ramírez and transcribed by Sigüenza y Góngora. Others believe it to be a work of fiction by the latter.<sup>7</sup> Regardless of its relative truthfulness, the story exposes the vulnerability of Spanish seamen who are expected to charter poorly armed ships in enemy territory (in this case the South Seas), leading often to the capture and indentured servitude of Spanish subjects. In essence, Sigüenza y Góngora's work makes an appeal similar to that of Cervantes almost one hundred years later. Filtered through the voice of the humble, even self-deprecating Alonso Ramírez, however, *Infortunios* is less overtly critical of the powers that be than Cervantes dared to be. Neither Ramírez nor his editor/author demand action of their sovereign, but the pitiful circumstances of the unlucky seaman expose the weakness and

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<sup>7</sup> Despite Aníbal González's 1983 call to drop the fact versus fiction debate, critics remained obsessed with debating the genre classification of *Infortunios* well into the nineties. Lucrecio Pérez Blanco's 1988 edition of *Infortunios* in essence agrees that the debate is futile as it is irresolvable, but nonetheless goes on to argue for its canonization as the first Latin American novel. There has been sporadic interest in the subject in recent years as well. See Aníbal González and Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora.

vulnerability of the would-be Spanish Empire. Ramírez's self-proclaimed ridiculous resistance against British pirates is one such instance of veiled criticism:

Dispuesto a la defensa como mejor pude con mis dos mosquetes y cuatro chuzos, llovían balas de escopeterías de los que en ella venían sobre nosotros, pero sin abordarnos. Y tal vez se respondía con los mosquetes haciendo uno la puntería y dando otro fuego con una ascua, y en el ínterin partíamos las balas con un cuchillo, para que, habiendo munición duplicada para más tiros, fuese más durable nuestra ridícula resistencia. (Sigüenza y Góngora 85-86)

The under-preparedness of the Spanish seaman is contrasted with the military might of the enemies (the British, French and Dutch) who are all well armed and can therefore fight each other as equals. To further make the case for action, the enemy's brutal, greedy and barbaric nature is emphasized as they engage in cannibalism, rob even while attempting to outrun a pursuer, and subject their prisoners to the cruelest of physical and psychological torture, which includes being force-fed human excrement.

## **Nineteenth Century**

Given the sparse literary production in Spanish during the eighteenth century, it is not surprising to note an absence of pirate literature from that period. In the nineteenth century, however, the pirate reemerged in a metamorphosed form, as the romantic hero embodying the ideals of liberty, individualism and defiance in a cruel and unjust world. José de Espronceda's celebrated poem "La canción del pirata" (1840) is a prime example of this tradition, and he might be considered the first in a long series of exiled authors (the rest of whom emerge in the twentieth century) to take an interest in the pirate. Espronceda's canonical poem is a classical representation of Spanish romanticism, and a mandatory reading for students of Hispanic literature at any level.

Exiled from Spain in 1826 for his involvement in a radical leftist political group, Espronceda effectively toured the circuit of European countries (England, Netherlands,

and France) once famous for the acts of piracy aimed at the Spanish Empire, and just as he had in Spain, organized and fought against absolutism. Perhaps it is his exposure to those cultures (and especially the British) that have traditionally venerated pirates that allows him to explore the subject in a positive and heroic light for the first time in the history of Hispanic letters. Certainly his experience with exile exposed him first hand to the sort of cultural isolation expressed by the poetic voice of his poem who claims only the sea as his homeland. Espronceda's pirate is no bitter exile; in fact he relishes in his individualism and celebrates his rejection of culture with its binding laws and religious edicts, singing:

Que es mi barco mi tesoro,  
que es mi dios la libertad,  
mi ley, la fuerza y el viento,  
mi única patria, la mar.

The poem also dispels the stereotype of the pirate as greedy and self-serving, since the pirate captain divides the booty equally among his men (as did the Buccaneers) and rejects the value of material wealth claiming: “sólo quiero / por riqueza / la belleza / sin rival” (vv. 63-66). Avarice is thus divorced from the pirate who in turn accuses the Imperial rulers of this same vice, because they engage in war “por un palmo más de tierra” (v. 38). Instead of greed, the pirate is motivated by power-lust, associating himself strongly with the masculine values of strength, valor and fearlessness.

Following Espronceda's example, much of the pirate literature emerging in the latter half of the nineteenth century consists of romantic narratives sympathetic to the pirate. Some, however, portray the pirate with much the same contempt as the authors of the colonial period—exalting the virtues of the defenseless colonists and detailing the excessive cruelties committed by pirates. Nina Gerassi-Navarro has convincingly argued



that the discrepancies in such pirate portrayals are due to post-independence political ideology and in particular the polarized debate over which European model to follow in fashioning the nation. Liberal factions adhered to the Anglo-Protestant “ethics of individualism and private enterprise,” while the conservatives reaffirmed their Spanish religious and cultural roots (Gerassi-Navarro 71). In such an environment,

[t]he problem in Spanish America soon became deciding to what extent the precepts and values of European countries (primary England and subsequently France) that were identified as the emblem of ‘progress’s could be transplanted to the Americas. This was the critical debate that divided most nations. Within the governing elites there was no consensus. Were Spanish Americans to be governed by a monarchy or a republic? Was slavery to be abolished? Was there to be one unified and centralized government, or were the provinces to be allowed a certain autonomy? What should the role of the Roman Catholic Church be in the new society, and what would relations with the Vatican be? Was should the role of education be? These questions highlighted the imperative need to consolidate a representative form of government and establish a specific political program. (Gerassi-Navarro 71)

The manifestation of such political debates gave these romantic novels a moralistic undertone with many narratives clearly differentiating good from evil. Those that were more ambiguous, such as Justo Sierra-O’Reilly’s *Filibustero*, nonetheless justify the pirate’s inhumane actions as a product of the abuses that he in turn faced as a mulatto in a racist society.<sup>8</sup> *Filibustero* is set in and around the vicinity of Campeche near the home of the Yucatec author. The character is most likely based on Diego de los Reyes, one of two historical pirates who went by that pseudonym. Both Diego de los Reyes and Diego Grillo were escaped slaves from Havana who joined up with pirates in the seventeenth century (Lane 71, 123). The more famous Diego de los Reyes became a captain of Dutch sea-rovers in the 1630s, and his attacks were recorded as far away as Portobelo. After a robbery in 1637, one Englishman told Diego’s story thus:

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<sup>8</sup> This incomplete novel written between 1841 and 1842 was not discovered or published until 1932.

This mulatto, for some wrongs which had been offered unto him from some commanding Spaniards in Havana, ventured himself desperately in a boat out to sea, where were some Holland ships waiting for a prize. With God's help getting unto them, he yielded himself to their mercy, which he esteemed far better than that of his own countrymen, promising to serve them faithfully against his own nation, which had most injuriously and wrongfully abused, yea, and whipped him in Havana, as I was afterwards informed. (quoted in Lane 71)

This historical synopsis is in keeping with Sierra O'Reilly's novel, in which the burden of responsibility for Diego el Mulato's violent actions is shifted from the individual to the society in which he lives, effectively vilifying the very victims of the pirate's violence.

Characteristic of nineteenth century narrative, Sierra O'Reilly layers a love story onto this probable historical model. Diego murders in cold blood and burns the city of Campeche to the ground, but is careful to save the beautiful Conchita. The young lady, who is ignorant of Diego's identity, secretly falls in love with him. When Diego el Mulato returns to sack the city again, he "kidnaps" the willing Conchita, who still does not suspect that he is the much-feared pirate, enemy of her homeland and murderer of her father. When the two are apprehended at sea, Conchita begs to be left to die with her "liberator." When Diego's identity is revealed, she goes mad.

Similar to Diego el Mulato, Puerto Rican author Alejandro Tapia y Rivera's protagonist takes up the pirate lifestyle and questions his faith because of the injustices he has witnessed. The title character of *Cofresí* (1876) reasons: "no he dejado de creer en Dios; pero no he creído firmemente, porque no he visto en el mundo siempre su justicia" (Tapia y Rivera 256). Cofresí is a virtuous pirate, who, along with his upstanding mate, Ricardo, treats women and children charitably and establishes ties with the Catholic Church. Prior to his execution, he sets aside his doubts and reaffirms the Catholic faith.

Tapia y Rivera is not generous in his portrayal of all pirates, however. The villains, Juancho and Caín are traitorous pirates of Cofresí's crew who rape, rob and plot murder out of greed for money and power. The novel also presents an exception in so far as Gerassi-Navarro's paradigm is concerned, as Puerto Rico had not achieved independence from Spain when *Cofresí* was published. It is most likely for this reason that the novel is excluded from her analysis. Though *Cofresí* cannot be considered a "fiction of nation building," emergent nationalism is nonetheless a feature of the text, and the ties between the pirate Cofresí and Puerto Rican identity are strengthened in twentieth century reinterpretations of the legend by Gustavo and Luís Palés Matos and Cayetano Coll y Toste. The novel is also unique in that it centers on a pirate who emerged in the nineteenth-century, when the practice was extremely uncommon. Most histories, in fact, cite the mid-eighteenth century as the definitive end of Caribbean piracy.

*Los piratas en Cartagena* (1886) deserves some attention here as it is the only negative example of piracy from this period. Similar to the narratives of the colonial period, Acosta de Samper's book is a hybrid genre between fiction and history with a lengthy historical introduction and footnoted sources. The volume consists of five episodes that feature different pirate attacks on the port cities of Cartagena and Portobelo between 1544 and 1739. The first four episodes are less than fifty pages in length, but the fifth is a short novel of one hundred pages divided into eleven chapters. Unlike the other nineteenth century narratives which bury political ideology in the plot, Acosta de Samper clearly reveals her disdain for pirates and her identification with Spain in the introduction:

La envidia, la emulación y el odio que el gran poderío de España en el nuevo mundo despertó entre las demás naciones europeas, se había traducido por

medio de ataques y vías de hecho: cosa natural en un tiempo recién emancipado de la barbarie y que acababa de salir de la época de transición llamada de la edad media. Aquellos ataques injustos contra España se pusieron en planta por ciertas asociaciones y compañías de piratas, corsarios, filibusteros, bucaneros y aventureros de diferentes naciones, y particularmente ingleses y franceses, los cuales, con el pretexto de auxiliar a su gobiernos y reyes—casi continuamente en guerra contra España—, se dieron a robar los tesoros que llevaban de las colonias a la madre patria, cometiendo al mismo tiempo innumerables desafueros y cruelísimas acciones en los puertos hispanoamericanos, como podía temerse de malandrines sin Dios ni ley. (xxv)

Despite this clear contempt for the pirate, some of her historical vignettes portray this figure in a more favorable light by tracing his embittered actions back to cruel punishments received by the hand of Spanish officials. Though she casts Spain as a victim in her introduction, Acosta is also quite critical of Spanish governance during the colonial period, describing one governor in particular as “perezoso y débil” (97). Such laziness, it seems, was a part of his cultural heritage as Spain’s “natural inercia” when it came to defending her territories is critiqued in subsequent episodes (155). On the whole, however, Acosta de Samper’s pirates are marred by greed and brutality which are contrasted against the virtue and innocence of their civilian victims. The pirates, “sedientos de sangre...y de riquezas,” kill and plunder mercilessly (40). Sympathy for the colonists is further stressed through romance and the treatment of women with *criollos* protecting their love interests at all costs and foreigners coercing, kidnapping or threatening the innocent woman.

### **Twentieth and Twenty First Centuries**

The earliest examples of pirate literature from the twentieth century include two poems and a short story by Puerto Rican authors Luis Palés Matos, his lesser known brother Gustavo Palés Matos and Cayetano Coll y Toste, all of which center on the pirate, Cofresí. Coll y Toste’s short story, which appeared in 1927 in a collection of Puerto

Rican legends, most likely inspired the nationalistic poetry of the Palés Matos brothers. The short story is quite different than Tapia y Rivera's novel in that it does away with the romantic plotline, emphasizing political and historical details instead. It contains sparse dialogue, an account of the final piratical attacks that led to Cofresí's capture, and a historical contextualization of key events, such as the strategic importance of certain ports and the motivations of the head hunters who set out to capture Cofresí. While international politics are glossed over by Tapia y Rivera, Coll y Toste is careful to point out, for example, that Cofresí is a Puerto Rican pirate whose predations were a menace to North American trade in the Antilles and Venezuela. As such, "el gobierno de Washington intervino y dio orden al Almirantazgo de castigar al pirata portorriqueño" (93). These details mark Cofresí's exceptionality, because he was not interrupting Spanish trade, and was, for all intents and purposes a Spanish subject himself, born on the island to a Spanish-*criolla* mother and a German father.

The dynamics of Caribbean piracy in the nineteenth century (the period in which the narrative is set) were quite a bit different than previous centuries, because *criollos* seeking independence took to the sea to fight against imperial rule, and Spain also authorized a number of privateering patents to help defend her threatened territories. In this sense, the pirate was no longer a foreigner and enemy of Spain, but an individual from within their own ranks. In his short lifetime, Cofresí was involved in both illegal and sanctioned missions that were regarded quite differently from the perspective of the Spanish crown, thus earning him the long list of titles (*marinero, bandolero, pirata y contrabandista*) in one recent biography (Cardona Bonet).

Luis Palés Matos draws on this lesser known period of piracy as a key

foundational element of Puerto Rican identity in the poem “Ten con ten.” The poem appeared in the anthology *Tuntún de pasa y grifería* (1937), a collection of poetry celebrating Afro-Caribbean rhythms and culture. In this style, “Ten con ten” describes the hybrid ancestry of European and African origin that came together to form Puerto Rican culture. The mixing of races and cultures, exemplified by European military might and African rhythms, constitutes for Palés an ancestral truce or a “ten con ten de abolengo” (v. 33). In the beginning of the poem, the pirate embodies this European ancestry with a description of Puerto Rico dressed “in pirate and Black”:

Estás, en pirata y negro  
mi isla verde estilizada,  
el negro te da la sombra  
te da la línea el pirata.  
Tambor y arcabuz a un tiempo  
tu morena gloria exaltan,  
con rojas flores de pólvora  
y bravos ritmos de bábula. (vv. 1-8)

But the cultural heritage becomes more specific by the end of the poem as Palés changes his terms to Spanish and African. Palés’s choice to have the pirate stand in for the Spaniard in the first stanza might seem odd to a reader unfamiliar with nineteenth century piracy or the story of Cofresí. The sea explorations, conquest and slave trade that Spain engaged in during the late fifteenth to seventeenth centuries do, however, have a piratical essence to them, especially when considered from the Native and African perspectives. It is therefore possible to imagine that in casting the Spaniard as pirate, Palés is making a statement about the dubious legitimacy of Spain’s naval operations, which led to the conquest of occupied lands and the trade in human bodies. Since there is no mention of Native populations, or even of slavery, for that matter, it is more likely that Palés refers here to the Roberto Cofresí and the local underground trade and naval conflict that

challenged Spanish authority.

Gustavo Palés Matos's epic poem "Romancero de Cofresí" is overtly inspired on the legendary Puerto Rican pirate and relates important details of his life accomplishments. The poem also contains a strong nationalistic fervor and the author charges Cofresí with being "símbolo de nuestra raza" (153), an exemplary national hero and a role model for other "machos de la patria" (16). The veracity of the story and the pirate's Puerto Rican origins are highlighted by the transcription of his baptismal and death records at the beginning and end of the poem. In the final send-off, the poetic voice addresses himself to Cofresí to express the importance of his story for the nation's patrimony:

Mi romance exprime el jugo  
De tu leyenda y tu fama,  
Y en coplas de asonante  
Lo siervo en aquestas páginas  
Para que mi pueblo un día,  
Lo beba... y le llegue al alma. (153)

It is clear from these final lines that Palés wants Cofresí's story to serve as an example for modern Puerto Ricans.

Published in the same year, María Luisa Bombal and Jorge Luis Borges's short stories on pirates are unique in the literature of the twentieth century in that they do not engage politics or nationalism.<sup>9</sup> Bombal's "Lo secreto" (1935) has elements of the fantastic and explores notions of existentialism and life after death. The plot involves a pirate ship that is sucked into a whirlpool and lands on the ocean floor. Coming to after the "accident," the pirates believe they have been beached and try in vain to get their vessel back to sea, but begin to notice strange things about their environment, like the

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<sup>9</sup> Borges's short story was first published in 1933 in the newspaper *Crítica*, but was not available to a wide readership until its publication in *La historia universal de la infamia* in 1935.

fact that the sails cast no shadow, the men leave no footprints and the sky “era exactamente el reflejo invertido de aquel demoníaco, arenoso desierto en que habían encallado” (67). Though the drowned men are identified as pirates, this detail is not essential to the plotline, except that these hardened men become soft in the afterlife, uttering spontaneous terms of affection to their own shock and awe. The cabin boy murmurs words of thanks, which are forbidden according to pirate law. And the captain calls the boy son, much to his own consternation.

Borges’s short story characteristically blends fact and fiction and includes long passages of quotations. Initially published in the newspaper *Crítica*, “La viuda Ching, pirata” (1933) and the other tales in this collection read more like pieces of journalism, with numerous quotes taken from sources that are cited at the end of the book. The stories—which with one exception are all based on the lives of infamous villains—are not always historically accurate and cannot be counted on as reliable sources. As the author himself has admitted in the prologue to the 1954 edition of his book, the pieces within “[s]on el irresponsable juego de un tímido que no se animó a escribir cuentos y que se distrajo en falsear y tergiversar (sin justificación estética alguna vez) ajenas historias” (Borges 10). Borges’s source in *La viuda* is Phillip Gosse’s *History of Piracy* (1932) which in turn quotes passages from Charles Johnson’s *A General History of the Pyrates* (1725). Though the episode focuses primarily on Ching Shih, a female pirate from the early nineteenth century in China, it is introduced by a couple of paragraphs about her predecessors, the female pirates Anne Bonny and Mary Read who operated a century before her in the Caribbean. Borges takes the liberty of describing the former as “una irlandesa resplandeciente, de senos altos y de pelo fogoso,” despite the fact that



there are no known physical descriptions of the duo (42). What is most curious, however, is that the Argentinean author makes no reference to the women as cross-dressers who passed as men. As I will argue in chapter two, Borges's brief introduction to the female pirates served as an inspiration for Hispanic authors at the turn of the twenty-first century, such as Laura Antillano, Carmen Boullosa, Zoé Valdés and Alberto Vázquez-Figueroa.

Mexican author Francisco Mancisidor's two novels on piracy have few stylistic or thematic similarities with previous pieces of twentieth-century pirate literature. However, *Lorencillo el pirata* (1949) does resuscitate some of the nationalistic fervor absent from Bombal and Borges's stories. *Lorencillo* is interesting because of its focus on Mexican history and culture and its exploration of the dynamics affecting Spanish and Dutch diplomatic relations during the sixteenth century. The novel begins as a beautifully written "cuadro de costumbres," detailing the sights, sounds, people, activities and conversations on a typical day in Veracruz in the 1940s. The introduction is strongly imbued with nationalistic fervor, revolving around education, work and historical architecture (such as the castle of San Juan de Ulúa). The student is regarded as "el futuro ciudadano" (27) who engages in "la ceremonia diaria que se rinde a la Enseña Nacional" (24). In this environment charged with national fervor and colonial heritage, the pirate is hyperbolically remembered as the backbone of all great empires, because in the function of privateers, they were able to make great economic and territorial gains for the sovereigns that they served. The narrator intones:

Los grandes imperios coloniales que existieron y existen de no importa qué nacionalidad, debieron su origen y su vida a estos hombres de mar, de corazón bien puesto, de gran arrojo, temeridad e indiferentes a toda fatiga, 'hombres de

hierro embarcados en buques de madera' y que tenían por lema: 'Honra sin barcos antes que barcos sin honra'. (39)

The story of the Dutch pirate Lorencillo is encapsulated in 1940s Veracruz with the aid of an old man who shares his historical knowledge with a group of tourists. The novel moves back and forth between the modern setting and the colonial pirate tale that again revolves around a romantic plot. Similar to the nineteenth century portrayals of pirates, and in particular, Tapia y Rivera's *Cofresí*, Lorencillo is exceptional in his profession. Though he is referred to as "sanguinario," "malo y cruel," his inherent goodness is revealed through his treatment of women who he always respected and protected from the advances of his less scrupulous companions (29, 33).

*Peter Wallace* (1958) shifts the focus away from Mexican history and centers instead on the founding of Belize by Anglo pirates. While there is no record of the specific pirate featured in the novel, English and Scottish buccaneers, known as "Baymen" are believed to have first settled the coast of Belize in 1638, using the territory as a base from which to attack Spanish ships, and later as source of logwood which was highly valued in the textile industry. The novel lacks a romantic plotline and the literary devices that make *Lorencillo* stand out, and the nationalistic rhetoric is also absent from the text. It can be best described as an action or adventure novel involving shipwrecks, stowaways, naval conflicts, and diplomatic and armed struggles with Native peoples.

The steady trickle of pirate literature from the beginning of the twentieth century dries up completely for a good thirty years only to come back with a boom in the 1990s. As I will argue in the following chapters, many of these newer narratives use the pirate to explore issues of identity pertinent to life in the age of globalization. To place this in the

context of pirate literary history, though identities have been explored in all pirate literature, the late twentieth century is the first time that Otherness (gender, sexual, linguistic and religious) is so deliberately adopted into the story of “who we are,” and the first time that national myths and norms are challenged. If Borges related the histories of female pirates in the early twentieth century, he certainly made no claim to their being Argentinean. In contrast, Zoé Valdés incorporates Anne Bonny and Mary Read into Cuban history in her 2003 novel (see chapter 3). Mancisidor’s pirate novels explore national identity, but ultimately embrace a nationalism that is defined by pre-established normalizing institutions, such as the public school, and activities that otherwise highlight the “homogenous, empty time” that leads to the illusion of national unity (Benjamin 265). Another example of such deliberate attempts to encourage national identification is the collection of Cofresí literature that celebrates oneness through shared mythology. The narratives that I study in depth in chapters three through five challenge the constructs of Latin American nationalism by queering these types of national myths, as Carmen Boullosa does in *Duerme* (see chapter 4).

What is immediately apparent when reading these narratives is the postcolonial subtext that leads to an exploration of the historical roots of Latin American nations in order to discover and redefine “who we are.” Characteristic of this genre is the inclusion of minorities and marginalized subjects in the history of the “discovery,” colonization and liberation of Spanish America. Contemporary pirate narratives also admit non-Hispanic subjects into national histories, thus defying the traditional myths of nation formation (*pace* Doris Sommer), which were founded in conceptions of peaceful, productive bi-racial unions. Such re-examinations of national identity are characteristic

of those that took place across Latin America in reaction to the *Quinto Centenario* (Rubert de Ventós).

For the first time in the long history of Hispanic pirate literature, we encounter female characters with depth and physical and emotional strength, who are not defined solely by their bodies. The male pirate, for his part is no longer a one-dimensional hyper-masculine individual who uses his strength and valor for good or evil, but may be effeminate, maternal or homosexual-leaning.

Carmen Boullosa's three novels on piracy from 1991, 1992 and 1994 all engage issues of gender and sexual deviance. As I will explore in depth in chapter five, the main character—Smeeks—of the first two novels, *Son vacas, somos puercos* and *El médico de los piratas*, has several homosexual relationships and falls in love with women who resemble men or have some sort of masculine energy. Though homosexuality is practiced regularly in the all-male communities in which he operates, the men are expected to publicly consummate their heterosexuality with prostitutes and Spanish ladies who are gang raped by the crew. Smeeks reluctantly conforms to these expectations, but another pirate who cross-dresses as a woman and sashays through Maracaibo in a Spanish lady's garb is ostracized and eventually murdered by the rest of the men. The burgeoning sense of place and belonging is also explored in *Son vacas* as the pirate-narrator claims the Island of Tortuga as home.

Boullosa's third novel, *Duerme*, which is analyzed in depth in chapter four, centers on a cross-dressing female pirate of French origin who is forced to settle in colonial Mexico and resume more feminine modes of life. She expresses a strong desire to live as a man, snubs heterosexual advances and has an affair with an Italian woman

and a very intimate, magical friendship with an Indigenous woman. *Duerme* plays with some of the national myths of Mexico, most notably the Malinche myth which is queered in the novel.

Interestingly, Laura Antillano's "Tuna de mar" (1991), published the same year as Carmen Boullosa's *Son vacas, somos puercos*, has a character in common with the novel: the historical pirate captain Jean-David Nau, alias L'Ollonais (or *el Olonés*), named after his city of origin in France. The son of *el Olonés* is a central character in Laura Antillano's story and the posthumous actions of the infamous French pirate are remembered and repeated by Juan David the younger. The title story in her collection of shorts, "Tuna de mar" constitutes an intriguing palimpsest of gender deviance and convention. The plot revolves around a young prostitute, Ana María (or Tuna) who is saved from a state-sanctioned religious ceremony involving public flagellation by Juan David the younger. The narrator, Cristóbal Martín, also helps to save Tuna from the ceremony and finds himself in a duel with Juan David over the rights to the young woman. The result is that Cristóbal is defeated and taken on board the ship along with Tuna, who is dressed as a man. After many months of sailing together, Tuna gives birth to either Cristóbal or Juan David's child. Though Tuna remains Juan David's secret lover, she and Cristóbal also have occasional sexual contact. Tuna and Juan David are both captured and publicly hung, but Cristóbal escapes the assault with the newborn baby, who he raises as his own.

In this complicated plotline, the macho duel over the right to a woman results in the woman's masculinization and one man becoming the sole caretaker to an infant that may not even be his own. This situation fulfils Ana María's secret childhood fantasy, to

become Joan of Arc, who she dreamed of “una y otra vez imaginándosela en la escena de quema pero con su propio rostro, mártir incomprendida para futuro reconocimiento en la cúspide de la fama” (Antillano 11). This fantasy indeed becomes reality, as Tuna (known as José María) has a price put on her head for acts of piracy, and even among a fierce crew of pirates is respected and feared. The occasional suspicion about José María’s true identity is laid to rest when she is challenged and prevails in a duel, just as did Mary Read.

The story is firmly grounded in Maracaibo, Venezuela, Tuna and Cristóbal’s place of origin, and the site of one of L’Ollonais’s most famous and profitable attacks (related by Alexander Esquemelin in his eighteenth century history of piracy and recreated by Boullosa in *Son vacas*). Cristóbal also professes his allegiance to Tuna, Maracaibo and the local saint, the Virgin of Chiquinquirá: “me la tomo mía, me tomo mía a la Tuna como si fuera su padre y Diómedes su abuelo, me tomo como mía a Maracaibo, a Gibraltar, a la mismísima virgen de la Chiquinquirá” (12). In this passage, the character’s sense of place and cultural affiliation is mediated through his relationship to Tuna. By imagining her as his own, he also adopts Maracaibo as his homeland and the Virgin of Chiquinquirá as his patron saint—a virgin who is venerated to this day in Maracaibo and can be considered the Venezuelan analogue of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Like “Tuna de mar” and *Duerme*, Alberto Vázquez-Figueroa’s two pirate novels, *Piratas* (1996) and *León Bocanegra* (1998) also center around a female pirate, though not a cross-dresser. The Canarian author’s pirate novels differ from all others of this generation in that they are not based on any historical figures. L’Ollonais, Bonny and Read do, however, receive brief mention in awkward historical asides. Vázquez’s novels

are somewhat of a throwback to nineteenth century portrayals of piracy, because they resuscitate the good versus evil dichotomy. In *Piratas*, for example, Sebastián and his sister Celeste play the roles of the honorable pirates who are dragged into the profession against their will and use it for the better good. Specifically, they become involved in the abolitionist movement, liberating slave ships and fighting to end trade all together in West Africa. Vázquez's characters flaunt the type of gallant heroism displayed in Espronceda's famous poem, and it is easy to imagine that the contemporary author was inspired by the nineteenth century poet.

Though both novels feature a female pirate and champion the antislavery movement, they also contain racist and antifeminist undertones. *Piratas* features either oversexed seductresses and traitors or chaste, ethereal women, such as the aptly named Celeste. On the side of evil is Celeste and Sebastián's mother, a woman of indigenous origin who prostitutes herself to an older, wealthy man, resulting in the banishment and near death of her husband and son and the perpetual enclosure of her daughter. *León Bocanegra*, which ends at the same juncture as its prequel, is somewhat racist in its comparison of the brutalities faced by white versus black African slaves. The novel tells the story of a shipwrecked European, León Bocanegra, who is captured and sold into the slave trade in North Africa. The escapee makes his way over the mountains to Lake Chad and eventually to the west coast of Africa where he meets and falls in love with Celeste. Bocanegra's slave owners, the Arab Fenéc, are considered to be much more brutal than the Latin American colonists with their black African slaves.

The final novel from this period that centers on female pirates is Zoé Valdés's *Lobas de mar* (2003) (chapter 3). Though many, if not all of the female pirates in

twentieth century Hispanic literature were inspired by Anne Bonny and Mary Read, this is the only one that specifically centers on these characters. Other works of fiction, such as Borges's "Viuda" and Vázquez-Figueroa's *Piratas*, mention these two historical figures and some of the details of their lives as a brief contextualization of for other female pirates. As I will later argue, Valdés ties the lives of these two Anglo pirates into the history of Cuba and identifies with them as exiles of a sort who find a new homeland in the sea. The overwhelming interest in female pirates in the nineties and early two thousands is contextualized in chapter two, which closely examines the main inspiration for these characters, the female pirates Anne Bonny and Mary Read and the fascination with their lives throughout the centuries.

Other novels from the decade of the nineties include Luis Britto García's *Pirata* (1998) and Daniel Cichero's *El corsario del Plata* (1999), which do not focus overtly on women, gender or sexuality. They share in common their focus on real-life pirates who had an impact on the history of Latin America. Britto Garcia's baroque novel is divided into four sections focusing on the lords (*señores*) of the water, death, peaks and heavens. Each of these four books focuses on a different historical episode, though all are interconnected. Book one focuses on the expedition of Sir Walter Raleigh into the Orinoco River valley (Venezuela). Book two gives the history of Tortuga, its government and the buccaneering expeditions set forth from the island (including those of captain Morgan and others related by Alexander Esquemelin). Book three offers a history of the Garífuna in Central America, and book four recounts the story of the mutiny on the pirate ship *Le Victoire*. Among other things, Britto García engages the complicated enterprise of piracy and its embeddedness in the history of colonization. As



one of his characters, the one-time governor of the Island of Tortuga, Levasseur, puts it:

La piratería no es un delito, sino un negocio. Al principio sólo se invierte lo más barato: vidas humanas, carne de horca arrojada al patíbulo del mar. Después hay que tener en cuenta la duración de los activos, el menoscabo por desgaste, el porcentaje para almacenar el botín en puerto seguro, la variación de los botines. Si se acaba la plata que sacan los esclavos caeremos sobre el tabaco que siembran los esclavos y si cae el precio del tabaco, destilaremos el aguardiente de la caña que los esclavos cosechan. La piratería es sólo el preámbulo de la instalación de colonias, o sea, la esclavitud... Así como del prostíbulo nace la respetabilidad de las familias, el pirata y el esclavo son el abono de la prosperidad de los negocios, es decir, de los imperios. (Britto García 171)

Daniel Cichero's *El corsario del Plata* is historical fiction at its best. The novel focuses on the pirate Hipólito Bouchard, a native of France who settled in Buenos Aires and was later sanctioned by the Argentinean government (then called "Las Provincias Unidas del Río de la Plata") to weaken the Spanish rule over Peru and Mexico and later to undermine the empire by targeting Spanish trade routes in Asia. This second voyage, which was initially disastrous, culminates in a tremendous success, both in wealth and strategic attacks on the Spanish Main. The captain, however, loses the entirety of his booty and many of the structural elements of his ship upon his arrival in the allied port of Valparaíso, when one of his traitorous officials teams up with a British captain to accuse him of piracy. A key feature of the novel is the evolution of the ship's crew as the original English, French and Argentinean members die or defect and are replaced by Malaysians, freed African slaves and Hawaiians who voluntarily join the mission. These new members surprisingly exhibit great patriotism for a country they have never seen (Argentina). Their interest in Bouchard's mission stems from their experiences with cultural domination and their interest in fighting to eradicate any imperial power, even one that is not an immediate threat to their people. The resemblance of the ships crew to a nation of immigrants is further highlighted by Bouchard's claim to the self governance

and autonomy of his ship. In defiance of the mandates of allied ships, he claims “en este barco, el gobierno...soy yo” (163).

In this historical review of Hispanic pirate literature from the Middle Ages onward, we can see that pirates are unanimously portrayed in a negative light until the mid-nineteenth century. Romantic sentiments and the independence of Latin American nations led to a reevaluation of the pirate who could be a valiant romantic hero, an inherently good person turned bad by social stigma, or, less often, the same unforgivable villain that lurked in the pages of Early Modern literature. The twentieth century explores piracy primarily as an aspect of national history and identity, admitting a much broader array of pirates than those referenced in colonial or nineteenth century literature. Another notable aspect of these newer narratives is the casting of the woman as pirate and the interrogation of gender and sexuality and nationality as they apply to the ambiguous figure of the pirate. In sum, literary portrayals of piracy use the pirate’s inherent ambiguity to reflect upon the political and national debates that are going on at the time of composition. The true figure of the pirate is thus appropriated by Hispanic authors to in order to engage with politics, power, and national identity, and eventually sexual identity in modern times.

## Appendix: Chronology of Hispanic Pirate Literature

### Medieval Narrative

Diéz de Games, Gutierre. "Cómo la reina Dorotea hubo batalla con los africanos, que la esperaban en el Estrecho, y cómo los venció con arte matemática y nigromántica." *El victorial*, 1435.

### Colonial Poetry

Juan de Castellanos. "Discurso del Capitan Franciso Draque." *Elegias de varones ilustres de Indias*, 1589.

Martin del Barco Centera. *La Argentina*, 1602.

Silvestre de Balboa Troya y Quesada. *Espejo de paciencia*, 1608.

Juan de Miramontes y Zuázola. *Armas antárticas*, circa 1610.

### Golden Age Drama

Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. *El trato de Argel*, circa 1582.

\*Lope de Vega. *Los cautivos de Argel*, 1599.

Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. *Los baños de Argel* 1615.

### Colonial and Golden Age Narrative

Diego Ortúñez de Calahorra. "De cómo la doncella Caridiana abatió al corsario Cleónidas." *Espejo de príncipes y cavalleros*, 1555.

Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. *La Galatea*, 1585.

José de Acosta. *Peregrinación de Bartolomé Lorenzo*, 1586.

Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de La Mancha*, 1605.

—. "La española inglesa," *Novelas ejemplares*, 1613.

—. *Segunda parte del ingenioso caballero don Quijote de La Mancha*, 1615.

—. *Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda*, 1617.

Catalina de Erauso. *Vida i sucesos de la monja alférez*, 1625.

María de Zayas y Sotomayor. "De amores, traiciones y valentías." *Novelas amorosas, y ejemplares*, 1637.

Juan Rodríguez Freyle. *El carnero*, 1638.

Pedro de Solís y Valenzuela. *El desierto prodigioso y prodigio del desierto*, circa 1645.

Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora. *Infortunios de Alonzo Ramírez*, 1690.

### 19th Century Poetry

José de Espronceda. "Canción del pirata." *Poesías*, 1840.

### 19th Century Novel

Vicente Fidel Lopez. *La novia del hereje o la inquisicion de Lima*, 1854.

Soledad Acosta de Samper. *Los piratas en Cartagena*, 1886.

Eligio Ancona. *El filibustero*, 1864.

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\*There has been some debate about the authorship of this work. See Rodríguez López-Vázquez (209).

Justo Sierra O'Reilly. *El filibustero*, circa 1842.  
Alejandro Tapia y Rivera *Cofresí*, 1876.

### **20<sup>th</sup> Century Poetry**

Luís Palés Matos "Ten con ten." *Tuntun de pasa y grifería*, 1937.  
Gustavo Palés Matos *Romancero de Cofresí*, 1942.

### **20<sup>th</sup> Century Short Story**

Coll y Toste "El pirata Cofresí." *Leyendas de Puerto Rico*, 1927.  
María Luisa Bombal. "Lo secreto." *La última niebla*, 1935.  
Borges "La viuda Ching, pirata." *Historia universal de la infamia*, 1935.  
Laura Antillano. "Tuna de mar." *Tuna de mar*, 1991.

### **20<sup>th</sup> Century Novel**

Francisco Mancisidor. *Lorencillo el pirata*, 1949.  
Francisco Mancisidor. *Peter Wallace el bucanero caribeño*, 1958.  
Carmen Boullosa. *Son vacas, somos puercos: filibusteros del mar caribe*, 1991.  
—. *El médico de los piratas: bucaneros y filibusteros en el Caribe*, 1992.  
Alejandro Paternain. *Señor de la niebla: de cómo el corsario Etienne Moreau invadió el litoral atlántico uruguayo y de la guerra que contra él promovió el Gobernador Zavala*, 1993.  
Carmen Boullosa. *Duerme*, 1994.  
Alberto Vázquez-Figueroa. *Piratas*, 1996.  
Luis Britto Garcia. *Pirata*, 1998.  
Alberto Vázquez-Figueroa. *León Bocanegra*, 1998.  
Daniel Cichero. *El corsario del Plata: Hipólito Bouchard y su viaje alrededor del mundo*, 1999.  
Zoé Valdes. *Lobas de mar*, 2003.

## Chapter 2

# Gender Piracy across the Ages: The Shifting Representations of Anne Bonny and Mary Read in Literature, Art and Film

### Introduction: Theories of Crossing

Over the past decade what I will refer to as “trans” studies has received special attention from feminist scholars, offering new perspectives and understandings on the gender question. I employ the prefix “trans” as an umbrella term relating to transvestites, transsexuals, drag queens and kings, cross-dressers, hermaphrodites, members of the intersex community, and persons otherwise difficult to pin down to one end or the other of the male-female dichotomy. By inhabiting a space or identity in between male and female, these individuals, whether intentionally or not, problematize traditional conceptions of sex and gender that would relegate them to one pole or another (and not to a transitional or border space in between). In addition to theory, which I will review below, the interest in “trans” issues has created an explosion of feature films and documentaries in recent years, including many award winning films.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The most notable titles from France, Spain, Argentina and the US include: *Ma vie en Rose* (1997), *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), *Todo sobre mi madre* (1999), *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001) (which has already become a cult film, with audience participation a la *Rocky Horror Picture Show* at public screenings), *Transamerica* (2005), and *XXY* (2007). Some recent documentaries are *Transgeneration* (05), *Gender Rebel* (06), and *Red without Blue* (07). There have also been a number of radio documentaries, especially

The seeds of “trans” theory can be traced back to the nineteenth century “sexologists,” or physicians who began to medicalize sexual behavior. Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, in particular, understood what we now call homosexuality to be “a species of hermaphroditism” (quoted in Hirschfeld *Homosexuality*) best described by the Latin phrase *anima muliebris in corpore virili inclusa*, or having a “woman’s soul trapped in a man’s body” (Ulrichs).<sup>2</sup> Thus, the very notion of homosexuality was bound up with the idea of transgenderism. Ulrichs’s “trapped” metaphor has been adopted by modern members of the “trans” community even though many do not consider themselves to be homosexual.

Modern “trans” theorists, such as Judith Butler, Marjorie Garber, Judith Halberstam, Cressida Heyes, Esther Newton, Sandy Stone, and Susan Stryker, often base their writings on their personal experience with some sort of “trans” identity (be that intersexuality, transitioning to another gender or sex, performing as a man, or being butch). While all of these authors have made significant contributions to defining “trans” issues, my review of theory here is limited to those scholars whose work speaks best to the theoretical subjects of this chapter, the eighteenth century cross-dressing female pirates, Anne Bonny and Mary Read. These historical figures, whose lives and artistic representations I will analyze in detail below, serve as the inspiration for the novels that I will study in chapters three and four.

In *Vested Interests* (1992) Marjorie Garber coined the term “transvestite effect” to articulate the “centrality of the transvestite as an index of category destabilization” in a

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on PRI’s *This American Life*. See especially (“Somewhere Out There Act 2: Tom Girls”; “Testosterone Act 2: Infinite Gent”; “What Is this Thing? Act 2: View From the Other Half”)

<sup>2</sup> From his 1862 article *Forschungen über das Rätsel der mann männlichen Liebe*. It is notable that Ulrich’s preferred terminology “Urning” for a man and “Dioning” for a woman, are borrowed from Plato’s *Symposium* (see Hirschfeld *Homosexuality* 38-40).

variety of social realms in addition to gender (36). She went on to explain that “[o]ne of the cultural functions of the transvestite is precisely to mark this kind of displacement, substitution, or slippage: from class to gender, gender to class; or, equally plausibly, from gender to race or religion” (36-7). This principle is particularly instructive when examining representations of the cross-dressing pirates, Anne Bonny and Mary Read, all of which have a tendency to queer social categories, even when their intention is to normalize.

In addition to indicating category crises in other social arenas, transvestism has the capacity to question originality—to almost unwittingly challenge our assumptions of what is “real” or “original.” Taking this a step further, it might, indeed, question “the very notion of an original” (Butler *Gender* 175). Judith Butler explains that “just as the psychoanalytic notion of gender identification is constituted by a fantasy of a fantasy [...] so gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin” (*Gender* 175). In Nelly Richard’s words, this might amount to “a parody of the parody of a parody” with no true original after which these layered caricatures are modeled (46). This questioning of originality or truth is also essential to a discussion of representations of Anne Bonny and Mary Read, for the boundaries between fact and fiction are often been blurred in historical accounts as well as in literary ones.

Richard’s account is particularly helpful in illuminating the nexus between gender and structures of authority, such as state apparatuses, because unlike Butler’s analysis which focuses solely on the implications of cross-dressing for the category of gender, Richard discusses instances of drag that took on the function of political and cultural critique. The majority of examples in Richard’s analysis come from 1980s Chile under

the Pinochet dictatorship, when the gay aesthetic exploded onto the art scene. Richard promotes the idea that transvestism was a form of resistance that challenged dichotomous conceptions of gender at a time when the populace and government were “gendered” by their social roles. In Richard's analysis, the Pinochet regime was active/dominant/male while the populace was passive/submissive/female. As a result, the work that the transvestite did in this time period to highlight “the failings of uniform(ed) and uniforming genders, dissolving their faces and façades into a doubly gendered caricature that shattered the mold of dichotomous appearances,” not only challenged conceptions of gender, but also those of political power (41). My analysis of the female pirates will similarly show that the nation is challenged when women cross-dress and usurp male power.

Judith Halberstam’s “trans” theory is significantly different from Butler’s and Richard’s, in that it focuses on gender performances (both conscious and unconscious) in biological females. In *Female Masculinity*, she urges us to recognize that “masculinity does not belong to men, has not been produced only by men, and does not properly express male heterosexuality” (241). On the contrary, “what we call ‘masculinity’ has also been produced by masculine women, gender deviants, and often lesbians” (241). Much of Halberstam’s analysis does not focus on what I (or most likely she) would call “trans” issues, but instead on the pervasiveness of performative masculinity in women. Her chapter on drag kings, however, is instructive to my discussion because it centers on women consciously imitating masculinity and effectively challenging “the realness and the naturalness of both the male body and its signifying effects,” which is key to my analysis of the female pirate (234).



On stage, the drag king faces the challenge of proving the theatricality of masculinity and turning it into humor, a task much more difficult than female impersonation, which is aided by the fact that femininity already “reeks of the artificial” (234). Responding to Butler (or more specifically to Esther Newton’s recent refutation to Butler), Halberstam has coined the term “kinging” as the drag king’s version of camp (which is the property of drag *queens*).<sup>3</sup> “Kinging” is a much subtler humor than camp, marked often “by restraint and containment” (238). This applies to cross-dressers as well as stage performers. As we will see in the following section, representations of the female-to-male cross-dressers, Anne Bonny and Mary Read, are not so much humorous as titillating at their best and fear provoking at their worst. The humor that does manifest itself is produced by the failures in their performance of masculinity—by the femininity that shines through—which only *reinforces* the myth that masculinity is “real” and inimitable. The modern reader, however, may also find some humor in the antiquated versions of masculinity that are performed by the two women.

So far, my discussion of “trans” theory has been limited to the issue of gender, but I have chosen this term in part because it lends itself to other theoretical issues pertinent to the study of pirates, namely, the transatlantic. As with transgenderism, my usage of the term implies a continual movement and negotiation between opposing locations, rather than a one-way crossing, and also a capacity to occupy an in-between space or “middle passage” as Paul Gilroy puts it, which in this instance applies to the extra-national territory of the ocean. For my study on pirates, Gilroy’s “image of ships in

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<sup>3</sup> Newton is quoted in Halberstam as refuting the notion that butch “performances” are the equivalent of drag queen camp. Her personal experience with fifties and sixties bar culture taught her that “butch-femme was not...ironic, not a camp, and certainly not, as Judith Butler has suggested, a parody, at least not then” (237).

motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean as a central organising symbol” is quite apt, and not just because “[s]hips immediately focus attention on the middle passage,” but also because the ship (“a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion”) becomes a species of wandering homeland for pirates, who are more likely to *linger* (in a “vortical” fashion) rather than simply *cross* seas and oceans (Gilroy 4; Deleuze and Guattari 52).

Though it is a very different context from what it was intended to describe, I want to apply Gilroy’s preferred term—“double consciousness” (borrowed from W.E.B DuBois)—to the situation of these female pirates. I find the concept useful because the female pirates do indeed experience a double consciousness of sorts, in both a gendered and spatial-national sense (a “doubled double consciousness,” if you will); they culturally inhabit both male and female subcultures with their different codes of conduct, and also inhabit the cultural space in between the Americas and Europe. This understanding of the female pirates will be especially useful in my reading of *Duerme* (chapter four), because, like DuBois, the female pirate who is the protagonist of this novel comes to “mean” something different in differing cultural contexts. That is to say that her identity shifts when she enters a new cultural and political space.

If it is not already clear, this chapter centers on figures who cross or transgress more than one type of barrier between dichotomies—male/female, the old world and the new. The cross-dressing female pirates find a home in the interstices between gender and nation, ultimately questioning the stability of both of these notions. It is in this spirit that I coin the term “gender pirate,” which I use in the title of this chapter and elsewhere in

the dissertation. Ann Bonny and Mary Read, I will propose, are pirates of gender, in addition to literal pirates who rob and pillage in the Caribbean.

## **Cross-Dressing in Historical Perspective**

While “trans” studies is a relatively new field of critical research, individual members of what might now be termed “trans” communities have garnered fascination for centuries. At no time or place in Western history did cross-dressing earn more attention than in Early Modern Europe. The Renaissance was a time of great social and physical movement. Social structures that had remained static for hundreds of years began to break down as capitalist economies developed, allowing for individuals to rise and/or fall in social rank throughout a lifetime based on their accrual or loss of capital gain and the titles of nobility that might be purchased with said capital. One was no longer born into a destiny, profession or lifestyle, but had some influence over the course their life would take. At the same time, explorations and discoveries of other continents added another horizon to the possibilities for social movement. Individuals could now redefine themselves and potentially amass great personal wealth by immigrating to the New World where they came into contact with alien cultures and landscapes.

It is no accident that during this time of great social flux, gender crossing became a trope in the literatures of England, France, Italy and Spain, partially in response to the reality that women were more frequently taking up the male habit in order to glean some of the social benefits available to men, but also in part as a metaphor for the blurring and crossing of what were once fixed and static bodies and identities. Though cross-dressing during the Early Modern period has typically been conceived of as an aberration—with

each individual singled out for their exceptional, non-normative behavior—some contemporary scholars have suggested that these activities were so common that they should be reclassified as a “tradition” in Early Modern Europe.<sup>4</sup> If these crossings produced anxiety on the one hand, as indicated by the sumptuary laws that arose to regulate and forestall the movement of class and gender, they produced fascination on the other.<sup>5</sup> Individuals exhibiting characteristics of both sexes became not only freakish spectacles, but also sources of aesthetic pleasure. The attractiveness of effeminate men in Early Modern Spain was expressed most famously in Tirso de Molina’s *comedia*, *Don Gil de las calzas verdes* (1615), in which the female-to-male cross-dresser wins the attention of many young women who admire “his” delicateness, and longingly describe “him” as made of crystal, pearls and emeralds (Molina vv. 115, 914-83). Women admired the fair, soft skin and beardless faces of female-to-male cross-dressers and eunuchs, perhaps in part because these features were associated with the upper classes.

During this time, a dyad of female-to-male cross-dressers emerged that captured the interest and imagination of Early Modern subjects from the English-speaking world. Their story, originally exposed in the media, would continue to inspire a vast array of literary and artistic representations throughout the centuries. In recent years, artistic and critical interest in these figures has transcended cultural and linguistic boundaries, offering yet another dimension to the multiple crossings they staged in life. Anne Bonny and Mary Read are well known now as the cross-dressing female pirates of

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<sup>4</sup> For an excellent if brief critical overview on this reclassification see Rudolph Dekker and Lotte van de Pol.

<sup>5</sup> For more information on sumptuary laws or dress codes see Marjorie Garber.

the Caribbean, but their story until recent years has been largely ignored in the Spanish speaking world.<sup>6</sup>

As early as 1933, Jorge Luis Borges featured this cross-dressing duo in the introduction to his short story “La viuda Ching, pirata,” which centered on a legendary female pirate from Southeast Asia. Borges’s story undoubtedly brought greater awareness of Anne Bonny and Mary Read to the Spanish speaking world, yet interest in these two figures was not taken up *en masse* until the nineteen-nineties by authors such as Laura Antillano, Alberto Vázquez-Figueroa, Carmen Boullosa, and Zoé Valdés (chapter 1). These pirate fictions vary a great deal in their adherence to or deviance from the details of the Bonny/Read story. Valdés’s novel offers the most literal interpretation of the original, calling her female pirates by their historical names and dramatizing the facts that had been previously published in Anglo accounts about their lives. The female pirates of Antillano’s short story and Vázquez-Figueroa’s novels on the other hand, are of creole-Spanish origin, while Boullosa’s cross-dressing pirate originates from France. Despite these vast differences, no matter what they are called or where they come from, all these characters were undoubtedly inspired by the Anglo duo to some degree as Bonny and Read are the best known female pirates of the Western World, and the only ones whose existence has entered the historical record.

This cross-cultural interest in transvestites traditionally perceived to “belong” to another’s cultural history has not just flowed one way. At the same time that Hispanic authors have taken marked interest in the Anglo pirates, the stories of Spanish cross-dressers and hermaphrodites have attracted attention in the English-speaking world. In a

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<sup>6</sup> Anne Bonny and Mary Read’s plight was made public in a pamphlet advertising their trials, the outcomes of which were reported in the *Boston Gazette*.

1996 (re)translation to English, the canonical autobiography of Catalina de Erauso (alias the lieutenant nun or *la monja alférez*) is sold to the American public via a somewhat propagandistic use of minoritizing language. The title, which is full of anachronisms, advertises itself as the *Memoir of a Basque Transvestite in the New World*, at once legitimizing the story as “true” (a memoir), while emphasizing the author’s minority status as not just a transvestite, but a Basque one at that. In actuality, Erauso’s Basque origins have very little bearing on her story. Much more important is the (unadvertised) fact that she was a member of the aristocracy. Is this piece of information left out because it is not a good sell?

Erauso’s story at its heart bears an almost startling similarity to Mary Read’s because it centers on a young woman who crossed over to the New World disguised as a man in order to conceal her identity and gain the privileges (namely freedom of movement) afforded to men. Like Read, her crossing involves a stint as a soldier, a fact that—along with their classification as sexually chaste—allows their transgression to be viewed as socially acceptable, even admirable. Mary Read is eventually punished by the law; however it is not for her cross-dressing behavior per-se, but for her suspected acts of *piracy*. Unlike Anne Bonny and Mary Read however, Erauso was not a pirate but a “perfect colonialist” as Michele Stepto has noted (Erauso *Lieutenant* xli).

What is never explained in the almost comical number of prefaces to Erauso’s translated story (that ironically if unintentionally, recall Golden Age literary convention) is the anachronistic use of the word “transvestite” in the title (which does not appear in any versions of the text in Spanish). The word refers to a specific (modern) subject, called into being in the late nineteenth-century. Staying true to its initial definition by

sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, a transvestite is most commonly believed to be a sexual deviant who derives pleasure from donning the dress of the opposite sex, and furthermore, the subject is generally presumed to be male (Hirschfeld *Transvestites*). Yet as the very editors, translators, and prologuists of this edition have noted, Catalina de Erauso does *not* elaborate on her sexual tastes or pleasures in her narration, and though she enjoys flirting with (and perhaps even seducing) women, she does not seem to derive any sexual pleasure from wearing a man's dress in and of itself. The selection of the term, which is clearly historically inaccurate and debatably a poor contemporary analogue to describe Erauso, seems to be motivated more by sensationalist editorial politics—that is, the minoritizing language of the title which is intended to appeal to scholars interested in “queer readings,” in addition to those who would typically be drawn to the text (scholars of Peninsular literature and culture). The titles in Spanish, such as *Vida i sucesos de la monja alférez* or *Historia de la monja alférez*, draw more attention to religion and militarism as they relate to the colonial project. And while gender transgression of some sort can be inferred, transvestism is not mentioned or even presumed from the title alone (she might be a woman fighting in a nun's habit, for example).

Perhaps what is most remarkable in reading the introductions of the recent English translation is the translator's admission that the English version of Erauso's text is largely identical to the original 1944 edition. So that what is new in the 1996 publication is primarily the title and the critical introductions (which do indeed offer solid contributions by framing Erauso's story in the light of contemporary debate). What all this implies is that even though the language of the story has not changed in over fifty

years, the new cultural context from which we read it gives fresh meanings to the very same words.

I have already suggested that the recent interests (cross-cultural or otherwise) in Anne Bonny, Mary Read and Catalina de Erauso have arisen at a time when gender studies, “trans” studies and queer studies—all areas that their stories touch upon—are in vogue. What the particularly cross-cultural interests in these historical figures inadvertently question is the notion of cultural property. An important premise of this chapter is that the stories of the female pirates are not exclusively important to the Anglo world, but also the Hispanic one, and not just because they have recently entered its literature, but also because the history of Caribbean piracy is a particularly *dislocated* one. In this pre-national period, pirates came from an array of kingdoms and formed communities with members from enemy states, often preying upon more than one enemy (they might attack colonial settlements and merchant ships of both England and Spain, for example). Who is to say, then, that a pirate *belongs* to a certain tradition and not to another, merely because of her language of origin?

While other chapters in this dissertation focus on the Latin American pirate fictions themselves, this chapter will center primarily on the back stories to contemporary renderings of Anne Bonny and Mary Read, tracing the layered cultural meanings and messages that their repeated representations produce. In particular, it will historicize the link between these pirates and the nation in order to deconstruct their status as cultural property. I will use the contributions of contemporary “trans” scholars from the English



and Spanish speaking worlds to help explore the “queer effects” produced by the ambiguous bodies of these “gender pirates.”<sup>7</sup>

## **Women and Water, Pleasure and Horror**

The cultural meanings ascribed to the female pirates (or to female sea farers of any type) are mediated by the symbolic relationship between women, water and patriarchy. The stories of Anne Bonny and Mary Read significantly emerge on a horizon of water, a protean, pre-cultural and inherently undisciplinable “space.” The ocean is the one earthy realm that cannot be domesticated by mankind—cannot be adequately settled, nationalized or parceled off. Perhaps for this reason, the anxious legends about the ocean’s female qualities have been extolled. The siren, for instance, is the embodiment of the untamable female essence, imagined as a pure beauty so mesmerizing that it can only drive one to death. The aquatic origins of these femmes fatale are of course linked to sexuality and one interpretation of the legend of the siren is that the sailors captivated by their beautiful song drown in the fluids of their own pleasure—in an orgasmic death, if you will. As we will see in the following section, these opposing sentiments of pleasure and horror are inscribed into representations of Anne Bonny and Mary Read as well. “Woman’s” nexus with water is certainly not limited to this particular Classical myth however, as David Cordingly has noted,

Evidence has been found at Knossos to indicate that the Great Goddess of the Cretans not only symbolized fertility but also regulated the course of the sun

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<sup>7</sup> I use the term “queer” throughout this chapter to point to and celebrate the resistance to hegemonic identities enacted by these individuals—not just those pertaining to sexuality, but also to nationality, gender, imperialism, race, etc. I use the term “gender pirates” to refer both to the alleged “theft” of gender carried out by these individuals as well as to the fact that two of them, Anne Bonny and Mary Read were accused of piracy in 1720.

and stars and protected seamen on their voyages. When the Egyptian goddess Isis was adopted by the Greeks, she became the goddess of seafarers, and Greek ships were often named after her. Aristotle and the medical writers of his time believed that women were physically wetter than men. Their soft, spongy flesh retained more fluid from their diet, and the purpose of menstruation was to remove the excess fluid from their bodies. (Cordingly 155)

Though the element of water has been associated with women since ancient times, seafaring has been considered an exclusively masculine lifestyle for centuries (Creighton and Norling ix). Over time, women aboard ships passed from being good luck charms capable of scaring away storms by exposing their naked, menstruating bodies, to being purveyors of ill fortune at sea; resented passengers of merchant and warships alike (Cordingly 154-70). Women thus were spared the torture and humiliation of being tied naked to the mast during a storm during the classical period, to endure instead, the tedium of staying below deck for months on end during the early modern period. In the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, English sailors' wives who wished to accompany their spouses to sea could do so with the permission of the admiralty, but were not paid or fed (Stark 49, 51). They (and any children who were with them) had to share their husband's rations and had to rely on the charity of other sailors in order to survive in the event that their husbands died at sea. Her position, therefore, was peripheral and precarious despite the fact that many of these women tended to the sick or acted as powder runners during battle (Stark 71).

In order to escape these humiliations and obtain a more official role aboard a warship, a good number of women were known to have cross-dressed in order to gain the full rights and privileges enjoyed by sailors. The stories of Anne Chamberlyne, "William Prothero," "William Brown," Mary Lacy, Hannah Snell and Mary Ann Talbot among others have been documented and retold in a number of histories of women at sea

(Cordingly; Creighton and Norling; Hargreaves; Stark). Unlike Anne Bonny and Mary Read, however, these women worked *for* instead of against the state, even if they did so under a false identity.

While the stories of all these women from the sailor's wives, to the cross-dressed sailors to the cross-dressed pirates challenge the traditional role of women within the patriarchy, none does so more than the female pirates who not only break away from the domestic/private sphere, but also from the nation. Additionally, since they live among persons who have shunned individual ownership, pirate women necessarily disavow their status as an object of property. So, though we might imagine the woman pirate as a cross-dresser, no matter what she wears, "woman" ceases to function symbolically *as such* among pirates.

## **Anne Bonny and Mary Read in Literature and Art**

The transgressive feats of Anne Bonny and Mary Read passed into legend shortly after the two were sentenced to death in a Jamaican court in 1720 for acts of piracy committed alongside John Rackham. Over the centuries, their story has inspired ballads, novels, paintings, etchings, biographies, and feature films. Yet the primary source information on the duo is scant, limited to the transcript of the trial which was published as a pamphlet; a couple of news articles in the *Boston Gazette*, and a publication by the unknown Captain Charles Johnson, believed by some to be Daniel Defoe, author of *Moll Flanders* and *Robinson Crusoe*.

Beginning in 1724, Johnson published several different editions of *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pyrates*. Read and Bonny

were featured on the title page from the outset beneath the heading “*With the Remarkable Actions and Adventures of the Two Female Pirates, Mary Read and Anne Bonny,*” and the tremendous popularity of their story prompted Johnson to expand these sections in later versions. In scouring public records it has been determined that the only verifiable elements of Johnson’s (sixteen page) story are that Read and Bonny were aboard Rackham’s ship—in whatever guise or role—when it was captured, and that the two were sentenced to death along with the rest of the crew, but asked that the punishment be delayed due to the fact that they were pregnant. Read died in prison and Bonny disappeared from public record. This of course does not make for much of a story and the temptation to embellish would appear to be irresistible for Johnson, whose account comes across as quite literary. The additional details of the story inscribe the acts of these two women with a cultural meaning that served to counteract the potential threat that they presented.

Briefly, his account relates that Anne Bonny was born the illegitimate child of an Irish lawyer and his maid. Her father, who was married, left his wife and settled in Charleston, South Carolina, with his daughter and lover, where he soon became a prosperous plantation owner. When Anne came of age, she married a seaman without her father’s consent and was promptly disinherited. The newlyweds set out for the Bahamas where Anne met and ran off with John Rackham with whom she fought until their ship was captured.

Mary Read was born of an unknown father, the illegitimate child of a poor English woman. From birth, she was dressed as a boy to pass for her older, legitimate half-brother who died in infancy. The boy’s grandmother paid for Mary’s upkeep,

believing her to be her grandson. When the grandmother died, Mary was hired out as a footboy, a profession that she promptly quit to begin her military career in England and Flanders. Unemployed during peace time she set off for the new world (dressed as a man), but her ship was captured by English pirates, who obliged her to join them. Passing from civilian to privateer, to pirate again, she finally met up with and joined John Rackham's ship until its capture.

In the first edition of his book, Johnson admits to his uneven handling of Bonny and Read in comparison with other pirates. With the exception of Rackham, who was romantically involved with Bonny, we are given no personal background on any male pirate. While there seems to be no need to rationalize or justify the reasons for a man to turn pirate, details are required to explain why a woman would take on a violent lifestyle. He explains, "As we have been more particular in the Lives of these two Women, than those of other Pyrates, it is incumbent upon us, *as faithful Historians*, to begin with their Birth" (Johnson *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pyrates* 126, my italics). It is interesting indeed that matters of intrigue such as birth, family circumstances and romantic affairs are thus imbued with historical significance, especially when the author concedes that the tale reads like a novel (Johnson *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pyrates* 117).

Although Johnson has been credited by some as a faithful historian, it is impossible to pass over the favoritism that he shows Mary Read without raising an eyebrow of suspicion. In stark contrast to one another, Bonny is described as rebellious, fickle, and lascivious, while Read is dutifully domestic, faithful and sexually prudent. Twice married and once widowed, Read is deemed "remarkable for her Modesty"

(Johnson *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pyrates* 122) and is said to have “declared she had never committed Adultery or Fornication with any Man” (Johnson *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pyrates* 125).

In contrast, Bonny, who was “not altogether so reserv'd in point of Chastity” (122), leaves her husband for Rackham and later tries to lure Read to bed by revealing her sex, thinking her a young man. The more modest Read dresses as a boy or man only when she is forced to do so for economic reasons, having no father or husband to provide for her. She briefly, yet happily settles into domestic life after marrying an army-mate, but must turn to male dress and occupation again when he dies. Bonny, on the other hand, discards one legal protector after another by marrying against her father's wishes and running off on her husband, thus spoiling any chance of domesticity. Unlike Read, she chooses her dress and her pirate profession in order to satisfy her illicit desires and employs violence gratuitously instead of as a means of making a living. As I will discuss later, this virgin/whore dichotomy introduced by Johnson is irresistibly imitated in twentieth-century literature and film.

In Johnson's account, it is clear that Anne is the anti model. But why does he choose to favor Mary? From his ideological standpoint, Anne potentially has several things going against her—she is Irish (and therefore racialized), she was raised in the colonies (which makes her prone to rebelliousness against paternalistic/imperial authority) and she is privileged (which provides her with no motive for her transgression). As a penniless orphan, Mary's cross-dressing can be safely accepted and

admired because she presents no threat to the status quo. Her transgression, however successful, is temporary and unwanted, employed only as an act of financial desperation.



**Figure 2.1**  
**Cover of the Dutch translation of Johnson (1725) featuring a monstrous Anne Bonny**

In addition to being a titillating tale of transgression and exposure, the Bonny/Read case as told by Johnson also teaches us that when a woman is cared for financially and protected by father or husband, masculinity and rebelliousness are nothing but grotesque. And indeed, taking the cue from Johnson's narrative, the illustration of Bonny on the cover of the 1725 Dutch version of his text reveals the hideous nature of her sexuality (see figure 2.1). The virility of her bare, muscular arm wielding a cutlass clashes with her enormous drooping breasts and her weathered, gaunt face. This odd combination yields the impression of a consumptive old woman superimposed onto the body of a robust young man. Adding to the ominousness of this image is the skeleton

flag that hangs directly over Bonny's head as she rises up from a tangled mass of humiliated, captive men. Bonny is a hideous, frightening monster whose sex appeal has been exaggerated to the point of repulsion.

Representations of Anne Bonny and Mary Read, however, morph under the same cover, for inside this same edition of Johnson we find an image of Bonny that is considerably more favorable (see figure 2.2). Her breasts, though still exposed are small and pert. Her youthful face is attractive and unthreatening, and her wavy hair seductively blows in the wind. Although she wears men's clothing and is loaded down with weapons, her stance is somewhat tentative and unimposing even as she raises her revolver. The faint smile on her face succeeds in clinching the impression that she is a woman merely playacting at being a pirate. Yet from the waist down the picture is somewhat different. The contemporary viewer will likely come to notice the lack of proportion in this image. Taken as a whole, the figure has an uncommonly small head and ill-positioned breasts (much too high on the chest to be anatomically correct). Yet if one covers up the figure from the waist down, the proportions don't seem so terribly off. Indeed, if an examination of Anne from the waist up reveals her incontrovertibly as a woman, from the waist down, we are come away with a different impression. The wide, strong legs are punctuated by creases and bulges in the groin area, which suggest a male anatomy. Put together, the wide sturdy legs and waist with the narrow and diminutive chest and head make the figure appear almost triangular in shape and certainly overly-abundant in bulges (in both the chest and groin area) indicating that s/he might be anatomically endowed with the sexual organs of both sexes. And it is perhaps no



coincidence that Anne Bonny's male half stands on firm ground, framed by magnificent ships, while his/her female half floats in the clouds.

The overall effect of this artistic rendering is the sensation that we are looking at a portion of one figure appended to another to create a new creature, much in the way that Classical cultures envisioned the centaur. Instead of being half man and half horse, Anne Bonny in this rendering is half male and half female—all human, yet perhaps equally as monstrous. As with the centaur, this rendering of Anne Bonny accentuates both beauty and strength, a blend that gives a benevolent bent to her monstrosity. Pulling on the threads of “trans” theory, we might ask here, where is the truth in this depiction? Any debate over what sex/gender s/he is *really* would certainly be circular, since one (male/female) is not privileged over the other.

These two widely disparate images of Bonny from the same version of Johnson both serve to inoculate against the potential threat that she poses. In the first, any power or sex appeal that she might have is distorted to be construed as demonic. Female masculinity thus becomes sickly and vile. In the second image, Bonny is merely a plaything not to be taken seriously; a mythical or “impossible” creature who bares his/her feminine side for the benefit of the masculine gaze. Though s/he arguably displays certain male sex attributes (from the waist down), the “truth” about his/her sex is conveniently concealed beneath a layer of clothing. Whether or not we or historical viewers of this image take him/her as a half-man, half-woman or as a cross-dressed woman, s/he certainly could be mistaken for a “real” or whole man (as the slashes in my pronouns indicate).



**Figure 2.2**  
**A lighthearted version of Anne Bonny from the 1725 Dutch edition of Johnson**

Yet Bonny and Read come much closer to “passing” in an etching that appears in the first edition of Johnson (see figure 2.3). Heavily clothed in loose smocks that leave only their hands and face exposed, the two women, neither dainty nor ugly, are covered up and desexualized. Their most womanly feature is their wide hips which are accentuated by their skirted smocks. Despite this hint of secondary female sex characteristics, the two are sturdily framed and plain-faced, as though, even if they were recognized as women, they might not inspire much sympathy.

This rather bland image of the two heroines reminds me of the fact that even if Johnson does engage in some degree of moralizing on the topic of sexual mores and gender roles, it is nonetheless remarkable that these women are used to *exemplify masculinity* in Johnson’s tale. He reports that Bonny and Read were the only two

members of Rackham's crew to remain on deck defending the ship against its final siege. In reference to this event, Johnson tells us that Bonny's last words to her lover were: "if you had fought like a Man, you need not have been hang'd like a Dog" (133). Read for her part gave a short speech in defense of "men of courage," in which she credited the death penalty for piracy for preserving the practice for only the bravest of the brave: "were it not for that," she reasons, "every cowardly Fellow would turn Pyrate, and so infest the Seas, that Men of Courage must starve [...] the Ocean would be crowded with Rogues, like the Land, and no Merchant would venture out; so that the Trade, in a little Time, would not be worth following" (125). By this logic, men of courage are paradoxically protected by the death penalty which keeps the practice elite and profitable.



**Figure 2.3**  
**Anne Bonney and Mary Read etching by B. Cole from Johnson's first edition**

It is clear that here, as elsewhere in Johnson's book, courage pays while cowardice does not. The bravest man is left standing, even if he is sometimes a woman. Rackham himself rose from quarter master to captain for outstripping the conservative Captain Vane in courage and daring only to die in the gallows while the braver Bonny

and Read were symbolically spared this public humiliation (even if on this surface it was due to their gender).

Johnson's tale thus manages to extol both masculine and feminine virtue in this cross-dressing duo. They possess the masculine quality of courage, and are thus exemplary, if merely honorary men. At the same time, Read and Bonny show us through negative and positive example, that women, no matter how brave, must *also* possess the feminine virtues of chastity and loyalty in order to earn our empathy. And if they fail to do so, if they become rebellious instead of submissive and they may in fact turn monstrous.

If a woman's rebelliousness is shunned in Johnson, it is extolled in this 19<sup>th</sup> century lithograph of Read bearing her breast to the man she has just defeated in a duel (see figure 2.4). The revelation of her sex serves as one further blow that might emasculate the dying fellow who looks up stunned and frightened at this sight. Mary defiantly maintains a wide masculine stance and grasps in one hand (and at groin level) the phallic tool that has killed him, while in the other, the breast that is meant to wound rather than seduce also acquires phallic meaning. In contrast to Mary's potent gun, which has proven its ability to kill by explosive penetration, her defeated foe's pistol lies inert, out of his physical possession, even if within his reach. The unfortunate man, then, is rendered both castrated and penetrated via his relation to the two phallic weapons while Mary holds a weapon in each hand (two phalluses)—one physically injurious while the other symbolically so.

At the same time, Mary's phallic breast serves as evidence of her rejection of all societal rules, including those pertaining to gender. The image thus romanticizes the triumph of the female pirate in her personal struggle against tyranny. The revealed breast in this image differs greatly from the 18<sup>th</sup> century depictions discussed above and also from the narrative accounts of such behavior in Johnson's text. Mary twice "discovers her sex" to her potential lovers, but both times it is discreet, meant to appear as if an accident. This act, which could potentially be interpreted as sexual aggression and immodesty, is by Johnson painted over with the guise of passivity and Mary immediately turns to protecting her chastity and insuring her chances of marriage after committing this transgression.



**Figure 2.4**  
Lithograph by Alexandre Debelle of Mary Read bearing her breast after winning a duel from P. Christian's *Histoire des pirates et corsaires* (1946)

This triumphant image of Mary Read's victory is of course consistent with the Romantic sensibilities of the time period that produced them. Pirates (both male and female) were in fact emblems of Romantic ideals. Their triumph over tyranny was a common thread in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novels, such as *The Pirate* (Sir

Walter Scott 1822), *Red Rover* (James Fenimore Cooper 1829), and *The Sea Hawk* (Rafael Sabatini, 1915) as well as the poetry of Romantics like José de Espronceda, whose poem “La canción del pirata” (1840) promoted antinationalism in favor of the absolute freedom of the sea. Yet pirate fictions of this time period in both the English and the Spanish speaking worlds sometimes strayed far from these romantic ideals. If the above mentioned literary productions were not couched in nationalistic discourse, a number of pirate novels from the late nineteenth-century served as “fictions of nation building” (Gerassi-Navarro) for burgeoning Latin American nations.<sup>8</sup>

While Johnson’s version of Bonny and Read was most likely somewhat sexually titillating to readers of its time, the author downplays this element in favor of the moralistic lessons that the story teaches. In the twentieth century, however, Anne Bonny

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<sup>8</sup> In her book, *Pirate Novels: Fictions of Nation Building in Spanish America* (1999), Nina Gerassi-Navarro looks at four nineteenth-century novels that use pirates as a pivot point to articulate their positioning according to political debates of the time period, which summarily centered on what European model to follow in building a nation/state. On one side of the aisle were the “liberales” who looked to England and France as progressive national models (and Spain as the antimodel). The “conservadores” on the other hand celebrated their Spanish heritage and rejected English and French styles of government. Gerassi-Navarro’s findings demonstrate that pirates were either presented as a model to emulate (by the *liberales*) or as villains whose example should not be followed (by the *conservadores*). The “liberal” view is espoused by Vicente Fidel López in *La novia del hereje o la inquisición de Lima* (1854). Fidel López is an Argentine who, like his compatriot Sarmiento articulated his political positioning through the *civilización y barbarie* debate. Interestingly, this advocate of social progress inverts the traditional (Spanish) perception of the pirate as a barbarian, showing him to be a civilized hero. It is instead the Spaniards who adhere to the primitive and unjust rule of the Inquisition that are the barbarians, while the gentle English pirate is remorseful and sincere. This exaltation of the pirate is similar to structures that later emerge in Hollywood that link the pirate with US nationalism. Hollywood’s aim, however, was not so much politically as economically motivated—that is, they wanted to sell movies and found that the best way to market the pirate was to make him a hero rather than a villain. The “conservative” view, on the other hand, follows the Spanish example of vilifying the pirate, which Soledad Acosta de Samper achieves in *Los piratas de Cartagena* (1886). The third and final view comes from a couple of Yucatec authors, Eligio Ancona *El filibustero*, 1864) and Justo Sierra-O’Reilly (*El filibustero*, circa 1842), who believed in designing a new, locally generated model of government. Their pirates are somewhat ambiguous characters—neither villains nor heroes—but rather locals who have been forced into piracy due to their rejection by the local populations. These characters are misunderstood and tragic figures who significantly are marked as racial others. Sierra-O’Reilly’s pirate Diego el Mulato may in part have been condemned for the same reasons that Anne Bonny was, historically. As the offspring of a socially mixed and racially marked coupling (of two Irish persons of unbalanced social class), Anne often was presented as menacing and sexually dangerous—a portrayal similar to that of Diego’s in Sierra-O’Reilly’s vignette.

becomes blatantly eroticized in more than one novel. This is the case with John Carlova's *Mistress of the Seas* (1964) which touts itself as a strictly historical account, despite the author's admitted "enthusiasm" to get "next to Anne Bonny" (13). Replete with quotations between Anne and her lovers, his publication contains a great deal of information on Bonny's sexual tastes. In one instance he relates: "She herself once told of curious private fencing matches in which she and her French fencing master would 'flick each other's clothes off, growing more excited with each lunge and thrust, until we were forced to throw away our foils and grapple half-naked on the floor'" (30).

Zoé Valdés likewise eroticizes the violence of "man to man" combat in her novel *Lobas de mar* (2003) in which Ann Bonny<sup>9</sup> and her husband James succumb to "un arranque de mutuo deseo carnal" after fighting "de igual a igual, como dos hombres, golpeándose hasta caer ensangrentados" (Valdés *Lobas* 60). Valdés, however seems more titillated by imagining Bonny and Read's homoerotic encounters and (why not?) threesomes including the two women and John Rackham. Interestingly, in these homoerotic encounters, Valdés has Mary consistently reject sexual invitations from men who take her for the same, so that even though Mary burns with desire, she rejects Ann's initial advances until she discovers that "Bonn" is also a woman, at which point she immediately succumbs to her desire. This is particularly odd because Mary easily "swings both ways" in the novel; it is unclear what leads her to reject a man's same sex desire for her, but not a woman's. Most likely these rejections are inspired, not so much by the character's nature, but by the discomfort that imagining two men paired together might provoke in Valdés's reading audience (an anxiety that is not exclusively grounded

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<sup>9</sup> Anne Bonny's name has appeared with many different spellings. When referring to Valdés's character, I use the Cuban author's preferred spelling.

in Latin America and the Caribbean, but in the West in general), even if one of the “men” is biologically female.<sup>10</sup>

Regardless of the differences in representation and the shift in motives for each telling of Bonny and Read’s story, the kernel of truth is what makes the account repeatable. From Johnson to Carlova, each author’s claim to legitimacy is a vital element of their narrative. Allegations of epic bravery in the archive and subsequent claims to historical accuracy repeat themselves in nearly every version of Bonny and Read that I have come across. And there are many who try to imbue their stories with authenticity by emulating historical typeset and titles. This insistence on truth reflects an anxiety that the Bonny/Read tale might lose meaning were it not for the fact that the characters are indeed “real.”



**Figure 2.5**  
**Nationalizing the pirate: Postage stamps of Anne Bonny and Mary Read from several Caribbean countries**

From left to right: An Anne Bonny stamp from a series of six featuring “Pirates of the Bahamas” (Bahamas 2003); Mary Read alongside a silhouette of the queen (Grenada, year unknown); Anne Bonny and Mary Read alongside a reproduction of the pamphlet advertising their trial (Jamaica 1971).

Whether tied to the mast in ancient times, coquettishly wielding weapons in Early Modern and contemporary times or defiantly destroying an enemy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the seafaring woman is forever exposing her breasts in the popular imagination.

<sup>10</sup> My reading of Valdés’s novel will be explored in depth in chapter 3.



Unsurprisingly, she can never keep her sex appeal fully masked, no matter how daring and chaste she may be. Thus sexualized, even the female *pirate* may recuperate her nexus with nation, as exemplified in the emblematic portrayal of Anne Bonny and Mary Read on the postage stamps of several Caribbean countries (see figure 2.5). These state-grounded homages to the female pirates might be considered their final triumph.

## Hollywood and the Nationalization of the Pirate

The next great boom of interest on the subject of women pirates came from the other side of the Atlantic from the Hollywood film industry, which showed a significant interest in piracy. Coquettish women pirates appeared as headliners in several films from the nineteen-tens, such as *Betty and the Buccaneers*, *Prudence the Pirate*, and *Peg of the Pirates*.<sup>11</sup> More often than not however, these female pirates were trophy wives, abductees, failed pirate want-to-be's or mere elements of a dream sequence, as is the case in Hal Roach's *Captain Kidd's Kids* (1919) (see figure 2.6).

In the Classical period of the 1950's, however, female pirates emerged as serious characters, competent in the world of piracy, and bore at least some version of the name of their historical predecessor, Anne Bonny. The breast revelation motif disappeared from this medium—and not just for reasons of decency—but because the Anne Bonnys of Hollywood were never confused for men even though they might wear pants and a tunic. This advent is due to the fact that clothing did not have the same identity-defining powers that it had in the early modern period. More affordable and less regulated, clothes no longer “made the man” (Garber). As I will discuss in more detail later, when

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<sup>11</sup> For more information on these films, including synopses, see James Rober Parish.

pirate women try to play the part of a lady (which implies a socioeconomic cross-dressing in addition to a gendered one), they do so awkwardly and unconvincingly. Though the actors physically comply with Hollywood's standards for female beauty, their masculine mannerisms and speech attest to the new belief that it takes more than clothing to change one from a woman to a man, or vice versa. What is foregrounded in such films is not the question of whether they are men or women, but the issue of what to do with the (dangerous) masculine woman. The films all express some form of anxiety about female masculinity, lesbianism and its ill effects on society. As a result, all the female pirates are killed or banished by the end of the films in order to save the integrity of the nation.



**Figure 2.6**  
The female pirates in the dream sequence of *Captain Kidd's Kids* (1919)

Nation and piracy has had a particularly rich history in the Hollywood film industry in depictions of male and female pirates alike (though the former is certainly more abundant). In order to understand the process by which the pirate was co-opted and nationalized in American film, a brief history is necessary.

Portrayals of the maritime renegades emerged on the scene almost simultaneously with the birth of American cinema in the ninteteen-tens and included the slapstick

features of Syd Chaplin and Hal Roach. By the end of the silent era in the late 1920s, Hollywood had produced nearly forty films featuring pirates. The genre trickled steadily onto the screen through the thirties and forties, before hitting its boom in the early nineteen fifties (known as the Classical Hollywood era), in which nearly thirty films were produced over the course of five years, for a total of thirty-three by the end of the decade. After this landmark period, the genre tapered off to an average of ten films per decade.

We may typically think of pirates as evil doers, à la Captain Hook, or at best grumpy and unattractive fatherly types, such as *Treasure Island*'s Long John Silver. A comprehensive survey of pirate films, however, reveals that the pirate has most often been portrayed as a stalwart hero opposed to colonial rule. This trope began to emerge in the 1920s, though it did not crystallize until the 1930s when it began to dominate the genre. Credited by James Robert Parish as an attempt to make the highly successful swashbuckling films even more palatable to the American public, the glorification of the pirate succeeded in turning this historical character into a species of national hero by appealing to American ideals, accentuating historical coincidence and subtly overlaying contemporary politics onto the plot (Parish).

Pirates on screen are easily confused with early Americans. They are similarly shown to be at odds with the project of colonialism and are portrayed as individuals who suffered under European (and especially British) rule who are also at odds with the Spanish throne. The injustices they suffered in their native countries turned them into exiles who were driven by these experiences to seek out their freedom in a new geographical territory. They were characterized as "desperate men" with no other choice than to break the law which was inherently unjust to begin with. In another parallel, we

might also recall that the first feat of the American Revolution, the Boston Tea Party, was in itself an act of piracy, in which a ship was looted and its cargo destroyed.

Additionally, pirates—such as Jean Lafitte in the War of 1812—contributed to the victory of America’s struggles for independence from Great Britain.

The pirates of American film also mirror the founding fathers in that they come to establish a new society that runs on a different, allegedly more just set of laws—a society which employs a new national philosophy that speaks against tyranny and envisions all men as equals. Thus, when the stalwart pirate hero of *Captain Blood* (1935) addresses his crew, he does so as a species of founding father defining the constitution of this new society and articulating a bill of rights. Significantly, the group of exiles agrees to characterize themselves as a political community, a type of family “bound together as brothers in a life and death friendship, sharing alike in fortune and in trouble.” Despite the fact that they are “men without a country,” this declaration of familial-like loyalty characterizes them as citizens of a new community, endowed with certain rights and responsibilities. This subtle flirtation with the American Declaration of Independence is intended to send shivers of nationalistic pride down the spines of its American audience and it succeeds in hitting its mark. The nexus between pirates and nationality is similarly exploited in Hispanic pirate literature (see chapters 1, 3 and 4).

The *Crimson Pirate*, a comedy from the 1950s offers a particularly complex example of the process of nationalization that pirates have undergone in Hollywood. The film uniquely blends post World War II American politics with early modern politics and paints over national affiliations in order to appeal to a contemporary American audience. Briefly, Captain Vallo (the Crimson Pirate) narrowly convinces his disgruntled crew to

trade with civilians rather than prey on merchant ships. Impersonating a diplomat, he makes a fool out of the local officials by breaking two political prisoners out of jail. This feat wins him the respect of the suspicious townspeople who help him build an advanced arsenal of weaponry to overthrow the imperialist government. Vallo's land dealings predictably put him in contact with a woman with whom he later falls in love, causing him to compromise his piratical plans and putting him temporarily out of favor with his crew. The plot itself is not so different from other swashbuckling features and Vallo's military aid to the disgruntled colonists is historically feasible, reminiscent of Lafitte's collaboration with Andrew Jackson in the War of 1812. What sets the film apart is its comedic, almost slapstick tone which inspired its classification as "a good natured spoof" of the swashbuckling genre (Parish 53).

While it is true that the fight scenes are cheerful rather than intense, replete with playful music, smiling heroes, amusing antics, and gratuitous acrobatics, *The Crimson Pirate* takes the buccaneer's heroism very seriously. Lighthearted though the film may be, Vallo is ever the charming champion in a sea of buffoonish colonialists representing the Spanish throne. Cunning, sexy, strong, and romantic, the *Crimson Pirate* has all the features of the quintessential pirate hero. On the other hand, there are a good deal of elements to the film that at first glance appear inconsistent or sloppy, such as names of ambiguous origin, misleading accents, historically incorrect costumes, and a taste of "science fiction." The humorous tenor of the film makes these elements easy to overlook, yet rather than being the result of sloppiness, it is precisely these elements that allow for the overlay of contemporary (1950s) politics.

To begin with, the Crimson pirate fights alongside and for the benefit of the highly romanticized American ideals of freedom and progress, concepts embodied in the characters of “el libre” who is a “great lover of democracy and the people” and the scientist/inventor, Elio Prudence, both of whom have been captured and sentenced to death by the imperialists on charges of conspiracy. Though the Crimson Pirate becomes involved with the two men initially only for economic gain (he hopes to sell them contraband weapons), he comes to collaborate with and fight alongside them in their popular uprising against the imperialist forces. The war they wage against the enemy involves advanced weaponry far beyond the capabilities of the historical time period. Science allows them to create a rudimentary submarine, tanks and automated weapons in addition to experimental explosives that are dropped in the plazas and in the harbor alongside an enemy ship. This advanced arsenal provokes such fear in the imperialist forces that they quickly surrender to the civilians and their pirate ally and all prisoners are freed.

This triumphant war scene alludes to both World War II might and American independence. The ambiguous nationality of the imperialist enemies attests to this fact. Though we are told in an early caption that it is a Spanish vessel that the pirates attack, this fact is soon betrayed by the names, speech and dress of the imperialists including the vaguely German Baron Gruda who figures largely into the plot. The soldiers of the Spanish named island of Cobra wear British uniforms and powdered wigs and even speak with British accents. Yet on their hats, we sometimes catch glimpses of insignia that resemble either a German or a Spanish flag. Thus, though they are designated as Spanish, the enemy takes on the characteristics of bad guys more familiar to a

contemporary American audience—that is the Germans of World War II (recent history) and the British of the war for independence (distant history).

Following these two historical strands, the Crimson pirate aligns himself on the side of freedom (the rhetoric of American independence) and progress (the rhetoric of World War II). Thus the pirate becomes the hero for the nation, defending national values with his bare hands, and sometimes with advanced weaponry, not unlike some of the lines in Enstroncada's "Canción del pirata" (see chapter 1). Though the Crimson Pirate has the capability to fight off hoards of bad guys with his bare hands, he would not have been able to quash the imperialists if it were not for the technology that offers "new ways to get rid of old enemies."

If masquerades, such as those I have described *The Crimson Pirate*, layer 1950s politics onto recreations of the colonial era, deliberately confusing the costumes of the imperialists with better known modern enemies, these "transvestite politics" often convey information about US-Latin American relations. This is true particularly in the case of pirate films that take place in the *Spanish* Caribbean. Frequently what is communicated is not just colonial history, but the present power relations within the Americas and the Caribbean. More specifically, historical imperial relations are entangled with the neo-imperialistic tenor of twentieth-century politics between the US and Latin America. Latin Americans in effect become the subjects of stereotypes and parodies in pirate films (as elsewhere in Hollywood) as film makers promote notions of cultural superiority of (white) North Americans over their (racialized) Latin neighbors. One pair of critics in particular has pointed to this marriage between the stereotyped Hispanics on screen and

US political interests: “As the United States extended its dominance throughout Central America (in places such as Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Panama), the use of stereotypes—most of which represented the people of these lands as backward, lazy, and childlike—helped justify imperialist actions” (Benshoff and Griffin 135).

In the vast majority of Hollywood films, all Spanish speakers, regardless of their country of origin (which may be fictional or real) fit this stereotype. Hence the Spanish viceroyalty that appears in pirate films is easily confused with the stereotypes of Mexicans. This cultural cross-identification might amount to another transvestism, but of course it is pertinent to note that the cultural attributes are misrepresented even in the “original” portrayals of Mexicans so that again we resort to the paradigm of “trans” politics espoused by Newton, Butler and Richard—that is to say, that even the “original” is a fake.

Looking specifically at the three films on female pirates that I will analyze in the following section, we can see examples of these temporal and cultural transvestisms in action. The films feature pirates of differing national origins who not surprisingly have diverse “enemies.” Fittingly, the geographical areas where they tend to carry out their attacks also vary. *The Buccaneer* (Paramount 1958), for example, takes place on the US mainland and involves a French born pirate caught in the middle of the imperial dispute between the US and Britain. *Anne of the Indies* (Twentieth-Century Fox 1951) features a pirate of British descent born in the New World who curiously seems to attack the Brits she descended from, not so much for monetary gain as in revenge for her brother’s death. *The Spanish Main* (RKO 1945), as one would expect from the title, takes place in the Spanish Caribbean and its principle pirate is a “peaceful Dutch pilgrim” who resorts to



piracy only in response to the excessively cruel treatment he receives from members of the Spanish crown when his ship is blown off course and runs aground in Cartagena. The perspective of the film in regards to Spanish colonial practices is made clear from the outset. The epigraph set to dramatic music characterizes the Spanish Main as “cruel, oppressive and ruthless” and marks Cartagena as “its most remorseless citadel.” The selection of Cartagena as a stronghold of tyranny and the eventual locus of a (deserved) piratical attack is interesting when we consider that the city was attacked by pirates on several occasions.<sup>12</sup> The implication seems to be that these attacks were somehow provoked or justified (which pirate attacks rarely if ever were). Instead, it had more to do with the strategic value and location of the port. Nonetheless, from a modern historical standpoint, Cartagena might be viewed as a seat of evil since it served as one of only two slave trading ports in Spanish America as well as the eventual location of the court of the Spanish Inquisition.

In *The Spanish Main*, Don Alvarado, the viceroy of New Granada is an overweight and buffoonish tyrant who fulfills the Latin American stereotype of the day: namely that he is lazy and is of inferior intelligence. He frequently complains of the burden of his duties (which consist solely of sentencing people to death or torture), bemoans the interruption of his siesta and chooses death over work when his power is finally usurped. His character is further denigrated by his frequent (semipublic) appearances in improper dress and his dishonest belief that “there is no such thing as a word of honor that must be kept.” Prior to his encounter with the Spanish tyrant, the pirate hero, Laurent Van Horn

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<sup>12</sup> These attacks on Cartagena are featured in Soledad Acosta de Samper’s novel *Los piratas en Cartagena* (see chapter one). Sir Francis Drake’s attack on the port undoubtedly inspired Gabriel García Márquez who makes reference to this historical figure in many works of fiction, including *Cien años de soledad* and *La increíble y triste historia de la cándida Eréndira y de su abuela desalmada*.

yearns only “to build a new home in the new world [more specifically in the Carolinas] where there will be freedom for all.” Laurent is portrayed in other words as a proto-American wronged by the powers that be, which in his case is the Spanish crown. As is to be expected from such a one-dimensional film, we do not come to know the common colonial subjects, but only the nobility and chiefly Francisca (inherently good and convertible) and Alvarado (inherently bad and resistant to reform). The love subplot involving the noblewoman (Francisca) and the renegade (Laurent) is justified because the Spanish woman must be rescued from the cruelty of those of her kind (the Spanish Alvarado), by the more Anglo-seeming (blond) pirate.

Even though *The Buccaneer* does not involve the Spanish crown in any way, the beloved Latin American stereotype finds its way into the film in order to add an element of humor. During the General’s Council, pirates from an array of nationalities debate their course of action. The strongest voices are those of the French and British and that of a scholarly East Indian man who reads an excerpt of the American Constitution. Yet when “Miguel” weighs in, with his dramatic “Wait! There is something I would like to say,” all parties fall silent in preparation for the empty punch line “I forgot” (delivered in a strong Spanish accent) which is followed with hearty laughter.

## **The Female Pirates on Screen**

If the question of historical truth was a central issue in literature and art (especially prior to the twentieth-century), this preoccupation fades to the background in on screen representations of the female pirates which are unapologetic about the great

liberties they take at fictionalizing these characters. In fact, as I will discuss in greater detail below, liberties were even taken in regards to their names. Yet truth and authenticity as principles are not abandoned entirely. Similar to the dilemma that arises when we contemplated the half-male, half-female rendering of Anne Bonny shown in figure 2.2, what these films seem to ask more than answer is “what is the truth in gender”? Is gender attached to the body, worn like a costume or acquired through experience and training?

The Anne Bonnys of Hollywood are always referred to with a female pronoun, and, though masculine, are never confused for men. Yet they seem to be bestowed (or perhaps cursed) with masculine traits that make it extremely difficult for them to play the part of a woman. Fittingly, the (dangerous) lascivious behavior of Anne Bonny that is flaunted in Carlova’s novel as well as in the original Johnson tale is substituted with another sexual abnormality in twentieth-century American film. Anne Bonny and her similarly named pirate analogues are unable to, or uninterested in attracting men’s favor, which puts into question their relationship to heterosexuality and by corollary, the nation. The universal defining factor between the screen versions of Anne Bonny is that despite their shows of masculine power, they are all marked by jealousy, unable to get the true object of their desire which is not power or wealth, but the love of a man.

Interestingly, the moralistic features of Johnson’s story are revived in the film genre which employs a contrast between women to demarcate the limits of acceptability for gender deviance. Mary Read disappeared in name from this medium, but lives on in the guise of the honest woman with ties to the nation who rebels only out of loyalty to her man. The class relationship between the two women is inverted, however, and instead of

allies, the two become foes, having been born into opposite sides of the colonial conflict. The higher class, more feminine woman serves as a contrast to the vulgar and excessive Anne/Bonny who makes her first screen appearance in *The Spanish Main* (RKO 1945).<sup>13</sup> It should be noted, however that female pirates emerged on the screen much earlier. 1916 turned out two films on female pirates and their on-screen success was followed up with three more in as many years. Though these characters were probably inspired to some extent by the Bonny/Read tale, they do not conform in name or behavior the historic duo.

In *The Spanish Main*, Dutch Pirate Laurent Von Horn seeks revenge against his enemy, the Viceroy of New Granada, by capturing the ship conveying his fiancée to the new world and pressuring her into marrying him instead. Against her better judgment, Countess Francisca falls in love with the pirate and uses her power and influence with the viceroy to aid Laurent and his men in their struggles against the Spanish authorities. Anne Bonny, a member of Laurent's crew, serves as a point of contrast to the Countess who becomes increasingly less lady-like as the movie wears on. Anne's male attire (pants and tunic as opposed to a dress), independence, and abrasive personality ensure that the noble woman's transgressions appear mild in comparison. Yet Anne has another seemingly contradictory function in the film, which is to catalyze Francisca's transformation from a proper noble lady to one who fits in better among a low brow, law bending crew of (male) pirates. This requires a transformation of both gender and class behavior, for as I have pointed out, Francisca is not just a woman, but a lady. Ultimately, this transformation is cast in a positive light, earning Francisca the respect of Laurent, his

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<sup>13</sup> Only loosely based on the historic figure, Anne Bonny's name morphs into Anne Providence in *Anne of the Indies* (Twentieth Century-Fox 1951) and Bonny Brown in *The Buccaneer* (Paramount 1958).

faithful followers, and even Anne. By the end of the film, the countess enacts what appears to be the perfect balance between transgressive and conforming behavior; she is willing to imperil herself in order to aid her man, and capable of defending herself as she stands by his side.

In their initial encounter, the jealous Anne mocks Francisca's high class feminine characteristics, calling her "a powdered drippy trollop." Sizing up her body, she barks out her conclusions—"Broad in the beam! Soft in the chest!"—to the amusement of her pirate companions. When she attempts to take a look at Francisca's teeth as if she were being considered for purchase, she receives a punch in the face from the Countess who proudly claims to need no protection. Wanting a fight, Anne provokes her even more, accusing her of lacking the courage to fight her own battle and "hiding behind [her] paid protection" like the rest of her kind. Curiously, instead of defending her upbringing, or mocking Anne's uncouth behavior, Francisca rises to the challenge to show that she is just as much a man as Anne is. Acting in accordance with the codes of honor for men (those of her station as well as those beneath her), Francisca avenges insult by challenging Anne to a duel with pistols. When her foe complains about her shaky trigger hand, the amateur holds the weapon steady out of spite. This phallic play is her right of passage into the lowbrow, masculine world of piracy. The chimney soot that has been secretly loaded into the gun instead of powder acts as a sort of baptism that figuratively dirties her hands, and literally dirties her face, sullyng the image of the "powdered drippy trollop."



**Figure 2.7**  
**The sooty Countess Francisca after her duel with Anne Bonny in *The Spanish Main***

Although it is Anne who sets into motion Francisca's cross-gender behavior, it is clear that the seeds of transgression were always there. From the moment the character is introduced, it is apparent that she faces an internal struggle: to behave according to her own desires or according to codes of proper conduct. Her initial desire for Laurent buds on her passage from Mexico to New Granada to meet her future husband for the first time. She expresses her culturally inappropriate yearning for Laurent by violating certain codes of conduct and then enshrouding herself in the protections guaranteed to persons of her station. She repeatedly steals away to his side fully expecting to encounter a man as respectful and gallant as he is handsome, yet each time he insults her or otherwise threatens her honor, causing her to call for help, publicly denouncing his behavior. In this manner, Francisca flirts with transgression at the same time she flirts with Laurent, testing her boundaries in both of these realms. Outwardly, she is scandalized by his sexually forward behavior, yet she continues to seek him out even after she has him corporally punished for putting hands on her. Seemingly, she wants to be able to have him on her own terms—she wants him to recognize and respect her power (which is

derived from her social station). But Laurent is also bent on maintaining power in their relationship and only makes sexual advances when they are clearly unwanted.

Francisca finds the perfect way to have him without admitting her desire: she does business with him, using herself as a pawn. She promises him “a genuine wedding, a proper wedding” if he will leave the *San Pablo*, another Spanish ship alone. Yet even if Francisca is prone to transgression, her active heterosexuality assists in normalizing her gender. In these initial scenes, for instance, the bi-sexual nature of the power dynamic between Francisca and Laurent means that she is not required to act like a man in order to gain some semblance of dignity, rather she relies on her “natural” powers as a woman of the upper class, by calling for help, accusing him publicly and selling herself as a bride in exchange for the safe passage of the *San Pablo*. After her encounter with Anne Bonny, all subsequent acts of transgression are put into play merely to aid her man, a fact that oddly enough Anne admires. But perhaps her reaction is not so strange when we consider that Anne Bonny’s insults and lack of respect for Francisca do not come solely from her class consciousness or internalized misogyny, but stem instead from jealousy.

When Anne discovers that Laurent has married, she is filled with rage. She calls him a “Dutch codfish,” and accuses him of dishonesty, expressing an empty threat to slit his throat. Whether or not the two have had a romance, it is clear that she feels betrayed by his sudden marriage. “All these months I’ve known you,” she cries, “If I thought you’d ever heard of the word marriage...” Her thoughts hang unfinished, covered over instead by a barrage of insults to Francisca’s class and character. In this manner, her unfulfilled and now unobtainable desire to marry Laurent is never spoken, covered over instead by anger and hatred toward the woman who has taken her place. Laurent later

adds insult to injury after the two sooty women have finished their mock duel. Laughing at the black-faced Francisca, Anne warns: "That'll teach you to marry anyone who can't see a joke." "I think you're right Anne," Laurent responds, wiping soot from Anne's face, "if I had chosen you." Anne impotently swings at him and is carried away flailing and kicking by a couple of crewmen.

Anne and Francisca's initial encounter could be described as a phallic and pseudosexual exchange of power in which the women are rendered impotent by the man (Laurent) who controls the tools of power (the pistols that are loaded with soot). Once power is annulled, however, Anne takes the first opportunity to symbolically rape Laurent's wife under his nose (though behind closed doors). Backed by a mutinous crew, Anne storms into the bridal chamber to take custody of the hero's wife while he is restrained (destined to be marooned). Francisca, dressed in a nightgown is escorted into a separate (even more private) chamber which Anne soon penetrates with a sword in hand. Behind closed doors we hear several shrill screams. A moment later, Anne emerges triumphantly, with the Countess's nightgown draped across her sword. The implication, of course, is that she has sliced the nightgown off her body, effectively (and violently) denuding her and claiming her underclothes as a trophy. In the codes of Hollywood and American culture, possession of such an item serves as proof of a sexual exchange.

This sexual violence between women is repeated in Hollywood's next female pirate film, *Anne of the Indies* (Twentieth-Century Fox 1951) which centers on the character of Captain Anne Providence, a fatherless orphan tutored by Blackbeard in the ways of piracy. Anne's main goal in the film is to take revenge on Pierre, the spy who



pretended to love her. Her initial attempt at achieving this goal is by capturing his wife, Molly, and threatening to sell her into prostitution. Molly, like Francisca, is objectified by the Anne Bonny character who greets the lady for the first time by circling around to her back and looking her up and down. Similar to her filmic predecessor, Anne judges the woman before her based on her physical attributes, concluding pejoratively, “So, you’re his notion of a mate for life.” Anne, however, does not comment on the woman’s breeding, and Molly in turn responds in a manner consistent with her gender and rank. She readily admits that she is defenseless and tries in vain to shame Anne by labeling her “a disgrace to our sex” and questioning whether it is fit for her to call herself a woman at all. Calling on these codes of decency, however has little affect on Anne who takes pains to suppress any sign of (feminine) weakness.



**Figure 2.8**  
**“So you’re his idea of a mate for life?” Captain Anne Providence sizes up the honest Molly in *Anne of the Indies***

Anne Providence does not mince words when it comes to conveying the idea that she considers Molly to be no more than a piece of merchandise. At every insult that Molly throws at her (which other than criticizing her gender performance, consists of rubbing in her face the fact that she got the man that Anne could not get). Anne responds

by reasserting her objectification of the woman with statements such as: “Poor piece of goods, Doctor. I’m almost ashamed to offer her for sale--got my reputation to think of” and “Take her off before I forget myself and damage the merchandise.” Ushering the woman onto the auction block, Anne hawks her goods, comparing Molly to textiles and thoroughbreds, but the Doctor halts the sale when he cries out to the crowd, “This is a decent woman, an honest woman, stolen from her husband by a woman gone mad.” The Arabs refuse to deal in another man’s property and quickly usher Anne and Molly back to the ship.

The sexual exploitation of Molly and Francisca by the two Annes is the most effective (and also the cruelest) revenge they have against the perceived usurpers of their love interests. If Molly’s Anne blatantly exploits her by trying to sell her into sexual slavery, Francisca’s Anne commits a symbolic rape with the phallic sword which is primarily intended to injure Laurent rather than Francisca. Anne in this way asserts her power and control over the woman who Laurent is powerless to defend. Nonetheless, because the people who perpetrate this symbolic violence are themselves women, their actions betray their (internalized) misogynistic tendencies and therefore have an element of self-injury to them. Operating within the patriarchal realm, they reassert “Woman’s” role as victim, as the object of property and the subject of power. As failed women, they themselves lack this social value, rendering them undesirable.

If the juxtaposition between Anne and Francisca in *The Spanish Main* serves to soften the masculinity of the Condessa, the comparison between the honest woman and the dishonest one does not have the same purpose in *Anne of the Indies*. Molly’s introduction serves instead to accentuate the runaway masculinity of the reckless female

pirate, to show that a woman with such power must ultimately go mad, as the doctor suggests at the auction block. But more than merely losing her mind as so many women have in fiction and film, Anne's rampant jealousy and phallic power combine to create something monstrous, recapitulating the disturbing depiction of Anne Bonny on the frontispiece of the 1725 Dutch version of Johnson's text. As with the 18<sup>th</sup> century lithograph, Anne's monstrosity is linked to her sexuality, yet it is not due in this case to her lasciviousness, rather to the abnormally homogenous relationship between her gender and her object choice. Anne, after all, is a masculine woman who desires masculine men, so that even if she is not homosexual in the sense that she does not desire people of her own *sex*, she is "queer" in that she desires people of a similar *gender*.

This queerness sullies Anne, rendering her somehow "unclean" in the estimation of both the doctor and Pierre, the movie's two honest men. Pierre reports to his wife that Anne is "the vilest hearted she-monster that ever came out of the sea," and sullied by his sexual-romantic contact with her (even if it was feigned), he complains that "all the oceans will never wash me clean again." Anne's abnormal gender performance thus makes its mark on Pierre, gendering him more feminine by association as he plays a subservient role to this phallic woman. From the moment of their initial encounter, in which Anne has him whipped nearly to death, Pierre is cautious to treat her with deference, so much so that he tosses aside a sword in favor of a dress when sorting through the booty. Symbolically, Anne then chooses the sword as her personal prize. Not only does Anne have him whipped, she also wields power over him when she steals and threatens his wife, destroys his ship, captures him and sentences him to death. Even in her acts of benevolence she asserts a certain amount of power and control over Pierre,

intervening on his behalf when he is unable to save his own life. In the end of the film, she still holds the proverbial sword—even though her refusal to let go of it soon destroys her—while Pierre’s only recourse is to reason.

Oddly enough, the one moment in which Pierre seems to have the upper hand (or at least when their power dynamic is on par) is when he happens upon Anne furtively trying on the dress he had chosen from the booty pile. The sheepish Anne looks to him for instruction on how to be feminine, all the while disguising her desire beneath the language of command. “Bear a hand with these lines astern,” she orders him, in reference to the dress lacing, but soon chastises him for his “fast hauling” when he cinches her up. Though she navigates her femininity like a foreign ship, laughing that Blackbeard would “have my hide if he ever caught me in such a rig,” she is receptive to the lessons on femininity that Pierre supplies. She initially mocks women (negating her membership to this group) for their uncomfortable fashion choice, yet through Pierre’s attention, she comes to appreciate it as an evil necessary in order to attract men. She even tests out the principle of female passivity that compliments her new outfit by letting the man make the moves and kiss her.

Despite the fact that Anne wears the dress in this scene, Pierre is still not in possession of the sword, or any weapon of power. Instead he must instruct her in the ways of femininity, and in a true inversion of traditional gender dynamics, his only advantage over his enemy is his own body which she desires and which he is willing to lend out in order to gain her confidence. In this manner, the rhetoric of cleanliness, normally reserved for women, especially in regards to sexual relations, becomes applicable to the male hero who by the end of the film is still hoping to be purified by a

“clean death.” Anne for her part returns to wearing the pants and barking commands after this brief transgression.



**Figure 2.9**  
**Captain in a dress: Anne (of the Indies) takes an awkward stab at femininity as she orders Pierre to “Bear a hand with these lines astern!”**

Nonetheless, this scene is of key interest as it features a masculine woman playacting at being a feminine woman. Though Anne never succeeds in *appearing* masculine (due to the fact that the actress, Jean Peters, has a feminine face, figure and voice), this scene shows that femininity does not come naturally to her, and therefore puts into question the (naturalized) relationship between body and gender. It is important to note that though she never manages to embrace femininity, she does not entirely disavow her womanhood.

If she at one point negates her female identity by declaring that “wenches are mad” to lace themselves into tight dresses that restrict their freedom of movement, she later throws her true sexual identity in Pierre’s face when he tries to appeal to her better (masculine) judgment for mercy. As Anne prepares to leave the couple stranded on a deserted island with no food, water or shelter, the honest man judges the uniqueness and monstrosity of her actions: “No one but you could do such a thing as this,” he declares,

“The men you've known all your life, scum as they are, Morgan, Rackham, even Blackbeard, not one of them would sink so low [...] Give us no more than Blackbeard would: a clean death. You like to *play* the man, then *act* like one.”

Pierre's emphasis on the incongruence between Anne's "playing" and "acting" deserves some contemplation. The two words are almost identical in meaning, both pertaining to theatrical role-play, yet perhaps "play," the action that Anne is able to successfully achieve according to Pierre, has the added connotation of being childlike. Anne has, therefore, in the manner of a child, played with male power. Yet, as Pierre suggests, her usurpation of the male role is incomplete because her motives and experiences and therefore her actions are incongruous with a man's. She may be literally in a man's shoes, yet this does not allow her to see through his eyes. For, of course, the men she grew up with are heterosexual and would never experience the humiliation of the feigned romantic love of another man. Therefore acting like a man, means ridding herself of the experience of being a woman and of the emotions (destructive jealousy) that come along with it. Anne's prideful and somewhat smug response in no means contradicts Pierre's insult. She instead underlines her *difference*: "But I'm a *woman*, as you're so fond of reminding me. You should have thought of that when you betrayed me."

For Blackbeard as well, Anne's biological sex predestines her to engage in a certain set of behaviors that are unbecoming of a pirate. When Anne defends her lover in the face of some incriminating evidence, the offended Blackbeard sentences, "I was a fool to believe a wench could be anything other than a wench, but what I made, I can blast." And blast he does (though reluctantly and regretfully) at the end of the film,

giving his experimental creation back to the sea just as Dr. Frankenstein must do with his own beloved monster. This abrupt and tragic ending sets Anne apart from pirate heroes of the male persuasion who are never exterminated on screen. There is also an implication that she is not self-made or even self-maintained, but rather created and sustained by a father figure. When she breaks ties with Blackbeard, she is not long to fall.

On the other hand, when Anne commits her final transgression, she does not return to the Father, but to the sea, that mythical place of femininity. Pierre prophetically narrates her demise in her final battle against Blackbeard, proclaiming “Let the sea take her” and “She’s home at last.” The implication that the sea is her home (rather than the heavens) pulls on the threads of Greek myth. Even if Anne is destroyed by a father, she does not enter the (fatherly) realm of Heaven and God after she dies, but the watery home of the mermaids, sirens and other such sea monsters.

The third and final permutation of Anne Bonny that appeared on screen became involved in piracy because of her biological father—an unscrupulous and power hungry drunkard who served under Jean Lafitte. *The Buccaneer* (Paramount, 1958) is a fictionalization of Lafitte’s role in the War of 1812 in which he double-crosses the British in order to help the Americans but is in turn betrayed by these would-be allies. An admirer of the American way of life, and in love with the governor’s daughter, Lafitte warns the governor of New Orleans about the impending attack, but is double-crossed. In order to free his men, Lafitte aids Andrew Jackson and his dwindling army in their victory over the British, for which he receives a pardon, but when it is discovered that an

American ship has been sunk, Lafitte is exiled from American territory. These fluctuations in Lafitte's favor are highlighted by the film's epigraph which states that "Three presidents condemned, pardoned and again condemned this pirate." This inconstancy is echoed in the gender fluctuations of the minor character, Bonny Brown who initially is manly and aggressive, briefly ladylike and finally settles somewhere in-between. Though Bonny is inconstant in her gender conformity, her resolute opposition to the nation never waivers and she is contented only at the end of the film when she joins Lafitte in his exile upon the high seas.



**Figure 2.10**  
"She couldn't hit the side of a ship with an axe." Bonny of *The Buccaneer* frequently appears as a wild woman prone to violent tantrums

Unlike her filmic predecessors, Bonny wears a skirt instead of trousers, yet she manages to come across as manlier than the two Annes. In fact, her dirtiness, low growling voice and combative nature make her look significantly rougher than many of the other pirates, including Lafitte himself, who at one point insults her unkempt appearance by asking rhetorically "why don't you learn to handle a comb as well as you handle a knife?" For the majority of the film, Bonny is Lafitte's chief antagonist. She starts a brawl in the marketplace when she refuses to pay a commission to Lafitte, calls for mutiny against him and even throws a dagger at the captain. Though other crewmen



voice their contentions, none is as forceful or contrary as Bonny. However, the potential power of these bold actions is downplayed by the force of her emotions; her seething anger against Lafitte (the origin of which is unclear) is so wild and imprecise that it takes on the quality of a temper tantrum. The violently flailing Bonny must be restrained in more than one scene, and Lafitte is less than threatened by her homicidal tendencies, charging that “She couldn't hit the side of a ship with an axe.”



**Figure 10**  
***The Buccaneer's* Bonny dressed as a lady: “I could love a man who killed my father”**

After Lafitte and his men have helped lead the Americans to their victory over the British, Bonny makes an impressive change in her appearance and demeanor. At the victory ball at the governor's mansion, she shows up dressed as a lady. She is dazzling, but somewhat awkward in this new “rig,” and prone to asides that reflect her more masculine, low-brow ways. Nonetheless, her voice is softer and lighter even as she mutters a desire to “break a bottle over [Lafitte's] head.” Her insecurity in this new role (which constitutes both a class and a gender transformation) paradoxically aids her feminine performance. It is no coincidence that we learn for the first time of her more vulnerable feelings and desires while she is cross-dressed as a lady. Stripped of the

armor of anger and bravado, she confesses both her fear and her love to Lafitte. Her admission that she could “love a man who killed my father,” (in reference to Lafitte himself) sheds a new light on her antagonistic behavior throughout the movie. It would seem that her animosity toward Lafitte was inspired by an unspoken jealousy, a desire to take Annette’s place as Lafitte’s lover (though not, as I will explain later, as his wife).

Bonny, along with the two Annes, fits neatly into Judith Halberstam’s taxonomy of female masculinities as the “predatory butch,” whose “identity is explained through rudimentary psychoanalytic models as an immature femininity, a femininity that failed to blossom” (Halberstam 194). They are the “adult tomboy[s]” who impotently flail about in a childish tantrum in an attempt to achieve the “greater freedoms and mobilities enjoyed by boys [and men]” (Halberstam 193, 6). Ironically, however, the main impetus of the tantrum for the Anne/Bonnys of film is not their inability to *be* like men, but their inability to attract them, for while Halberstam’s butches are able to cross over to the normative side of the gender line when they learn “to be less trigger happy,” the Anne/Bonnys of film seem to be hopelessly locked into their deviant gender roles (194). Even when Anne Providence and Bonny Brown put on the dress and set aside their weapons, they are still unappealing to the male hero.

Both Pierre and Lafitte correctly intuit that there is still a butch beneath the dress. In both cases the women perform femininity awkwardly at best, both referring to the dress as a “rig” as if it wore them, rather than them wearing it. Anne, for her part immediately puts the pants back on after a brief experiment with passivity that she endures just long enough to attract the man. And Bonny’s rejection of the nation continues to mark her gender even when she wears a dress. She may look as beautiful as

her rival, Annette, but she still lacks any desire to be left “safe, in an American New Orleans.” The incompatibility of Bonny and Lafitte, it seems, is due to their opposing views about the nation. Bonny rails that “All that slop about freedom and rights makes me sick,” but she is wrong when she gestures to Annette’s portrait accusing, “*that’s* all the America [Lafitte] cares for!” For Lafitte proves that he loves America more than Annette, or at least, that he will not have Annette if he cannot be an American.



**Figure 2.11**  
“This is all the country I want.” Bonny at *The Buccaneer’s* finale.

While Lafitte wishes to trade in his pirate ways for a new nationality, Bonny seems finally at peace at the end of the film when she follows Lafitte in his exile “strait out to sea.” The woman we see in this scene is not the gruff and angry butch of the first part of the film, or the awkward and demure lady of the governor’s ball, but something in-between. And the film closes with her contemplating a stoic Lafitte after proclaiming that the deck beneath her feet is “all the country I want.” In this manner, Bonny lands happily in an indeterminate space, belonging to no nation, no man, and floating even between genders.

If Bonny is not destroyed by her masculinity as both the Annes are, she is nonetheless removed from the nation, and though she may still be a ‘butch,’ she is no longer a ‘predatory’ one once she is removed from the company of other women and isolated from society on a sea vessel. By contrast Anne Providence is not only unfit for the nation, but is even too monstrous for the world of piracy as Pierre suggests when he appeals to her better (masculine) judgment for clemency, maintaining that no other pirate would “sink so low.” Anne is willing to take her fight for autonomy to the bitter end and her refusal to let go of the trigger even in the face of certain death leads to her inevitable obliteration—even her name is symbolically destroyed at the end, crossed off a list of piratical enemies by a disembodied hand and a faceless voice that sentences “Sheba Queen, sunk off Barbados, Anne Providence, master.” This gesture ensures that she is not only obliterated in physical form from the present, but also symbolically crossed off of the historical record.

The Anne Bonny of *The Spanish Main*, for her part, is castrated and annihilated in her moment of greatest triumph, as if by manner of punishment for her excessive behavior. In a battle scene in which she literally stands out in front of Laurent, she flaunts her phallic power by gleefully slaying her aggressors. While fighting off two swordsmen at once, her weapon is suddenly cut in half and the now defenseless Anne swings her useless weapon several times before she is run through with an intact sword. As with *Anne of the Indies*, it seems that death is the price to be paid when the phallic woman is unwilling to give up her power.



**Figure 2.12**  
***The Spanish Main's Anne Bonny with a severed sword***

As with earlier depictions of Anne Bonny, the neutralization of these women by form of death or banishment is necessary to quell the anxiety that masculine women present to the nation, and the fate of female pirates on screen is a result of their (dangerous) inadequacy as women—of the incongruence between their bodies, genders and desires. For Bonny and the two Annes, the clash between their unconventional gender and their traditional (heterosexual) desires creates a queer predicament. Unbeknownst to them, the freedom and power they are raised to wield comes at the cost of love, and their alternative upbringing predestines them to a life jealousy and loneliness as well as an untimely death.

Yet true to earlier portrayals of Bonny and Read that admired their masculinity even as they condemned it, pirate films do not entirely revile the masculine woman. In point of fact, while the predatory butch is exterminated, the honest woman must become somewhat seasoned in the dishonest lifestyle in order to appeal to the pirate hero. The

transformation of Francisca in *The Spanish Main* is a perfect example of this phenomenon which is repeated in scores of pirate films that center on male heroes.

Finally, the two cross-dressing scenes I have analyzed from *Anne of the Indies* and *The Buccaneer* unwittingly enact “a parody of the parody of a parody” (Richard). For when these “women” dressed as men (in both the costumed as well as the social sense—for they not only wear slacks, but also take up a masculine role) try to dress as women, “feminine” behavior proves to be unnatural to them. The questions that arise for us as viewers in response to these scenes are pertinent to current feminist debates. Are they unnatural in feminine dress because they are inherently masculine or because they have been raised this way? Which is the “real” Bonny or the “real” Anne, the lady in the dress or the butch in pirate clothing?

If these and similar questions are left open in the films as well as in earlier portrayal of female pirates, it is nonetheless possible to deduce a change in gender ideology across the ages. Pre-nineteenth-century stories and images portray women “pirating” male gender through dress, while twentieth-century film shows masculine women attempting to “pirate” female gender by the same means. This shift was no doubt influenced by the medical ideology on sexuality which sprung up at the turn of the twentieth century. Prior to diagnosing gender and sexuality disorders, Mary Read was free to jump whimsically from one gender to another without any negative reflection on her character. *Anne of the Indies* clearly demonstrates the contrary, that one is bound to his/her gender even if it is aberrant, in which case they must be classified as “mad.” Additionally, all representations of the female pirates betray the interconnectedness of gender, nation, race and class. For when gender is crossed, it inevitably destabilizes other

social categories and the transgressor must be put back in her proper place (or killed) in order to restore social stability.

## Chapter 3

### ***Lobas de mar: A Cuban Exile's Take on the Female Pirates***

*[T]he dynamic relationship between Cuba, the Caribbean, Mexico, and North America cannot be understood outside of the context of globalization: How the relationship between Cuba and North America frames regional geopolitics with in the broader Caribbean and with its neighbors responds to a new era in global politics. Globalization and regionalization are thus two sides of the same coin.*

—Heather N. Nicol

#### **Introduction**

The political events of the twentieth-century have made it implausible to speak of Cubans in purely local terms. “Diaspora” has become the buzzword to refer to the large number of Cubans—roughly 1.5 million—that have permanently taken up residence in other countries in the past fifty years. In fitting with Nicol’s comments, Zoé Valdés, a Cuban exile living in France, considers *cubanidad* from global, regional and local perspectives in her literary works, writing equally about life in Cuba, the dispersed Cuban exile community and Cuba’s geographical and political relationship to the broader Caribbean. Her personal experience as an exile has shaped her writing in a number of ways. Though she was born in Cuba in 1959 and lived there through her mid-thirties, the



author claims that France had a larger role in influencing her writing by allowing her a certain freedom of thought. In a 2004 interview, Valdés—who had been living in exile for 10 years—claimed of her cultural heritage, “Soy cubana, indudablemente. Y escritora. Pero como escritora le debo más a Francia. La independencia del pensamiento la aprendí en Francia aunque nunca esa independencia es absoluta” (Gutiérrez and Mateo del Pino 57). Thematically, Valdés’ writing fits with the work of Cuban artists and writers living in exile during the Special Period.<sup>1</sup> As one critic has noted, “the writers of the 1990s generation [including Zoé Valdés] reveal in their novels a poetics of rootlessness and anger” that is consistent with the “nomadic perspectives” embraced by Cuban visual artists of the same period (Alvarez Borland "Fertile" 253). In fact, as Isabel Álvarez Borland has elsewhere noted, themes of displacement, nomadism and fragmentation are characteristic of Valdés’s narrative, which often centers around stories of emigration (Alvarez Borland "Reminiscent" 345). *Lobas de mar* (2003), however, breaks with this tradition and in many other ways might be considered an anomaly in the Valdés’s corpus. While this novel, which takes up the story of the female pirates Anne Bonny and Mary Read, will be the centerpiece of this chapter, I wish to begin with an overview of her works.

## **Valdés: Themes, Influences and Readership**

It could be argued that nostalgia is the one overriding principles that pervades all of Valdés’s novels, including those written in Cuba, such as *La nada cotidiana* (1996),

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<sup>1</sup> The Special Period in Peacetime or *período especial en tiempos de paz* refers to the decade of economic decline after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 which resulted (among other things) in a loosening of travel restrictions for performers and artists, many of whom remained abroad.

the work that relegated her to exile.<sup>2</sup> Though this novel, along with *Te di la vida entera* (1996) and *Querido primero novio* (1999), takes place in Cuba, there is a palpable yearning for a time before the days were filled with the “nada cotidiana” of the postrevolutionary period. The narrator of *La nada cotidiana* can do nothing but recount the tedium of her daily routine, which involves empty tasks, such as rationing bread, bartering for “luxury” items such, as toothpaste, pretending to work, and navigating the various utility outages that plague the island. Though the narrator was born on the day that the Revolution triumphed, she longs for a time that she never knew: prerevolutionary Cuba. Such sentiments are echoed in *Te di la vida entera* and *Querido primer novio*.

If nostalgia is a guiding principle in the novels that take place in Cuba, it is all the more so in Valdés’s stories of exile. *Café Nostalgia* (1997), for instance, explores the tragic side of being an immigrant by looking at the scattered Cuban Diaspora and emphasizing the difficulty of feeling at home in one’s adoptive community, regardless of the enhanced quality of life. The novel’s narrator could be described as a reluctant nomad. Her travels, though not unpleasant, are colored with feelings of loss and anguish as she confronts a fragmented community and feels somewhat out of place in all settings. Since she cannot return to her “true” home, she is no ordinary traveler and cannot find peace in her life as a drifter. The absence of the island and its ever present companion, the sea, loom large in *Café Nostalgia*.

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<sup>2</sup> Valdés explains: “Yo aproveché que tenía una invitación de la Escuela Normal Superior en París, para impartir un ciclo de conferencias sobre la poesía amorosa de José Martí. En la misma fecha salía *La nada cotidiana* en Francia: jamás ha salido en Cuba. En cuanto salió y empecé a dar entrevistas, los representantes de la dictadura me impidieron el regreso a mi país. Yo lo había previsto: por esa razón intenté salir con mi esposo, el cineasta Ricardo Vega, y con mi hija que tenía un año y medio” (quoted in Gutiérrez and Mateo del Pino 56).

Like the themes of her novels, Valdés's literary influences are rooted in Cuba. The influence of Cuban writers, such as José Lezama Lima, Guillermo Cabrera Infante and Reinaldo Arenas on Zoé Valdés have been mentioned by many critics (Alvarez Borland "Fertile"; Alvarez Borland "Reminiscent"; Gutiérrez and Mateo del Pino; Tepper). Some of these connections are more obvious than others. Valdés's admiration for Lezama Lima is made evident in *Querido primer novio* through the protagonist, Dánae, whose name was derived from his most celebrated poem, "Muerte de Narciso." Valdés's Dánae maintains a mythic reverence for the late poet, whose home has been converted into a museum. In a more obtuse connection, Isabel Álvarez Borland credits Valdés with adopting a Lezamian aesthetic in *Café Nostalgia* by retelling "the story of 'lo cubano' through a vast panorama of [non-Cuban literary] readings," such as Proust, Whitman, Eliot and Joyce (Alvarez Borland "Reminiscent" 346).

Valdés's most overt literary appropriation comes in *Te di la vida entera* (1996), which is riddled with references to Cabrera Infante, from the novel's epigraph ("Habanidad de habanidades, todo es habanidad ...") to the proliferation of clever and humorous nicknames (such as Fax and Fotocopiadora, XXL, la Mechunguita y la Puchunguita, el Uan, etc.) to the invocation of Havana nightlife of the 1950's, and its music. In the opening chapter, even the convertible that transports the characters to the cabaret is self-consciously referred to as "mi auto homenaje al de las novelas de Cabrera Infante" (29).

The majority of *Te di la vida entera* follows conventional narrative style, but the final chapter escapes from this mold. The narrator frequently interrupts her own story with constant asides and even relates two contradictory versions of the same event. It is

in this chapter that Valdés experiments with the “acrobatic literary abandon” of Cabrera Infante (Tepper). But while Cabrera Infante’s word plays largely draw on literary and pop culture references, in *Te di la vida entera*, these games are invariably political jabs that critique the corruption and social conditions of postrevolutionary Cuba. Such is the case with her extended play with the prefix “diplo,” which critiques the insidious diplomatic presence in Havana:

...de vez en cuando un diploauto arrolla a un diploperro. Una diplobicicleta choca contra un diploposte. De buenas a primeras un diplolada chapa blanca de diplomministro parque en el diplogaraje de un diplorestorán. Una diploputa camina pavondeándose, la diplobarriga llena de diplopuerco y diplofrijoles. Una recién graduada universitaria siente envidia y comienza a reflexionar si no sería mejor hacer diplocarrera en el Malecón. Inmediatamente, recuerda el diplodiscurso del diplotallasuperextra [se refiere a Castro, que en la novela se conoce por es seudónimo XXL], el que le tocó por la libreta, experimenta una ferviente vocación religiosa: *Nuestras putas son las más instruidas, las más sanas del mundo entero.* (*Te di* 349)

In a more direct reference to Cabrera, and the epigraph that begins the novel, the narrator laments: “Habáname tú, mi ciudad prisión. Habáname tú, mi libertad, con tus virtudes y defectos: descolorida y triste, pero gozadora, escandalosa, mortificadora” (72). The vision of Havana in both these quotations is certainly different from the affluent city of the 1950s promoted by Cabrera Infante. Valdés’s Cuba, in contrast has always been “descolorida y triste,” as she was born after the revolution. It is significant that Valdés’s invocation of Cabrera Infante’s language is not reproduced during Havana’s glamor days, but after it has turned shabby. Her language, then, becomes the idiom of nostalgia, invoking a past and underlining its irrecoverable nature.

If nothing else, in reading Valdés’s works, it becomes clear that she is an avid reader who has been influenced by many authors from Cuban and European traditions. It should come as no surprise, given her chosen country of residence, that many of these

authors are French, not the least of them Margueritte Yourcenar and Marcel Proust who have also been honored in her epigraphs in *La nada cotidiana* and *Lobas de mar*. But in consideration of all these influences, it is important to note that Valdés is and aspires to be a popular writer. Though she no doubt longs to write as well as the role models that she cites and emulates, what matters most to her is the volume of her readership. Quite simply, she explains, “[q]uiero que me lea mucha gente” (Gutiérrez and Mateo del Pino 52). While she may nod to the likes of Cabrera Infante, Lezama Lima and Proust, her own writing is much more accessible and less geared toward the academy. In general, Valdés’s novels are plot-driven rather than language-driven and span a period of decades or travel across broad geographic spaces. In contrast, Cabrera Infante’s characters in novels such as *Tres tristes tigres* never leave the confines of Havana or the historical context of the 1950s. Relatively little happens in the novel, which features endless forays into the Havana night life. Rather than plot, it is language that drives the narrative, since it is word play and literary parody that maintain the reader’s interest and turn this novel into a literary masterpiece. Lezama Lima’s narrative is similarly motivated by its aesthetic sensibility. In *Paradiso*, for example, moments of action, such as the tense clash of a student uprising, are subordinated to the philosophical debates that follow, making the plot much less important than the art of rhetoric. In fact, such events are only significant in that they give the characters a topic to debate with studied eloquence.

Given Valdés’s accessible, plot-driven writing style and desire to be widely read, it may be more apt to compare her writing with that of other commercial Latin American women authors such as Julia Álvarez, Isabel Allende, Ángeles Mastretta, and Gioconda Belli who, along with Valdés, focus on issues of social inequality on the basis of class,

race and especially sex. Valdés's works share common literary styles such as ecofeminism, magic realism and incorporation of popular (romantic music). Like Isabel Allende, Valdés pushes magic realism to the brink of parody, as is the case in *Querido primer novio* which features an inbred rural woman who oozes guava paste from her navel when she is aroused, and a benevolent manatee that saves the *guajira* from drowning. This novel also utilizes eco-feminism as it features a (female) tree who acts as part-time narrator in a manner almost identical with Gioconda Belli's *La mujer habitada*. Finally, Valdés's *Te di la vida entera* mirrors Ángeles Mastretta's *Arráncame la vida*, which also uses bolero lyrics in its title and in the introduction to each chapter. Political unrest and sensuality are a guiding principle in all these narratives, but Valdés's works are unique in their overt exploration of lesbianism.

A prime example is *Querido primer novio* (1999), which explores the link between lesbianism and political dissidence. The novel, which takes place in Castro's Cuba, centers on the illicit lesbian love affair between two teens that ironically met at the rural education camps (or *escuelas al campo*) that socialist youth have participated in since the mid-60s. The two young women—one of whom is from the city and the other from the countryside—are separated when camp lets out and do not meet again until they are middle aged. The adult women, who decide to pursue a life together, are in great danger of persecution by the same government that unwittingly facilitated their encounter. Toward the end of the novel, we learn of the possible tragedies that *might* have befallen the couple—hypothetical situations that mirror what has happened “en tantas otras ocasiones con numerosas afiebradas que desafiaron los patrones de conducta erigidos por la sociedad” (Valdés *Querido* 295). In the first scenario, one of the women

is committed to an insane asylum by her retaliating husband where she lives drugged, restrained and disoriented, yearning for an early death while her partner struggles to survive on the streets. In the second scenario, the two women enter into the corrupt criminal justice system after false accusations are made by the emasculated husband. It is only by force of miracle that the two women escape the death sentence initially handed down, and also the softened condemnation to life in prison. As various spirits enter the courtroom (those who have narrated the previous chapters), the victims and witnesses are allowed to speak, and the truth proverbially sets them free.

The retaliatory tactics of the jealous husband in *Querido* speak to the threat that lesbianism poses to men in a patriarchal society. From the point of view of the husband, his wife's affair constitutes a "[d]oble humillación," for not only was he betrayed, but he was betrayed *by a woman* (*Querido* 327). His wife's fellow inmate at the insane asylum (who, incidentally is a political prisoner silenced and restrained by the powers that be with the false charge of insanity) puts it succinctly: "Siempre que una mujer transgrede, paf, el poder se descontrola. Provoca un desequilibrio. Una mujer hace algo grande y en seguida pondrán a un hombre por encima de ella para intentar apagar el esplendor de su obra. Y si para colmo se equivoca, la decapitarán" (302). Any transgression by a woman, then, is terribly threatening to the social order and is punished not just by the offended man, but by the machinery of the patriarchal system that is designed in his favor. Such a society facilitates the imprisonment of transgressive women in insane asylums and penitentiaries which ensure their social death and might even facilitate a more permanent annihilation in an actual death sentence.

In his autobiography, Reinaldo Arenas has likewise commented on the heightening of macho attitudes by the revolutionary government that embraced “una virilidad militante” and exalted macho stereotypes to the detriment of women and gays (71). Such sentiments are echoed in Severo Sarduy’s *Cocuyo*, in which the Revolution is effectively credited with institutionalizing machismo in Cuba (González-Echevarría 80). The similar fate of gays and women led to frequent alliances according to Arenas, because “la mujer, como el homosexual, son considerados en el sistema castrista como seres inferiores...De ahí que las mujeres y los homosexuales se unieran, aunque sólo fuera como una manera de protegerse” (178). The linkage of lesbianism and political dissidence is consequently not unique to Valdés’s writing, but is a feature that emerges in the writing of several Cuban authors (and has proven to be quite successful in the literary market). In Vades’s corpus, the themes of lesbianism and political dissidence appear again and again, but have a particularly unusual manifestation in *Lobas de mar*, as I will discuss below.

### ***Lobas de mar***

Compared to Valdés’s other novels, *Lobas de mar* (2003) offers a very different look at cultural displacement and nomadism, one that reflects the shifts that have occurred in global economics and cultural politics over the last three-hundred years. While *Café Nostalgia* is somewhat anti-assimilationist, mourning a permanently fractured community, *Lobas de mar* is more interested in the connections that bring disparate cultures together—rather than those that separate a singular one, such as Cuba. Displacement, cultural fragmentation and nostalgia are de-emphasized in *Lobas de mar*.



Instead, *Lobas* celebrates being of the world, being of no place and having connections to every place—for it is situated in the pre-national period, when national identities were not yet formed, where being born in one place did not necessarily give rise to a sense of connectedness or communal allegiance. Of course, this is not to say that there were no prejudices about one's place of birth: *Criollos* born of Spanish parents in the colonies were socially stigmatized for the unlucky accident of entering life far from the Iberian Peninsula. Nonetheless, *Lobas* celebrates an idealistic vision of the pre-national era that is not so different in tenor from utopian imaginings of globalism.

There is no doubt that globalization has had certain homogenizing effects. Among other factors, the relatively low cost and high speed of travel and communications, the dispersal of world populations, and the magnitude of the global marketplace have reduced the relative space and time that once separated us, making events and beliefs in one region or country more relevant to others across the globe. These effects, however, are seldom cause for celebration; in fact, they are what make it possible for terrorist attacks to be executed from halfway around the globe, for downturns in the US economy to rapidly produce aftershocks in foreign markets and for unsavory methods of commercial and agricultural production in China to directly affect the health of American children and pets. Indeed, the increased relevance of world events upon local communities, has raised fears that the nation-state might vanish as globalization “creates a world without borders” (Appadurai 1).

At the same time, there exist opposing forces that push back against this homogenization. Since the 1980s, the net tendency has been for states to become ever-smaller. I refer, for example, to the fracturing of Eastern European states, the increased

intensity of separatist movements, and the effects of recent waves of immigration that have created myriad fractured, hyphenated or blended communities as specific and unique as “Nuyorican” and “Miami Cuban.” Consequently, at the same time that our lives have become more relevant to one another’s, and we are more than ever linked globally, we are also more invested in creating ever-smaller communities with which to identify. Such contradictory tendencies are in keeping with the “disjunctive” nature of globalization that Arjun Appadurai identified in his 2000 Wertheim Lecture.<sup>3</sup>

As a point of contrast, the colonial period (in which *Lobas* is set) did not have this oppositional tenor. Even though it took months for individuals and news to travel between continents, the transatlantic divide was ideologically smaller, due to the fact that communities on either side of the Atlantic (such as Spain or England and their respective colonies) were governed by the same sovereigns and adhered to the same social principles. This, of course, was in the pre-national period, before we had such things as “countries,” when political and cultural boundaries were more amorphous than they are today and might even be renegotiated peacefully as powerful families consolidated through marriage.

Zoe Valdés’s *Lobas de mar* celebrates this cultural ambiguity and idealistically seeks to bring some of its principles into our contemporary consciousness. Despite having won the well-publicized Premio Fernando Lara in 2003, *Lobas de mar* would not likely be classified as one of Valdés’s best novels. In fact, Nuncio Hernández Valle has dedicated a full length article to pointing out all of the novel’s inconsistencies, poor uses

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<sup>3</sup> Other notable works on globalization by Appadurai include “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*, ed. Anita Manuur (Malden: Blackwell, 2003); *Globalization* (Durham: Duke UP, 2002); and *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996).

of language, historical inaccuracies, and the like.<sup>4</sup> Taking these factors into consideration, we can assume that for the novel to win such a prize, it must have had considerable merits beyond the literary. One that stands out is the theme of Golden Age piracy, which is somewhat of a rarity in the corpus of twentieth-century Hispanic literature and certainly underread and understudied. Of the twentieth century narratives that I have outlined in my introductory chapter, only Borges's short story and Valdés's novel center overtly on Ann Bonny and Mary Read, though a number of the other pieces of fiction (all, in fact, except Cichero's and Britto García) feature female pirates that were most likely inspired to some degree on these historical figures.

As I have elsewhere insisted, considerations of piracy from the Hispanic perspective are much needed to offset the overwhelmingly vast study of the subject from the Anglo-American perspective. *Lobas* achieves this by uniquely narrating the story of the infamous Anglo female pirates, Anne Bonny and Mary Read, in Spanish. Her cultural and linguistic translation of the story of these two women might be viewed as appropriate if one does not take into consideration the particularities of a pirate's life in the early eighteenth-century. Decided exiles of their own places of origin, Caribbean pirates inevitably had contact with other cultures as they attacked ships and ports and later unloaded their contraband. Thus they might be enemies of the Spanish crown, and simultaneously allies of the Spanish settlers. Furthermore, persons of Spanish, English, French, Dutch and African descent might be compatriots aboard the same pirate vessel. It is fitting, then that Valdés's protagonists operate seamlessly within Anglo, Spanish and African circles alike, and curious that traditions other than the English have been reduced

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<sup>4</sup> The article, which is not copywrited, or published in a professional journal, is nonetheless thorough and well researched. It can be found on various websites, but the original is on red-literaria.com. See Hernández Valle.

to a mere footnote in most other versions of their story. The glaring absence of the Spanish Main<sup>5</sup> is particularly surprising, given that most Caribbean pirates concentrated their attacks on the Spanish trade that dominated the region.

Valdés's novelization of the female pirates draws heavily from Charles Johnson's relation on the duo, published in *A General History of the Pyrates*. The Cuban author is careful to restage all of the key events of the pirate's lives, as related by Johnson and even has her heroines quote verbatim from the eighteenth century text. Along general lines, Bonny and Read's personalities also fall in line with Johnson's characterization; in both versions of the story, Bonny is rebellious, fickle and lascivious, while Read is dutiful, brave and drawn toward monogamy. However, as Johnson's tale is less than twenty pages long, Valdés's novelization leaves much room for embellishment. Her characters are much more developed, but also say and do things that would have been impossible for Johnson to imagine, much less publish. Indeed, *Lobas* is imbued with contemporary politics. Valdés's characters explore such foreign notions as (homo)sexual identity and slave emancipation. In this sense, Valdés's novel has a broader objective than to merely make the story of the pirates known to the Spanish-speaking public. As I have noted above, such a move was carried out in 1933 by Jorge Luis Borges who published the unembellished facts about the Anglo pirates and their Asian predecessor in his short story "La viuda Ching, pirata." What stands out about Borges's "short story," is that there appears to be no fiction, or at least, no modifications or challenges to Johnson's account of their lives. In contrast, Valdés's protagonists are strongly influenced by her

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<sup>5</sup> The Spanish Main referred to the coast of the Spanish mainland territories bordering the Caribbean, which included modern day Florida, Mexico, Central America and the northern coast of South America. The Spanish Main was a key target of pirate attacks because of the wealth originating from ports such as Veracruz, Cartagena, and Maracaibo.

imagination, and, as I will argue below, by her political convictions.

As for the relationship of the female pirates to Valdés's other protagonists, as I have earlier noted, the gleeful adaptability of these wandering women is in stark contrast to the unsettled sensation experienced by the majority of Valdés's main characters, be they Cubans living abroad or on the island. All of Valdés's characters suffer from some kind of displacement, regardless of their physical location. Those living in Cuba suffer under Castro's rule, nostalgic for the pre-Revolutionary period. Those living abroad likewise yearn for a free Cuba, but also, of course, for the island in general, since they are physically separated from its landscape. The attitude of the protagonists of *Lobas* toward their transatlantic wanderings is quite different from that of the exiles and diplomats of *Café Nostalgia* and *La hija del embajador*, in that it is void of yearning, cleansed of the pain of nostalgia.

In keeping with the (pre-national) time period, *Lobas de mar* discards notions of nationalism, assuming no affinity based on the fact that one was born and raised in a particular place. Instead it highlights a more desirable (yet perhaps somewhat idealistic) approach to exile—the ability to feel at home in many cultural traditions. Valdés's interest in the pirates and their plural identities might be linked to her own cultural roots as the grandchild of immigrants from diverse regions of the world. In a move that could be part sincere and part marketing ploy, she prides herself on claiming a number of cultures as her own. Though she has called herself undoubtedly Cuban, she is also staunchly multicultural, and has claimed: “mi cultura es española, china, irlandesa, y negra, la del negro cubano. Mi abuelo materno era chino, mi abuela materna irlandesa, mis abuelos paternos canarios, y viví mi infancia en un solar rodeada de tambores

afrocubanos. Pero mi madurez intelectual la estoy viviendo en Francia” (Gutiérrez and Mateo del Pino 57). Notably, all these identities are exalted in her novels, and her genealogical and experiential claim to them is no doubt asserted in an attempt to pass herself off as a cultural insider or expert qualified to create diverse and politically correct cast of characters with which readers of all sorts might identify. Regardless of her motives, her two apparently contradictory affirmations—that she is both undoubtedly Cuban and decidedly multicultural—manifest themselves in the logic of *Lobas de mar*. For at the same time that the novel celebrates multiculturalism and anti-nationalism, there is also a temptation to re-nationalize the female pirates—to de-emphasize their Anglo roots in order to Cubanize them, which constitutes another element of “piracy” (the appropriation of non-Hispanic historical figures).

Despite the relatively brief attention to Cuban colonial history, which constitutes one out of nine chapters, *Lobas de mar* is not overtly about Cuba. The story as Valdés tells it, however, speaks to the contemporary Cuban experience in a number of ways. To begin with, trade with Cuba has been a hotly contested issue in the international community since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. In hopes of provoking the fall of an economically weakened Cuban government, the US drastically tightened its trade restrictions with Cuba in 1992 with the instatement of the Cuban Democracy Act or Torricelli law. The Act went beyond the already existing trade embargo and provided a strong incentive for other governments and international companies to follow suit. According to the new law, ships having “touched port in Cuba or transported goods to or on behalf of Cuba” were prohibited from entering US ports for a period of 180 days (Domínguez 66). Violators of the decree were threatened with a blacklist. This policy

was later institutionalized by the Helms-Burton law or The Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act in March 2006, a time in which such anti-socialist attitudes had strong international support. In fact, “the whole of the Western hemisphere was at that time overwhelmingly dominated by neoliberalism, most governments in the region being right-wingers heavily committed to the idea and with none of them in the slightest sympathetic to Cuba’s plight” (Domínguez 67). The long-standing U.S. economic embargo has also placed restrictions on remittances sent to islanders, often from relatives living abroad and travel to the island, because tourist dollars support the Cuban economy. Perhaps more devastating than the economic restrictions, is the fact that such an embargo necessarily leads to restrictions on cultural exchanges, since visiting scholars and relatives are presumed to spend money on the island in violation of the embargo. And of course, travel abroad for the average Cubans is still impossible, though some entertainers and other professionals are given permission to travel.

Tight regulations regarding commerce have also been instituted by the Cuban government, which restricts foreigners from obtaining local currency. Foreigners, of course, must spend money while on the island, so alternative currencies have been made available to them (and thus to Cuban merchants) in the form of US dollars (which have been banned since 2004) and “convertible pesos” which are linked in value to the dollar (currently \$1.08 plus a 10% exchange tax). The convertible, however, is not an internationally recognized currency and, as such, is not indexed by the ISO and is not exchangeable outside of Cuba. Furthermore, the government imposes many restrictions on commerce, so that Cubans are not free to buy and sell goods or services without prior government authorization and heavy taxation. Consequently, piracy, in the form of black

market groceries, contraband and counterfeit cigars, illegal taxi rides and home stays is also rampant on the island. These petty illegal acts, sometime termed *jineterismo* or hustling, are not strictly policed on the island (Domínguez 80). In many (but not all) instances, *jineterismo* involves foreigners, due to the fact that they have more disposable income. Finally, certain items, such as beef and lobster, are made legally available only to foreigners. Slaughtering a cow for personal consumption is illegal even for the farmer that raises the beef. It could be argued that the government also engages in forms of petty piracy by extorting wealth from Cubans and foreigners alike. The inflated exchange rate and taxation of the *peso convertible* is a prime example, seeing as it is an internationally suspect practice that ensures the Cuban government gleans a direct profit from each foreign dollar brought into Cuba. All of these restrictions and the high incidence of their illegal circumvention point toward an integral link between piracy and the way that Cubans live—though the piracy I refer to here is not quite the same as traditional form enacted on the high seas.

Apart from these modern *economic* parallels to piracy, the freedom of the open seas that pirates (male or female) enjoyed in the colonial era has its contemporary analogue in the exodus of Cuban refugees who seek their freedom by taking to the sea. Such maritime adventures are, of course, not solely a Cuban phenomenon, but one practiced by citizens of many underdeveloped Caribbean nations, including Haiti and the Dominican Republic. In the case of Cuba, these maritime emigrations were sometimes achieved through piracy or marine hijackings. The larger waves of such hijackings in October 1979 and spring and summer of 1994 were not overtly inspired by trade but can be linked to economic factors, nonetheless. In fact, the mass cooption of commercial



ships was an act of desperation on the part of Cuban citizens suffering in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse. Perhaps inadvertently, the hijackings put further strain on the Cuban economy by interrupting trade. Lana Wylie explains:

In the spring and summer of 1994, numerous Cubans, determined to immigrate to the United States due to the severe economic crisis on the island, resorted to hijacking boats visiting Cuban ports. Castro, frustrated by his inability to guarantee the safety of ships in the Bay of Havana and by the apparent refusal of the United States to discourage these departures, removed restrictions on Cubans leaving the country. As he expected, this prompted thousands to take to boats and rafts and set out for U.S. shores. (Wylie 8)

Such links between piracy and Cuban life might in part explain Valdés's interest in telling the story of the Anglo pirates in Spanish. But as an exile, she also feels a personal connection to Bonny and Read. In the novel's epilogue, the author poetically links the experiences of the female pirates to her own life in a passage which underlines the importance of the sea as a place of escape. She explains: "He decidido novelar las vidas de dos mujeres piratas, ardientes y voluptuosas lobas de mar: Mary Read y Ann Bonny, porque yo, al igual que ellas, sufrí la angustia de echarme a la mar instigada por la desesperación, en una huida definitiva de los conflictos de la tierra. En una huída de mí misma" (235). In this brief explanation, Valdés seems to allude to her personal exile from Cuba (a specific "land") as an equivalent to the female pirates's exile from all land-based culture. However Valdés did not actually escape from Cuba in the traditional fashion (by sea in a small fishing boat bound for Florida) but managed to obtain legal permission to leave the country, as did many artists of her generation.<sup>6</sup> But even if Valdés's escape was neither to the sea or via the sea, this body of water is still responsible for creating the distance and space between her present location (France) and her past (Cuba). As the author continues in defense of her novel, the escape she refers to

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<sup>6</sup> See note number 1.

becomes less literal and more literary—no longer referring to a physical escape via the sea, but a spiritual escape from the self which might purify the thoughts and even inspire writing. Indeed the sea might be considered a muse—a place of escape from the “real” and a place of inspiration for writing.

It is not merely a connection to the sea in general or the Caribbean in particular that helps the author identify with her characters, however. There are various indicators within the narrative that Valdés considers piracy to be a form of exile. In reference to the female pirates and their captain, John Rackham, for instance, the narrator relates: “el hecho de haber elegido el océano como hábitat los convertía en exiliados permanentes, inclusive de cualquier territorio, de cualquier país, de sí mismos” (171). In this sense, Read and Bonny, are, like Valdés, exiles who are distanced not just from their places of origin, but also from themselves as is indicated in this quote from the body of the novel as well as in the previous quote from Valdés’s epilogue.

In the case of the pirates, the alienation from the self might refer to their relationship to sex and gender which could be considered another form of exile. If Valdés’s characters understand piracy to be an economically motivated form of self-imposed exile from a given geographical location, governing body and social hierarchy, female-to-male cross-dressing has similar qualities. For the female pirates as well as all sorts of cross-dressers, donning a man’s clothes and social role acts as a form of escape and liberation that opens up creative possibilities for women who otherwise would have been relegated to a life of submission and poverty.

The “exile” from femininity is a means of escaping the negative effects of the *machismo* that pervades the culture of the ship as well as the land based culture that they

have left behind. As with the more traditional geographically-based exile, this gender exile is not necessarily negative. That is to say that we need not think of femininity as a homeland that has been tragically lost, for Read and Bonny do not yearn for a life of dresses and homemaking anymore than they long to return to England or the thirteen colonies. Such feelings of nostalgia for a former way of life are entirely absent from the narrative with respect to gender and geography alike.

## Cubanizing the Female Pirates

The title of Valdés's pirate novel is a liberal translation into Spanish—one that modifies the masculine singular into the feminine plural—of Jack London's successful novel, *The Sea-Wolf* (1904), about the brutal captain of a seal-hunting schooner. The feminization and Hispanicization of Anglo-American representations of piracy thus begin with the title of her novel. Aside from being narrated in Spanish, Anne Bonny and Mary Read learn about Spanish language and culture from the people that they meet on the high seas and through extended stays in Spanish territory.

The acculturated, international version of Read is a language enthusiast who takes every opportunity emulate the “enemies” tongue. She is first exposed to the Spanish language in Europe and later tries to perfect it with the help of an Andalusian pirate friend:

Durante la guerra en Flandes...Mary Read, había aprendido a pronunciar con cierta decencia el idioma enemigo, o sea, el castellano ... Y más recientemente durante su estancia en el *Kingston*, donde la amistad con Juanito Jiménez—un ex prisionero gaditano a quien Jack Rackham destinó a la cocina como ayudante de Arturito...—, y que no paraba de canturrear en todo el bendito día, y hasta dormido, le había permitido progresar en la lengua cervantina gracias al infinito repertorio cancionístico del andaluz. (Valdés *Lobas* 150)

As we will see, however, after being seasoned in the Caribbean, Juanito Jiménez’s voice and song take on qualities that are more suggestive of Havana than of Cádiz. To begin with, Mary Read takes pains to reproduce Juanito’s “acento dulzón a caña chupada” when she sings in Spanish—a description that is suggestive of Cuba in that it metaphorically compares his voice to the chewed pulp of sugar cane which was mass produced on the island beginning in the nineteenth century. The lyrics of the song that Read intones also stir up images of the Caribbean nation:

*La china que yo tenía  
cuándo la volveré a ver,  
era una manzanillera,  
que me dejó de querer.  
Yo la vi, yo la vi, yo la vi,  
y ella no me vio,  
y estaba comiendo mango  
sentada en el Malecón... (150)*

Regardless of the origins of this song, the mention of tropical fruit (mango) and the Malecón—a hallmark of Havana—are more evocative of Cuba than of Spain. Of course Cádiz is also a port city with its own seawall and similar architecture. In fact, the resemblance of Cádiz to Havana has been acknowledged and popularized in the song “Habaneras de Cádiz” (1984) which has become a local anthem for the Andalusian port city.<sup>7</sup> In addition to the Cuban flavor of these last two lines, the preceding two recall

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<sup>7</sup> “Habaneras de Cádiz,” written by Antonio Burgos (lyricist) and Carlos Cano (composer) in 1984, has been performed by dozens of Spanish artists. The refrain intones:

Que tengo un amor en La Habana  
y el otro en Andalucía,  
no te he visto yo a ti, tierra mía,  
más cerca que la mañana  
que apareció en mi ventana  
de La Habana colonial

Cuban artist Compay Segundo's "Viejos sonos de Santiago" (*Calle Salud* 1999) which minus one repetition of "yo la vi" has identical wording in its refrain: "yo la vi, yo la vi / y ella no me vio."

The references to a Caribbeanized Spanish (and to a Caribbeanized Spaniard) speak to the fluid exchange between Spain and the colonies during the colonial period and the fact that a significant portion of Cuba's heritage was born of Spain. This transatlantic connection is further developed in the novel's final chapter which jumps ahead to the year 1999 when the Andalusian descendent of Juanito Jiménez travels to Cuba in search of a descendent of the baby that Ann Bonny left on the island. This brief interlude serves to mark the societal rift that time has created between the two nations.

The contemporary islanders can no longer comprehend the difference between Cádiz and Galicia, and question their visitor when corrected, asking: "¿y cuál es la diferencia mi niño? ¿Eso no es España?" (228). The Spaniard, for his part, can no longer operate with ease within the local culture, and is corrected for calling his host's dwelling an *hacienda* when the former slave plantation had long since been turned into a shabby commune, a "solar de vecindad, donde numerosas familias compartían la miseria" (227). The Spaniard approaches his surroundings with greater consciousness and attention to the past rather than the present and is anxious to find the broken ancestral link between himself and the islanders in order to renew a historical bond and revive the past. The contemporary Cubans on the other hand are conscious only of their present surroundings

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tó Cádiz, la Catedral, La Viña y El Mentidero...  
Y verán que no exagero  
si al cantar la habanera repito:  
La Habana es Cádiz con más negritos,  
Cádiz, La Habana con más salero.

Burgos, who is originally from Sevilla has called the song "una declaración de amor a Cádiz" in an interview with an unknown reporter. See (Unknown)

and situation. They are disinterested in stories about pirates and treat past events and foreign lands with indifference.

Valdés's censure of the communist government manifests itself in this final chapter with the underlining of the poverty and misery of the hacienda's inheritors. The cultural-linguistic comparison between the language and practices of the imperial past (the age of the *hacienda*) and those of the communist present (the age of the *solar de vecindad*) is charged with Valdés's own political convictions and suggests that the abhorrent institutional practice of slavery put into play by overemphasizing the differences between classes of people and conferring all the rights, liberties and accommodations to one group over another has been substituted by an only slightly better situation in which everyone suffers equally in communal misery. Such sentiments are echoed by other Cuban exiles, such as Reinaldo Arenas who insists on comparing the forced labor camps of the sixties and seventies to colonial slavery (154-55). Given Valdés's background and life experiences, it is significant that Cuba is the chosen place to make the historical nexus—to connect the colonial past to the present and to acknowledge the transatlantic divide.

In *Lobas de mar*, unlike Mary Read, Ann's apparent ability to communicate in Spanish is never explained or problematized. Instead, she goes from communicating (presumably in English) with English-named characters, to a stay in Cuba in which she cavorts with people with exclusively Spanish names. Determining the presumed language of communication is difficult in the novel because all dialogue appears in Spanish with few narrative footnotes to clarify. However we do learn that just as Mary

Read picked up the Spanish language through casual contact, Ann Bonny learned to dominate African dialects through her involvement in the slave trade.

On an *hacienda* in Cuba, Ann follows the distant chants of the African slaves who sing to Yemayá in “bantú lucumí,” which according to the narrator is “un idioma en el que Ann había aprendido a desenvolverse, gracias al tráfico negrero” (135). *Bantú* and *lucumí*, however, do not constitute just one language. Bantú is in fact a large group or family of hundreds of different languages. In Cuba, the term refers to ethnic descendents from Congo who practice the religion referred to as “palo.” Lucumí on the other hand refers to the religion of Nigerian descendents who speak the Yoruba language. Yoruba and other African languages are still spoken among African descendents in Cuba today, especially, though not exclusively for ceremonial purposes.

Despite Ann’s alleged ability to communicate with the African slaves, she never speaks with them in their native tongue and distances herself from them in many instances. She initially reproaches her Creole host for his participation in Afro Cuban religious ceremonies and eyes his collection of saints that have indigenous and African features with disdain (it might be noted that such Spanish-creole involvement in Afro Cuban religious ceremonies during that time is quite improbable). However, she does appreciate their music and dance traditions, and values at least one individual on a rather objectified physical-erotic level.

Initially disdainful of her host’s involvement in the African ceremonies, Ann later insists on attending one herself and picks up the African rhythms and movements as if she had been immersed in their culture all her life. Indeed, Ann dances barefoot and pregnant with unexpected ease: “pese a su estado, Ann bailaba, pies descalzos,

acompañada al ritmo sandunguero de las negras congas, restregándose con los cimarrones cuya piel repujada en cicatrices la excitaba hasta perder los sentidos, sobre todo con Tomasito, el hijo de Vidapura” (142). Such moments are infused with the tremendous sexual energy that motivates Ann throughout the novel, in keeping with earlier versions that highlighted her sexual appetite.

Regardless of Ann’s apparent embrace of African traditions, she is by no means converted into an emancipationist as are other fictional female pirates in the Hispanic literary tradition, such as Alberto Vázquez-Figueroa’s *Celeste (Piratas)*. Though she muses that “serían los esclavos los que un día se levantarían y se salvarían a ese país de la avaricia y de la envidia,” she actually shows *less* compassion for the slaves after her cultural experience on the island (148). Finding themselves inconveniently with a cargo of African and Moorish slaves at a time when they are contemplating giving up the pirate lifestyle, Ann advocates for throwing the individuals overboard, even though prior to her induction into African religious ceremonies, she had protested to similarly inhumane treatment of sick slaves. Rackham somewhat hypocritically—for he has also undergone an inexplicable about-face on the subject—chastises Ann for her ethical flip-flop, charging: “[h]as cambiado de opinión desde Cuba para acá, Bonn, allá no pensabas igual” (204).

More powerful than Ann’s musical-erotic connection with the African slaves in Cuba, is her appreciation for the physical environment which has come to feel like home for her during her several-months long stay. At the time of her departure, her heart aches, not for the daughter she must leave behind, but for the landscape of the Cuban countryside: “Ann recorrió con la vista el fulgurante verdor de los campos, los penachos



de las palmas lejanas eran mecidos tiernamente por la brisa, pensó, y confesó en voz alta que su corazón lloraba henchido de amor de tristeza, partido por dejar aquella isla” (145). Such separation pains are never felt when leaving any other setting, be it mainland, island or ship culture. This is as close as we come in this novel to emulating the feelings of nostalgia that pervade her other works, as Ann negotiates a momentary sense of loss at the prospect of a permanently deterritorialized life.

The permeation of Cuban culture extends beyond plot and character and into narrative asides about linguistic idiosyncrasies (181, 190) and historical figures such as José Martí and the (perhaps fictional) pirate *Mantequita* who betrayed the Cuban creoles (159, 207). It is no accident that Valdés chooses to feature two figures that ostensibly played a role in the Cuban struggle for independence from Spain. In such a way, Cuban heritage is privileged in the novel over any other, giving the novel a distinct Cuban flavor, despite the fact that it is about two Anglo pirates who were captured and sentenced by representatives of the British crown.

## **Sexuality and Political Subversion**

When considered in the contemporary Cuban context, the sexual transgressions of Valdés’s protagonists also obtain a deeper political meaning. While it could be argued that transgressions of sexual and gender norms are always subversive in nature, this is especially true in communist Cuba, where sexual acts are policed and transgressors severely punished. According to the author, “[t]o identify as gay or lesbian in Cuba...is to declare political dissidence. It is equivalent to publishing a manifesto against the government” (quoted in Bolonik no pag.). We have seen Valdés dramatize this belief in

*Querido primer novio.*

Valdés's exploration of homoeroticism in *Lobas de mar* is an innovative part of her narrative, one that celebrates the subversive spirit of the female pirates who rebel against the status quo even in bed. Similar to the protagonists of *Querido primer novio*, the female pirates must keep their sexual experimentation closeted. In Bonny and Read's case this is not only to conceal such unorthodox sexual practices, but also to keep knowledge of their true sex a secret. In light of the author's background, these homoerotic elements might be considered an anti-Castro exercise of her recently acquired freedom of speech and her "independencia del pensamiento," which she learned in exile. Though Valdés's exploration of homoeroticism is unique in many ways, she is not the first to imagine desire between the two pirate women. In fact, the lesbian encounters in *Lobas de mar* fulfill the hint of homoerotic desire that dates back to the 1724 version of Johnson's text, in which the unscrupulous Ann Bonny allegedly took Mary Read for "a handsome young Fellow, and for some Reasons best known to herself, first discovered her Sex to Mary Read" (Johnson *A general history of the pyrates, from their first rise and settlement in the island of Providence, to the present time. With the remarkable actions and adventures of the two female pyrates Mary Read and Anne Bonny. To which is added, a short abstract of the statute and civil law, in relation to piracy* 122). Johnson, however, makes it clear that no sexual contact came about from the crush, because "Mary Read knowing what she [Ann Bonny] would be at, and being very sensible of her own Incapacity that Way, was forced to come to a right Understanding with her, and so to the great Disappointment of Ann Bonny, she let her know she was a Woman also" (122). Though Ann's great disappointment would seem to indicate that nothing transpired

between the two women, an affair still remains a possibility for Ann's lover Captain Jack Rackham. Suspicious of their "intimacy," and deeming Read to be Ann's "new Lover" he "grew furiously jealous" and threatened to slit his rival's throat (123). Learning the truth about Read's sex seems to have assuaged his worries—perhaps because an affair between the two women was unimaginable to him or because such intimacy (whatever that entailed) was appropriate in relationships between women.

As discussed in the previous chapter, lesbianism is also a motif that emerges in twentieth-century Hollywood films featuring female pirates who are unable to attract men. Similar to these films, Valdés does not bother to make the homoerotic encounters appear historically accurate. In fact, despite the "absence of a concept of an erotic identity" in the eighteenth century, some characters—such as Mary Read's second husband, Matt Sinclair—have strong (homo)sexual identities which they are not averse to articulating (Traub 41). Uncharacteristic of the time period, Bonny and Read in Valdés's novel also explore notions of sexual preference for one another over their male partner(s). Furthermore, the affair between the female pirates in the novel is not in keeping with historical "lesbian" affairs: they do not have ambiguous anatomy and therefore cannot be classed as hermaphrodites or tribades; their affair does not involve deceit or differences in perceived gender (in other words, they know each other to be women and neither woman adopts one of the two available social gender roles, therefore making their affair incomparable with historical cases of "female husbands"); and finally, their affair does not develop surreptitiously out of an intimate or romantic friendship between women.<sup>8</sup> Instead, their romance is initiated for the sheer delight of committing yet another social transgression. Such anachronisms, however, are in keeping with Valdés's stated interest

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<sup>8</sup> For more information on these historical forms of lesbianism see Judith Halberstam and Valerie Traub.

to contemporize the female pirates and are also consistent with the modern language used throughout the novel. According to the author,

*Lobas de mar* es una novela que toca un tema histórico debido al contexto y porque los personajes existieron, pero quise darles mucho de la actualidad, de la mía, aunque conocía a estas piratas desde adolescente y siempre retornaba a ellas con variaciones en la perspectiva de mi lectura. Además había leído poca ficción sobre ellas. Y quise sacarlas de ese encierro. Fue todo. No sé si volveré a una novela cuyos personajes provengan de un acontecimiento del pasado. Pero ellas no constituyen modelos históricos. (Gutiérrez and Mateo del Pino 54).

What is most fascinating about the sexual explorations in *Lobas* is the vast array of couplings and their articulation with gender, for it is not merely lesbian relationships that can be defined as queer. On the contrary, even apparently “hetero” relationships that involve a man and a woman engage homoerotic desire to some degree, because Bonny and Read’s gender is never fixed or certain. The parity of man to cross-dressed man combat is eroticized in Bonny’s relationship with her husband, James Bonny. In one instance, the two succumb to “un arranque de mutuo deseo carnal” after fighting “de igual a igual, como dos hombres, golpeándose hasta caer ensangrentados” (Valdés *Lobas* 60).

If James Bonny, a heterosexual, macho man finds his wife to be “mucho más atractiva disfrazada de varón,” gender ambiguity is all the more attractive to the homosexual-leaning Matt Sinclair who patently prefers men (31). It is no coincidence that he falls for the strong and capable yet slight framed Read. Sinclair is at first turned off when he discovers that Read is a woman, but is able to get over this initial reaction and accept Read even though she doesn’t fit his ideal: “¿Eres una hembra? —Matt Sinclair creyó enloquecer, pero no de alborozo, más bien de desconcierto pavoroso—. A mí me van más bien los varones. Pero da igual si eres hembra. Tú me has gustado”

(194). Sinclair's stated preference for men in this quotation is one of the many historical anachronisms that appear Valdés's novel, since such notions of sexual inclination are particular to modern sexuality and identity politics. Negotiating Sinclair's predicament, Read offers a sort of gendered truce: to be both man and woman, or more man than woman if he so desires. She explains: "Salvo ese ineludible accidente, o sea la raja entre mis muslos, el resto en mí responde más a chico que a chica. Si me lo propongo, y he pasado mi vida entera proponiéndomelo, puedo ser varón y hembra; y si aprieto la tuerca consigo ser más varón que hembra" (194). With this proposal, the two do not delay in consummating their desire and are married within the week. As I will later discuss, Sinclair seems to adapt all too well to his newfound heterosexuality.

Interestingly, the homoerotic relationships are also misperceived. When Read and Bonny hook up, for instance, some take them to be a strait couple, while others assume it is two men who are romantically involved. One pirate in particular takes sadistic pleasure in ensuring that the "mariposuelas locas" (derogatory term for homosexual men) are duly punished (163). Harp, who has poor eyesight, tattles on the two "men" because he finds "mariquitas a bordo" so offensive that it makes him sick to his stomach (158). Upon learning of the affair between "Bonn" and Read, Pirate captain Jack Rackham, who became Bonny's lover when she ran off on her husband, is privy to the knowledge that Bonn is a woman, but assumes with the rest of the crew that Read is a man. Consequently, he reacts according to the codes of masculinity, becoming jealous and challenging his rival to a duel.

Without telling him the truth about Read's sex, Ann tries to dissuade him to no avail. Despite Ann's pleas, Rackham claims to be incapable of forgiveness, especially in

this type of circumstance. The duel takes place as ordered and Read, badly injured in the fight, convalesces for several days in the ships's infirmary. Upon learning that his rival was a woman, Rackham regrets having retaliated, chiding Bonny for letting him go through with it. He grumbles bitterly to his lover, "¿Cómo no me dijiste que se trataba de una mujer?" (166) and later confesses to Read: "Eres muy bella. No me perdonaré jamás de haberte herido" (170). The implication here is that as a woman, Read does not present the same threat to his masculinity when she carries on an affair with his lover.

Furthermore, the codes of chivalry—which dictate that men protect all women, not just their own—are curiously awoken in the unscrupulous pirate upon the discovery of Read's "true" sex. This episode of admiration rapidly evolves into a *menage à trois* instigated by Bonny.

Such chivalrous, borderline macho tendencies permeate the narrative, manifesting themselves in the face of confusion over the gender of the pirates. As I alluded to earlier, Sinclair, who was initially disappointed to learn that Read was a woman, is later mortified when Read arranges to fight a duel in his stead. Read must appeal to his sense of reason and remind him of his previous convictions and orientation: "¿no sospechabas al inicio que yo era macho? ¿No me confesaste al saber que yo era mujer que tú preferías a los chicos? Pues bien, si yo hubiese sido varón y mejor esgrimista que tú, ¿lo habrías soportado [que te reemplazara en un duelo]?" (200). Unmoved by this appeal, tensions nonetheless remain high between the couple. Sinclair's macho reaction is especially ridiculous because few aboard the ship know of Read's true sex, and their marriage is therefore presumed to be secret. In light of this, it becomes clear that Sinclair is not so much worried about what other's will think as he is personally offended by the idea that a

woman (and *his* woman at that) would have to fight in his place. In a sense, he too is pirating gender here (though perhaps, in a more unconscious, performative manner) by adopting these macho attitudes.

Bonny and Read themselves are not immune to such macho tendencies. Mary Read feigns macho indignance at Bonny's advances, as if she were a man being propositioned by another man, even though she also burns with desire for her suitor. When the tables are reversed—that is, when she is aware that they are both women—Read is not inhibited in the same manner:

Bonn se viró hacia Read, apoyó la mano en su nuca, la atrajo y le besó los labios.  
Read juzgó conveniente zafarse del abrazo, limpió su boca con el dorso de la mano, fingiendo rechazo.  
—¿Qué recoño de tu madre traficas? — la perplejidad acentuaba el imperioso deseo, más que probada repulsión.  
—Read, Read, escúchame, amigo...—Ann tomó las manos de Mary y las plantó en sus senos erectos, debajo de la chaqueta desabotonada—. Soy chica, no soy varón... No te asustes... soy chica.  
Palpó, en serio, sí, por supuesto, no podía ser diferente de ella. La carcajada apagó el farfuleo [...] Read dejó de reír y entonces se le tiró encima, como si fuera a golpearla; inesperadamente le devolvió el beso, con lengua hasta la campanilla, arduamente ensalivado.  
—Es mi venganza...—suspiró—por atreverte a besar a...A otra mujer. (156-157)

Again, we see in this quote another gross failure to capture the eighteenth century register—a failure that may or may not be intentional. Mary's about-face when made aware of her suitor's sex would seem to imply that lesbianism is acceptable or less dangerous than man-to-man sexual contact. The allure of such a relationship, at least, is worth risking the discovery of her true sex, which would most likely mean an end to her career as a pirate. It could thus be argued that Zoé Valdés's narrative reinforces macho attitudes at the same time that it celebrates the defiance of patriarchal social structures.

José Ismael Gutiérrez, a scholar who works on Valdés, has noted that *Lobas* goes

above and beyond the social critiques of institutionalized machismo in Cuba that can be found in her earlier works, such as *Querido primer novio*, by exploring issues of gender equality on a global, transnational scale that transcends the exclusively Cuban context (Gutiérrez 32). While this is true to some extent, it is worth noting that her expanded exploration of such issues is somewhat undermined by the inconsistencies mentioned above and that, as I have elsewhere insisted, the Cuban landscape and context never fully disappear from her narrative even when the storyline ostensibly centers on extra-national territories and individuals.

Nonetheless, the subversive nature of sexuality that is explored in *Lobas* does more than just celebrate rebellion against patriarchal structures and make an obtuse dig at the Castro government, it also delves into the very meaning of gender and sexuality, reflecting on the processes that create such concepts and their effects on individuals within societies. Her presentation of the pirates certainly supports the widely accepted Butlerian theory that gender is performative and socially constructed, rather than “natural” to the body. How else to explain how these two women could so easily operate in both feminine and masculine roles—as both men of arms and housewives? Were it their nature rather than their affect that made them masculine, their prevailing, though not exclusive preference for heterosexual relationships over homosexual ones would be difficult to explain.

Overwhelmingly, Valdés blurs the boundary between categories deemed to be stable and mutually exclusive, such as male/female and heterosexual/homosexual, and in relationships of all sorts, avoids establishing a butch/femme dynamic that might normalize the queerness of the multiple unorthodox pairings that appear in *Lobas*. Her



embrace of polymorphism might along with her self-identification as “multicultural” be another marketing strategy that exploits or pirates the popularity of political correctness. These dichotomous social categories are ultimately turned into ambiguous borderlands as unpredictable and indefinable as the sea itself, once again recapitulating the notion that national, sexual and gender identities are not fixed or static but capable of penetrating the imaginary boundaries that bind them.

## Chapter 4

### **Gender Piracy and Colonial Mexico: The Female Pirate in Carmen Boullosa's *Duerme***

#### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I discussed Zoé Valdés's transcendence of binary social categories in her novel, *Lobas de mar* (2003), based on the historical pirates Anne Bonny and Mary Read. Carmen Boullosa similarly undermines either/or categories of social classification in her novel *Duerme* (1994) about a female pirate whose life story differs greatly from these historical predecessors. Like Valdés, Boullosa ties her pirate story to the history of her home country. Boullosa's protagonist, the French born Claire Fleurecy (or Clara Flor, as she is called in Mexico) has a few things in common with Valdés's heroines, namely her experimentation with lesbianism and her exposure to the foreign land-based culture of colonial Spanish America.

Unlike Valdés's Anne Bonny, who had difficulty wresting herself from island culture to return to her life of piracy, Boullosa's Claire settles permanently on land, albeit against her will. Claire does not bond with her landscape or the local culture as seamlessly as her fictional cousin, a fact that is made more devastating because she has

no hope of ever returning to her piratical past. Though technically Claire could return to the sea if someone carried her there, she would be deprived of consciousness and the life of action that she craves, since at the beginning of the novel she is administered a magical potion that causes her to fall into a deep sleep when she leaves the confines of Mexico City—a condition that gives rise to the novel's title. Her inability to effect a conscious decision about her lifestyle speaks to the historical position of women during the colonial period, and specifically the New World Spanish colony of 1571 in which the novel is set.

When the novel begins, Claire's pirate life is already a thing of the past, which we appreciate only in the form of her memories. Therefore, we are not immersed primarily in the life of a female pirate, but rather the life of a woman whose body is pirated by others and ascribed new meanings and uses which differ from those she chose for herself. Gender piracy in this context comes to mean something else—not a woman stealing a man's identity in order to plunder for her own economic benefit, but the cooption of the female body for the benefit of one man or a group of men. Though Claire is never able to return to her life as a pirate, through magic and powerful friends, she is begrudgingly able to do what few women can—experience the lifestyles of many types of women (and a couple of men) from different classes, races and sociolinguistic backgrounds. *Duerme* thus offers a fictional history of women in colonial Mexico as seen through the eyes of one soul: Claire Fleurcy, a one time French prostitute, Caribbean pirate, Spanish Count, indigenous servant, exemplary French noblewoman, and finally, an abandoned (but eternal) body with a long forgotten past.

In contrast with Valdés, who is a popular writer, Boulosa's fourteen novels are widely studied and highly respected in the academy. Despite this, *Duerme*, was not

received with as much enthusiasm as Boullosa's previous (six) novels. In his review, Tomás Granados Salinas criticized *Duerme* for its choppiness, calling it "una ambiciosa serie de historias, un tanto inconexas" (Granados Salinas 59). Christopher Domínguez Michael has likewise questioned the novel's integrity, going so far as to call it a "novela fallida" (quoted in Montes Garcés 59). Elsewhere, however, Domínguez Michael has granted that his difficulties in interpreting Carmen Boullosa's narrative might be a reflection on his skill as a reader, rather than Boullosa's talents as a writer. Rethinking his changing attitude toward Boullosa's writing, which over the years has gone from "la admiración a la reticencia," he surmises: "la obra de Carmen Boullosa ha ganado una complejidad que exige del crítico una vigilancia continua y perpleja. A mayor cantidad de problemas propuestos por un autor, mayor número de objeciones [ibid]. No puede ser otra la condición de una literatura proliferante como la de ella" (Domínguez Michael 42).

While I am not in agreement that *Duerme* is a failed novel, I will concede that it presents a challenge to any reader, and especially the literary critic. At the very least, the plot is convoluted and difficult to summarize, in large part because of the bewilderment of its narrator who is a foreigner even within her own body. Living in a strange land, immersed in alien cultures and languages, Claire struggles to understand her surroundings as well as the limitations of her magically altered body and her repeatedly shifting social identity, all while going in and out of consciousness. Not surprisingly, the disoriented narrator tells a disorienting story, which I will try to outline as clearly and concisely as possible.

*Duerme* begins in *medias res* at the precise moment that Claire's life as a pirate comes to an end. She has been drugged by a Spanish Count accused of treason who swaps clothes and identities with her so that she may hang in his place. The Count's indigenous servant discovers that the victim is "sin ropas mujer" and secretly decides to save her by giving her the gift of immortality. The servant cuts open the pirate's breast and fills it with sacred indigenous waters, leaving Claire bloodless and vulnerable to episodes of unconsciousness, yet immortal. Though she survives the gallows, her indigenous savior worries that Claire might be discovered and so dresses the European in a *huipil*.<sup>1</sup> Claire lives as an indigenous woman until a Spanish writer she befriended invents a new identity for her, presenting her to the Viceroy as the daughter of a French-born admirer of the Spanish who has been trained in combat. In this way she is transformed into a French lady and privileged friend of the Viceroy, who becomes her benefactor. She is even given temporary permission to serve the crown in arms against the natives, but she is easily defeated as the magic potion that grants her immortality also causes her to fall into a deep sleep when she ventures too far from Mexico City. Her bloodless but undying body spurs the anger of the natives and the suspicion of the Spanish. The disgraced Claire puts her fate in the hands of her writer-friend, who temporarily carries her outside the limits of the city so that she can reinvent herself once the political climate has changed, but he is unable to make good on his promise to restore her to consciousness.

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<sup>1</sup> A Nahuatl-derived Spanish word for a traditional blouse or dress (depending on the length) worn by Mayan and Zapotec women. The colorful garment is woven with intricate patterns that indicate essential information about the wearer, such as her village of origin and marital status. The *huipil* consists of two to three panels of cloth that are stitched together, sometimes with elaborate embroidery, and can fall anywhere from the waist or down to the knees. Regardless of the length, the unfitted, squarish garment was typically worn without an underskirt. Part of Claire's discomfort, then, may come from the fact that she feels exposed, adding a further humiliation to the reduced social status that the *huipil* confers upon her.

As can be seen from this summary, Claire's ability to invent herself ends in failure on a couple of occasions. Her pirate identity is stolen from her at the beginning of the novel, and at its conclusion she remains inert, unable to reinvent herself as a man. In between these failures, Claire is dressed and passed as three separate types of people whose identities she played no part in creating at the outset, but whose characteristics she nonetheless comes to claim as her own. Claire's crises of identity ultimately raises two fundamental questions: "who are we?" and "how did we come to be who we are?" In my analysis of *Duerme*, I will tackle both of these questions, primarily looking at the "we" as it applies to Mexican women, though there are instances in which Claire's experiences and struggles with her identity speak to a more universal human experience.

In the first section of this chapter, "Pirating Identities," I will tackle the "how" question by focusing on the processes by which Claire's unwanted identities are created. This section grounds itself in "trans" theory (see chapter two) and particularly in the overdetermined power of clothing, which is analyzed in the subsection entitled "Clothing and Performativity." I also reflect upon *mestizaje* and the cultural meanings of blood and water in a subsection entitled "*Mestizaje*: The Blood of a Nation," which draws on Peggy McCracken's theorization of blood.

Section two, "Pirating History," focuses on the "who" question by considering the specificity of Claire's unwanted identities and their points of articulation with Mexican history and national consciousness. Specifically, I look at the manifestations and perversions of historical figures, such as *la Malinche*, Sor Juana and Catalina de Erauso, who have been similarly reinterpreted by Chicana feminists Cherríe Moraga, Norma Alarcón, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, and Gloria Anzaldúa.

The third section, “Nomadism and Piracy as Countercurrents to Nationality,” will discuss the ways in which Mexican national identity is disarticulated and revised through “nomadic” modes of consciousness. This section will explore the theoretical relationship between nomads and pirates in a comparative reading of *Duerme* and Gabriel García Márquez’s novella *Eréndira*. I ground this comparison in the work of Rosi Braidotti, Deleuze and Guattari, and Doris Sommer.

## **Pirating Identities: The Creation and Cooption of the Self**

*Pensé yo que huía de mí misma, pero  
¡miserable de mí! Trájeme a mí conmigo y  
traje mi mayor enemigo.*

—Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz

This quote from Sor Juana, colonial Mexico’s famous erudite nun, is the first epigraph in Carmen Boullosa’s *Duerme*. Originally appearing in Sor Juana’s autobiographical letter, “Respuesta de la poetisa a la muy ilustre Sor Filotea de la Cruz” (1691), the quote refers to the nun’s failed attempt to escape her profane masculine interests in intellectual pursuits by entering the convent. As the nun laments, these culturally inappropriate inclinations (either a gift or a punishment from God) were not erased in this new location and her forays into writing—especially on religious matters—became a source of much controversy, ultimately causing her trouble with her superiors and leading to her intellectual death as she was forced to give up the pen. Her intellectual gifts, which would have been encouraged if she were a man, were deemed inappropriate for a person of her gender. In this sense, we might consider Sor Juana to be a type of gender pirate, for even though she was not a plunderer, she co-opted the tools of the

masculine domain and learned to use them with prowess—such prowess in fact that she was deemed dangerous and (much in the way of female pirates of film discussed in chapter one) was symbolically castrated when her tool of power (the pen) was confiscated.

As the quote implies, Sor Juana's act of self-creation ended in failure as she was not able to change who she was by changing her location and vocation. Read between the lines, however, we might distinguish a different failure of self-creation—one not incurred by a breakdown in self-discipline, but by the societal mechanisms that limited her. In the same letter, Sor Juana describes her self-discipline as a student who in her youth submitted herself to a set of bizarre punishments designed to encourage learning. The payoff of this discipline was a rock-solid intellect that allowed her to comfortably debate with men, pass rigorous oral examinations and publish two volumes of writing in her lifetime. In this light, the true failure of self-creation is incurred not when she fails to become anti-intellectual, but when societal pressures truncate her intellectual life and quash her identity as a writer (which she out of modesty would never use to describe to herself).

The failure of Sor Juana's act of self-creation is echoed by *Duerme's* protagonist, Claire, who is exiled from her preferred location (the high seas) and vocation (piracy) and thus unable to live out her life as she designed it. Claire's failure more closely follows the second trajectory that I have outlined—that which features a woman thwarted in her attempts to live a life imbued with certain masculine privileges, resulting in the symbolic death of the gender pirate.



Claire's attempts at self-creation, at penetrating the world of masculine privilege are certainly more corrupt than Sor Juana's, for the nun's studies, while unconventional and even scandalous, were nonetheless legal and, as she tries to argue, sanctioned by God. But, due to the conditions of her birth, Claire does not have the same set of options. As the daughter of a prostitute and herself a young initiate in the profession, Claire is not eligible for either marriage or the convent. Thus she must reinvent herself illegally, without the sanction of the Church. Her reinvention therefore involves stealing another's identity. Claire likens her act of self creation to the conception and birth of a male version of herself from out of her female body. As with Sor Juana's letter, we learn of the heroine's act of self-creation at its moment of failure—in this case when her clothes are removed, exposing her female body to scrutiny in a manner reminiscent of her past as a prostitute. Unable to speak (because she has been drugged), she directs her painful thoughts toward the indigenous servant that undressed and ogles her:

Sí, soy mujer, ya lo viste. Yo me siento humillada así expuesta. Creí que ya lo había vencido, que nunca más volvería a ser ésta mi desgracia, el cuerpo expuesto, ofrecido (como si él fuera mi persona) al mundo... Quiero llorar. Se ha muerto el único hijo que yo querría tener, me lo han matado en mi propio cuerpo. Me han dormido para que yo no pueda defender a mi vástago: yo, sí, yo soy mi propio hijo, Claire vuelta varón.  
(19)

As it turns out, however, Claire's life as a man is briefly revived before her gender is unhappily reverted, for despite the discovery of her sex, she is redressed in the clothes of a Count sentenced to death for conspiracy. Ironically Claire's fantasies are fulfilled as she is handed her death sentence which confirms her identity as "rico, un Caballero, un Noble, de Buena Cuna" (26). She disinterestedly skims the letter that announces her

immanent death, focusing her attention on her current identity and opulent surroundings rather than on the details of her death sentence. She reads:

«Su Excelencia, Conde Enrique de Urquiza y Rivadeneira»... Ése soy yo. Alzo la mirada para observar la magnificencia del salón. Ésta es mi casa. Vuelvo a poner la mirada en el papel, un poco más abajo, «conspiración»... «horca». Me salto ya todas las palabras para llegar a la firma «Depositario del poder de su Majestad, Felipe II, el Excelentísimo Señor Virrey Don...», etcétera, etcétera...

Estiro la mano devolviendo el papel a quien me lo ha dado. Apresurado, lo toma, no fuera a quemarme. Reviso el salón que es momentáneamente mío: por fin soy rico, un Caballero, un Noble, de buena Cuna. Es mi consuelo, morir siendo lo que siempre quise ser en vida.  
(26)

While not altogether happy about her pending execution, the details about her future are reduced to single words (*conspiración* and *horca*) and truncated by ellipses and etceteras. Instead, she is captivated by the letter's interpellation which names her a nobleman and in so doing, confers ownership over her surroundings. She linguistically appropriates these surroundings with possessive adjectives and later calls the Count's servants hers as well.

Despite her infatuation with the upper class lifestyle—her affirmation that the Count embodies “lo que siempre quise ser en vida,” Claire's pirate identity is even more attractive to her than a life as a Count. For while she enjoyed the way she was treated when she was a man of means, the pirate lifestyle offers a complete escape from such social hierarchies. If life as a count offered the comforts of an opulent home and the attention of servants, piracy by contrast allows for both excess *and* detachment via the thrill of amassing great wealth and spending it all frivolously. Thus, if given a chance to pass again as a man, Claire vows: “Volvería al Caribe, armaría una flota, saquearía mil puertos. Me haría rico y lo gastarí todo en fiestas. Me volvería a hacer rico y lo perdería todo para volver a emprender un asalto” (90).

Woven into this fantasy is the notion that such a lifestyle transformation would require clothes. Claire's musings are in fact inspired by a piece of indigenous embroidery that she describes as "un trozo de mundo" because it seems to come alive in the hands of its maker. Aptly, throughout the novel, it is textiles that—for better or for worse—offer her passage into another lifestyle and indeed another world of existence. In a contemporary context, a change of clothes in and of itself would most likely be insufficient to change one's perceived race or gender. Other factors, such as speech, affect and mannerisms would need to be modified as well. However, as I have discussed in chapter one, clothing had a much greater impact during the Early Modern period. Thus *Duerme's* vestimentary transformations, while somewhat oversimplified, are rooted in historical accuracy.

### **Clothing and Performativity**

In historical perspective, it is fitting that Claire would be perceived differently by strangers, acquaintances or even relatives who are unaware that she has undergone a change of dress. As a point of comparison, in her autobiography, seventeenth century cross-dresser Catalina de Erauso (1592-1650)—also known as "la monja alférez"—passes as a stranger to members of her own family when dressed as a man. This confusion is facilitated by the time that has elapsed, the fact that Erauso has been presumed dead and the context in which the two meet—both dressed as soldiers in the New World, far from their home in the Basque country.

What is unique to *Duerme* is clothing's ability to transform the wearer *in her own eyes* and in the eyes of those who know that she is cross-dressed. The seeds of such

consciousness transformations are observable in Erauso's autobiography as well; the "lieutenant nun" alternatively refers to herself with masculine and feminine pronouns. But this is part of a masquerade in which she *deliberately* adopts an alter-persona (the lieutenant) in the same way the Claire adopted the pirate. But Claire also suffers an *involuntary* loss of confidence and a shift in emotion when she is dressed against her will. No longer complicit in a conscious gender performance, Claire sees herself through the eyes of others and responds in accordance with social expectation.

When she is forced to dress as an indigenous woman after the Count's execution, Claire's anticipated lack of power and freedom in combination with the experience of alienation in a foreign (indigenous) culture and language drives her into a "feminine" emotional state and a submissive silence. She attributes her tears, the bewildering product of a self-proclaimed "strange" emotional state to "las enaguas que porto y el susto que acabo de pasar" (44-5). The "susto" or fright to which she refers, was the experience of finding herself dressed in a *huipil*, unable to climb out of the Count's grave. When dressed as the count, distressing situations, such as being marched off to the gallows and having a noose tied around her neck, were confronted with serenity. Fright is therefore an emotional experience particular to her female dress and identity, one which is repeated when she becomes the object of a man's penetrating gaze. Though he presents no real threat, Claire's back-away response to this gaze leads to a self-inflicted injury when she steps on a machete, effectively completing the fear feedback loop.

The anguish caused by her new indigenous identity also inhibits her thought process. As she puts it, "la infelicidad de verme vestida así, descubierta mujer, no me da fuerzas para articular pensamientos" (52). As we have seen above with Sor Juana,

rational thought and its articulation into speech or writing is the exclusive property of men since they are the only ones with access to education. Though Claire has the capacity to write, and indeed does so in her journal, she disqualifies her own writing because of her presumed lack of verbal eloquence as an indigenous woman. Referring to her friend Pedro de Ocejó, a bona-fide writer and friend of the Viceroy, she explains,

Yo no tengo su gracia. No para narrar las historias que él cuenta, yo no soy ese hombre hermoso, lleno de encanto, sino una mujer india que como tal puede ser usada y sin pago, por quien lo quiera, en cuanto le dé la gana. Pero puedo intentar repetirme a mí misma fragmentos de las historias que me ha narrado Pedro de Ocejó... (78)

Even in the private sphere, Claire follows the guidelines for behavior expected by a person of her dress. She must justify her attempts to write History (in other words, to act as a privileged male) even in the confines of her own journal. Her private affirmations of the identities that are imposed upon her inspired one critic to assign the slogan “[m]e visto, luego soy” as Claire’s *modus operandi* (Vilches Norat 64).

Apart from Claire’s personal reaction to her situation, the indigenous servants who know that she is cross-dressed also take her at face value, treating her as just another indigenous woman. Inés is a prime example as she cared for Claire when she was dressed as the count, but lost all respect for her once she was dressed in the *huipil* that she personally gave her. Claire laments: “Verme vestida de mujer india la hace creerme un ser sin ninguna importancia. Si volviera a mi traje de varón blanco me hablaría con respeto, sería mi fiel criada, daría por mí su vida” (76). This speculation is confirmed when Inés treats Claire with more respect and attention when she is later dressed as an upper-class, French woman.

While the significance of clothing is consistently emphasized in *Duerme* as the instigator of identity change—just as it was in the Early Modern imagery of Anne Bonny and Mary Read (chapter 2)—the expectations of both wearer and non-wearer is what truly creates the costumed subject in the contemporary novel. Claire’s changing perception of herself and her tendency to unconsciously modify her behavior neatly follows Judith Butler’s explanation of the process of self-fulfilled expectation that produces the gendered subject. Butler was initially inspired by Derrida’s reading of Kafka in which “the one who waits for the law, sits before the door of the law, attributes a certain force to the law for which one waits,” effectively creating the authoritative body by anticipating it (Butler *Gender* xiv). Butler postulated that gender works much in the same way, operating as “an interior essence that might be disclosed, an expectation that ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates” (xiv). In this way, Claire gives power to her own clothing, unconsciously helping the world to see her as an indigenous woman by anticipating and conforming to their vision.

### ***Mestizaje: The Blood of a Nation***

*¿no soy acaso también hija de la raza?*

The seamless manner in which Claire passes for men and women of the upper and lower class is somewhat conceivable to the modern mind. More troubling is the knowledge that she could so easily pass as indigenous despite her “cara de francesa.” Our discomfort when imagining a costumed change of race begs us to reflect on our current practices of social classification. Though we presently tend to rely more on the body (facial structure, skin color, etc.) rather than clothing in order to determine one’s race and gender, visual perception is still a primary method for classifying individuals.

For gender in particular, bodily appearance—especially of the genitals—has until recently been accepted as empirical evidence for the existence of two sexes and for the designation of each individual into one of these two camps. But just as critical race studies has proven in recent years that there is no biological basis for race as we understand it, so too has feminist scholarship begun to dismantle the presumption that our eyes only see confirmed facts.<sup>2</sup> In *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Judith Butler provocatively raises doubts about the material basis of sex: the body being always already seen, understood and classified by biased individuals whose visual perception is influenced by their culture. The body thus becomes subjected to a type of chicken and egg debate in which “[w]e may seek to return to matter [that is to say, the physical body or its sex] as prior to discourse to ground our claims about sexual difference only to discover that matter is fully sedimented with discourses on sex and sexuality that prefigure and constrain the uses to which that term can be put” (*Bodies* 29).

If the truths conveyed by the body-as-organism have come under attack, cellular materiality is still sacred ground. Visual evidence of the type “I saw it with my own eyes” has become suspect, but cellular DNA is considered indisputable. Examination of DNA is precisely what convinced the majority of the scientific community that there is no biological basis for race that can be traced through the genetic record. In *Duerme*, however, the cellular makeup of the individual is proven to be an unstable and corruptible principle that, like the body, is imbued with cultural meaning. What we might consider to be a fixed biological factor, such as blood is shown to be a mutable principle in

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<sup>2</sup> As Cavalli-Sforza explains, “[v]isible differences lead us to believe in the existence of ‘pure’ races, but we have seen that these are very narrow, essentially incorrect criteria. And when measured and plotted carefully, visible traits are actually far less discontinuous than is usually believed. Classification based on continental origin could furnish a first approximation of racial division, until we realize that Asia and even Africa and the Americas are very heterogeneous” (28-29).

*Duerme*, for when she is given a transfusion of native waters, Claire's European blood is washed out of her veins, making her an unlikely "hija de la raza." Though in the case of the novel, blood is transformed through the power of magic, upon further reflection, we might note that blood, in addition to being a unique characteristic of each individual body is also corrupted by the social meanings ascribed to it, which have little or nothing to do with biology. In fact, gendered cultural values have been "mapped onto blood" for centuries (McCracken ix).

In her book, *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero: Blood, Gender, and Medieval Literature*, Peggy McCracken explains the complexities of blood-based gender symbolism in which "the values of men's blood are always dependent on the values, both positive and negative, associated with women's blood" (ix). Historically, the valuation of women's blood (primarily menstrual blood) has never been a clear-cut matter. In fact,

in medieval culture, as in many modern cultures, menstrual blood is regarded as a polluting blood, a blood that does both symbolic and practical harm. At the same time, though, menstrual blood is not only a polluting blood in medieval culture—it can be used in medicinal cures...and it usefully purges the female body of excess blood" (McCracken ix).

Claire's blood transfusion leaves her without menses, which might, according to McCracken's description, rid her of the curse of polluting blood. But it also rinses clean the masculine-associated blood which might be shed in battle, which would earn her status and privilege. This indeed turns out to be problematic for Claire when she comes to fight for the Viceroy and instead of shedding blood or even giving her life for the cause is left with gaping, bloodless wounds that make her quite suspect and cause her to fall out of favor with the Viceroy.



Claire's lack of menstruation is potentially problematic, because, as McCracken notes, menstrual blood has positive properties as well as negative ones. Aside from the curative properties mentioned above, menstrual blood is a signifier of fertility, of the ability to conceive and bear the next generation. Counter to this logic, even without menstrual blood, Claire manages to maintain a symbolic fertility; she seemingly becomes a vessel, a carrier of an allegorical child: Mexico. Not only does she, like a vessel, carry the ancestral waters in her body, she also recalls various facets of Mexican history and it is this aspect that I will reflect upon in the following section.

In addition to holding gender symbolism, the various bloods and waters of *Duerme* also relate metaphorically to issues of contamination, illness and legitimacy. The mixing of the races and the unsanctified uniting of the bloodlines (conception outside of marriage) were regarded as contaminating processes in the Early Modern period that infected progeny with the illness of illegitimacy. Cervantes criticized such concerns in his satirical *entremés*, "El retablo de las maravillas," in which the social fear of being marked as illegitimate allows two swindlers to make money off of an imaginary puppet show. Chanfalla creates intrigue when he claims that "ninguno puede ver [el retablo] que tenga alguna raza de confeso, o no sea habido y procreado de sus padres de legítimo matrimonio; y el que sea *contagiado* de estas dos tan usadas *enfermedades*, despídase de ver las cosas, jamás vistas ni oídas, de mi retablo" (emphasis mine Cervantes Saavedra *Retablo* fol. 244r). As can be seen from my emphasis in this quotation, blood is believed to act as the bearer of *social* contagion. From the Spanish perspective, *Duerme*'s protagonist is infected with a panoply of social illnesses. She is the daughter of a prostitute (illegitimate birth) who engages in illegitimate warfare (piracy), dresses in a

manner inappropriate to her sex and finally has her bloodlines contaminated when she receives a transfusion of indigenous waters.

Turning our focus from blood to water, however, highlights a different perspective on purity and corruption. Water, of course, has its own relationships to contagion, which involves more practical concerns with *physical* illness that might be contracted from contaminated drinking waters. From the perspective of the indigenous populations, Claire's blood transfusion serves as a purification rather than the inverse. Inés explains that Spaniards have come to contaminate all the waters of their nation which were once pure. Prior to the conquest, "[e]ra el agua tan limpia...que nuestros abuelos no vaciaban en ella siquiera sus orines. A diario pasaban canoas a recolectarlos, y sacaban los orines de Temixtitan y los barrios" (28). But the same lakes and rivers are now "tocados por las costumbres de los españoles" as well as their animals and trash and are no longer potable (28). Claire is infused with these pre-contaminated indigenous waters and in the process becomes indigenized and purified of her European roots.

These two contradictory interpretations of Claire's indigenous contact, its social significance and its affect on her body emerge from a novel that is strongly concerned with questions of *mestizaje* and duality, which have over the last thirty years been a chief critical concern, especially among minorities. While such a consciousness about *mestizaje* didn't exist in the Early Modern period, hybrid individuals most certainly did and Boulosa's novel looks back to the cultural origins in an attempt to bring these realities to light. Perhaps one of the reasons that Claire strongly identifies as a pirate is because continuities, rather than divisions are the norm out at sea. In Claire's words,

el mar es donde el mundo se mira completo. En él hay de todo, hasta la cazuela con sal, y cuanto hay se encuentra entero. Fuera de él, en tierra

firme, todo se mira dividido [...]. Si hubiera edificaciones sobre el mar, no se acabarían nunca, o terminarían donde se hastiaran. En tierra firme todo viene roto, partido, fragmentado, dividido...Nunca hay nada completo” (46).

In essence, land is punctuated by natural and man-made boundaries—what Deleuze and Guattari might refer to as “striated space,” while the ocean is the territory of continuity, a “smooth space” where hybridity reigns.<sup>3</sup>

In mapping social relationships between the new and the old worlds, however, the ocean (a smooth, continuous space in the political as well as the physical sense) becomes nothing more than a barrier, a broad border between two worlds. As a result of this division, new identities emerge which express geographical relationships. As Claire later notes, “el que vuelve a la Península se llama indiano, y no puede zafarse de la designación, porque vuelto allá se comporta distinto, no es español de España sino indiano venido de estas tierras” (79). Even worse was the case for the foreign-born *criollos* (such as Sor Juana) whose social status was inferior to that of anyone born on European soil, regardless of whether they had earned the epithet of “indiano.”

Throughout the novel, Claire maps out the contours of such in-between spaces which are indicative of where she has come from (the sea: a space in-between the old and the new world) and what she has been (a cross-dresser: an individual living between genders and races). The difficulties of Claire’s in-between and mutable existence are uncannily reminiscent of the theoretical problems that Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa tackled in *Borderlands/La frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). Code switching between

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<sup>3</sup> Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “striated space,” which is diametrically opposed to “smooth space,” implies a theoretical terrain that presents obstacles for the nomad who moves from place to place without a set path or trajectory, moving “vortically” rather than linearly. The two theorists cite the desert, the sea, and the sky as smooth spaces, which the state, nonetheless tries to reform by establishing set courses of travel, or in the case of the desert, settling it. Striated space, on the other hand, refers to territories marked by “walls, enclosures and roads between enclosures” or other natural or man-made boundaries that limit movement, such as forests and agricultural land (50-62).

English and Spanish and wandering back and forth between narrative and poetry, *Borderlands* defined the US/Mexico boarder as a third or in-between space that could be occupied, rather than simply crossed, thus defying the here versus there dichotomy. Marred by gaping wounds and a constantly shifting identity and appearance, Claire's body might be considered a borderland of a sort. Anzaldúa's definition below, may serve as a comparison:

The U.S.-Mexico border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the “normal.” (Anzaldúa 3)

Passed off as an indigenous woman, Claire reflects precisely on this third space and its invisibility to the Spanish colonists:

El mundo se divide en dos: el viejo y las tierras nuevas. La luz y la oscuridad. El silencio y los sonidos, lo blanco y lo negro. El agua y la tierra. El bien y el mal. Los hombres y las mujeres. Los europeos y los de las otras razas. Esto último no lo sabe quien no deja su tierra, ahí creará que la diversidad es amplia, que hay ingleses, franceses, flamencos, chinos, portugueses, catalanes. Reto a cualquiera que vista como yo ropa de india y luego me dirá en cuánto se divide los seres. “En dos,” me contestará, “los blancos y los indios” [...] Si acaso mi atuendo de india es verosímil, lo es por un solo motivo, por el tres. [Los españoles] Ven mi porte de blanca, mi cuerpo de blanca, mi ropa de india, y dicen “es mestiza.” No miento, respondo a las cuentas que han aprendido a hacer en esta tierra los españoles. Para ellos tres es dos, no les cabe duda. (Boullosa 57-60)

With this insight it becomes clear that Claire's various affirmations that she is an indigenous woman are uttered because there is no socially recognized in-between

category—no recognition of *mestizaje* in the world in which she lives. A person perceived to have even the smallest trace of indigeneity is summarily an Indian, even though they may have European blood as well.

Though Claire begrudgingly accepts her indigeneity at first, articulating its social worth with a word of negation (“yo no soy...*sino* una mujer india”), she comes to embrace it by the end of the novel, daring to call herself a child of the Mexican race. In this sense, she might be considered a begrudging pirate of race in addition to gender. At the end of a long diatribe in which she criticizes the Viceroy for his foolishness and cowardice, and praises the Indians for their fear-provoking strength, she muses: “¿no soy acaso también hija de la raza? La única francesa que lleva agua en las venas, la mujer de la vida artificial, la que sólo puede vivir en la tierra de México” (Boullosa 125). Her recognition of her indigenous roots in this instance differs from her previous affirmations. First and foremost, in the moment that she calls herself an “hija de la raza,” she is no longer living as an indigenous woman. Her recognition, therefore, is not a defeatist confirmation of the limitations of her present social reality, but a prideful affirmation of her ancestral roots. With this new perspective on her life, she also recognizes Inés as “de algún modo la madre de lo que soy” (129). As a confirmed mother of the Mexican race, Inés’s evocation of the historical figure, *la Malinche*, is difficult to ignore. Claire’s association with *la Malinche* and other notable women of Mexican history will be the subject of the following section. As with the female pirates of Valdés’s *Lobas de mar*, we will see how the non-Hispanic, European-born Claire is re-nationalized in Boullosa’s novel.

## Pirating History: Mexico's Queer Mothers

If Claire becomes identified with the Mexican race through an alteration of her blood and her clothing, she becomes identified with Mexican history by mirroring aspects of the lives of three notable women of colonial Mexico: *la Malinche*, Sor Juana and Catalina/Alonso de Erauso, as I will describe in detail below. While not referred to directly in the novel, these women (along with Anne Bonny and Mary Read) undoubtedly influenced the conception of Claire who recalls aspects of all three of these individuals. These parallels will be illustrated in the close analysis of certain scenes and aspects of the narrative that follows. Before doing so, however, let me take a moment to introduce these historical characters and the cultural meanings that have been loaded upon them throughout the centuries.

Even though they came from very different backgrounds, *la Malinche*, sor Juana and Catalina de Erauso can all be considered “gender pirates” in some sense, as they all appropriated different aspects of male privilege and power. The most complicated to comprehend is that of the indigenous woman known as *la Malinche* who is regarded as the “mother of the Mexican race,” for her productive heterosexual relationship with Hernán Cortés, who she served as translator and mistress. But, since *la Malinche's* role as translator also aided in the conquest of the indigenous peoples of Mexico, she is regarded as a traitor to her people and

[u]pon her shoulders rests the full blame for the “bastardization” of the indigenous people of México. To put it in its most base terms: Malintzin, also called Malinche, fucked the white man who conquered the Indian peoples of México and destroyed their culture. Ever since, brown men have been accusing her of betraying her race, and over the centuries continue to blame her entire sex for this “transgression.” (Moraga 99-100)

Cherríe Moraga explains how this heterosexual woman has become associated in recent years with male power and privilege, and oddly enough, lesbianism:

The woman who defies her role as subservient to her husband, father, brother, or son by taking control of her own sexual destiny is purported to be a “traitor to her race” by contributing to the “genocide” of her people—whether or not she has children. In short, even if the defiant woman is not a lesbian, she is purported to be one; for, like the lesbian in the Chicano imagination, she is una Malinchista. Like the Malinche of Mexican history, she is corrupted by foreign influences which threaten to destroy her people. (113)

Sor Juana’s transgression is more straightforward. As I have related above, in her time (1648-1695) she was considered to have usurped male intellectual and religious power by picking up the pen and opining on matters of faith. Catalina de Erauso, the Basque nun who famously cross-dressed and brandished a sword in defense of the Spanish Empire, usurped masculine physical might by engaging in the art of war. Her exemplary ability to preserve her virginity while serving in combat earned her the Church sanctioned privilege to live out her life as Alonso de Erauso in colonial Mexico.

In recent years, the exemplary feats of these three gender benders have brought their sexuality into question. Sometimes thought of, as Moraga describes above, as lesbian traitors who usurped male power and took control of their own sexual destiny, their proto-lesbian essences have also been celebrated, especially by the queer Chicana community (Alarcón; Gaspar de Alba; Moraga). In *Duerme*, it is Claire, the female outlaw and literal gender pirate who takes on aspects of these exemplary women in order to queer Mexican history. Once again the subversive nature of piracy acts as a pretext for the celebration of sexual and gender diversity.

To begin with, the character Inés (or “la de las manos tibias”) is like *la Malinche* in that she creates a (mixed indigenous and European) Mexican race in the novel when

she replaces Claire's European blood with the waters of her ancestors. This creation, is perceived to herald the demise of the indigenous populations who claim that Claire is "La Virgen que sin hacer nada los protege [a los españoles] / y nos destruye. / ¡Su sueño es nuestra muerte! / Su reposo nuestra destrucción" (Boullosa 111). The novel's version of the birth of the Mexican race both queers and feminizes the Malinche myth. On the first hand, the Mexican race is born in the novel of two women instead of between woman and man (though one of the women does have aspects of both sexes). This act of creation has been regarded as rape, by at least one critic, transforming the indigenous woman from *la chingada* to *la violadora* (Montes Garcés 17-18). I would add that this rape inverts the race relationship and queers the gender relationship of such unions that took place in abundance during the conquest between indigenous women and Spanish men. It is also significant that the story marks the birth of the Mexican *woman*, rather than the Mexican man.

On a different note, "la de las manos tibias," the novel's version of *la Malinche*, resists identification, evades being immortalized by historical narrative and in so doing seems to comment on the way *la Malinche* has been misused and mis-remembered. "La de las manos tibias" is the descriptive moniker assigned to the indigenous woman that saves Claire's life, by administering the magical potion of immortality. Claire initially tries to learn the identity of this nameless woman, but is given the false names "Cosme" and "Juana," which the indigenous woman negates one after another. The nameless savior warns the inquisitive Claire, "Averigua mi nombre, que cuando lo tengas te diré que no es el mío" (56). It is not until Claire's final days in Mexico City that she discovers the woman's "true" name. Inés explains her initial elusiveness as an attempt to protect her



name after death. Claire's immortality makes her incapable of keeping Inés's name in "el silencio de la tumba," thus preventing her friend from finding peace in death.

While Inés longs to be forgotten, to sleep peacefully in her grave, Claire is perplexed by the prospect of such an erasure. Her entry into oblivion is ensured, however, by the Viceroy who mandates that her name not appear in any document. To Claire's consternation, Inés explains, "a ti te borra, que nada sabrá nadie de ti nunca sino nosotros, los que aquí ves" (127). As exemplified by these two characters, the historical fate of women is often to be forgotten entirely (like Claire) or misremembered as traitors and whores (like Inés/*la Malinche*). In consideration of Inés's resemblance to *la la Malinche*, it is interesting that her first invented name, "Cosme," bears a resemblance to "la Raza Cósmica" or cosmic "fifth" race, a concept that was initially introduced to dissolve national/racial boundaries and bring Latin Americans together, but which ironically has been used to promote Mexican/Chicano nationalism (Guerrero; Vasconcelos). It may be precisely this type of interpretive misstep that Inés hopes to avoid by remaining nameless.

Curiously, the historic identity that is associated with Inés also applies to the novel's protagonist, Claire, who could also be considered a *la Malinche* analogue, since the new *mestiza* woman was engendered in her body (rather than in Inés's womb). In this sense, Claire is simultaneously mother *and* child of the Mexican race. Furthermore, Claire's sexual relationship to the Spanish conquerors is initially one of subordination. She, like *la Malinche* and so many other indigenous women is *la chingada*, literally "the fucked one." Not only is Claire symbolically raped by Inés, but also by the Count who stole her identity and by the indigenous populations whom she fights. Of these three

rapes, her pseudosexual encounter with Inés is the only productive one—the only one enacted out of charity and resulting in positive consequences.

*La Malinche's* polar opposite is Catalina de Erauso, who instead of representing the conquered (*la chingada*), is a conqueror and a “perfect colonialist” as Michele Stepto has noted (Erauso *Lieutenant* xli). The allusion to Catalina de Erauso emerges in Claire’s third incarnation in the novel as an upper-class Frenchwoman who is given license by the Viceroy to dress as a man and fight for the Spaniards. It is in this incarnation that Claire experiments with homoeroticism, similar to her historic predecessor. But if both the fictional and the historical cross-dressers flirted with same-sex romance, their attitudes and approaches were quite different. Though Erauso articulates aesthetic preferences with regards to women, the main attraction in these romantic exploits is the successful imitation of men and especially the replication of male trickery or *burla* which allows her to seduce women with false promises of marriage. Evidence for this lies in the fact that even when she is repulsed by a woman, she continues to court her, and when, on the other hand, the woman is to her liking, she runs off on her as well, often without any intimate contact. Contrary to erotic logic, Erauso throws herself at the feet of “una Negra fea como unos diablos, mui contraria a [su] gusto que fue siempre de buenas caras,” whom she courts for two months and skips off on a more attractive white girl “de mui relevantes prendas, i con buen dote” after merely kissing her hand once (*Vida* 70). Erauso’s aesthetic assessment of women consequently appears to have little to do with romantic desire and more to do with social value.

Rima de Valbona similarly advises against a lesbian reading of Catalina, recommending instead that that we read her as a transvestite, which according to Jean Baudrillard's definition has more to do with gender play than same sex desire:

lo que les gusta a los travestis es el juego de indistinción de sexo. El encanto, que ejercen, también sobre sí mismos, proviene de la vacilación sexual y no, como es costumbre, de la atracción de un sexo hacia otro. No aman verdaderamente a los hombres/hombres ni a las mujeres/mujeres, ni a aquellos que se definen, por redundancia, como sexuados distintos [...] En ellos todo es maquillaje, teatro, seducción. Parecen obsesionados por los juegos del sexo, pero sobre todo lo están por el juego'. (Jean Baudrillard quoted in Erauso *Vida* 71)

While Erauso certainly communicates an air of playfulness, it should be noted that there is a serious side to her cross-dressed exploits as well. Erauso in part chooses to live as a man and be perceived as a man because it affords her a power and freedom denied to persons of her biological sex. Faced with the prospect of living out her life in a convent or living a similarly constrained life as a wife and mother bound to the domestic sphere, Erauso prefers to live as a man and does so more honestly and less playfully in her later life. After receiving a blessing from Pope Urban VIII to resume her male habit, she returned to the new world living out her life as a mule driver in New Spain (modern day Mexico).

Unlike Erauso whose strongest feelings for a woman are expressed rather flatly with the words "parecióme bien," Boullosa's protagonist is more fervent in her admiration of the female form and has an explicit homoerotic experience in the novel with an Italian woman (known simply as *la italiana*), an actress who comes to entertain the injured and bed-ridden Claire. Enraptured by her beauty, Claire informs *la italiana*: "[e]res la mujer más linda que hay en la tierra" (108). *La italiana* repays her for the

compliment by seducing the convalescing woman, an experience that on first reading seems to inspire shame and confusion. Claire relates:

...antes de que yo me diera cuenta, ella [*la italiana*] me estaba propinando caricias *donde menos debe tocarse a nadie* ¿Cuánto tiempo? Mi camisola blanca, las sábanas blancas *eran mi único escudo*. Y su cuidado, que bueno lo puso en no lastimar con sus manos mis heridas abiertas. Aunque donde las puso puede bien ser considerado herida abierta. En mi caso ya no sangra, pero no le hace falta esa expresión de roja inmoderación para decir que es la herida siempre abierta en un cuerpo... (114 emphasis mine)

This love scene is marked by a lack of any description of pleasure and is punctuated instead with a concern over the inappropriate nature of *la italiana*'s touch and a self-consciousness about exposure. Though this worry about exposure seems initially to apply to modesty and shame about her naked body which was poorly covered by the sheets, it might also speak to fears about the exposure of her illicit pleasure, which is unspoken in the description of this scene but becomes evident later in the text.

Despite the fact that Claire is disoriented and even worried by this unorthodox experience, *la italiana*'s attentions have an immediate affect on her physical well-being after an interminable convalescence in which her bloodless wounds refused to heal. The erotic encounter with *la italiana* not only succeeds in returning color to Claire's cheeks and alleviating her agonizing pain (114, 117), but also awakens her spiritual passions. Shortly after *la italiana* makes love to her, Claire finds her friend Pedro de Ocejo and *la italiana* naked in bed together and is overcome by a jealousy that could only be caused by romantic love. Notably, Claire feels ashamed of her jealousy (perhaps because this love is for a woman), but her suspicions are assuaged by Pedro who claims matter-of-factly that both women are disinterested in a man: "No, no hay nada entre ella y yo [...] Yo, qué

más quisiera que tú o ella me prestaran atención. Las dos me han robado el corazón. Más tú. Lo sabe *la italiana*” (117).

In the context of these revelations, Claire’s consternation in the love scene with *la italiana* does not stem from a lack of pleasure or desire, but rather from surprise and a lack of language to describe what was regarded as “an impossibility” in the Early Modern period (Traub 5-7). As with Valdés’s novel, this lesbian encounter as well as the pseudo-lesbian union between Claire and Inés is far from gratuitous. The homoerotic moments serve as an alternative to the violent sexual encounters widely practiced during the Spanish settlement of Mexico. Such encounters are also referenced in the novel when Claire, in her capacity of indigenous woman is raped by the Count who stole her identity.

If Erauso took control of her sexual destiny by escaping the habit in order to roam the world as a man, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz welcomed it as a way to avoid marriage and still insure salvation. She describes her attitude toward marriage as one of “total negación,” regarding the habit as as the lesser of two evils, “lo menos desproporcionado y lo más decente que podía elegir en materia de la seguridad que deseaba de mi salvación”. Sor Juana’s professed repugnance for marriage has led Chicana feminists to adopt her (along with *la Malinche*) as another queer foremother of Mexico. In her 1999 novel, Chicana scholar Alicia Gaspar de Alba imagined a homoerotic relationship between Sor Juana and her friend, patron and publisher the Condesa de Paredes, in her novel, *Sor Juana’s Second Dream* (1999).

Claire’s relationship to Sor Juana is more obtuse than her connection with *la Malinche* and Erauso, for while she is known to write in her journal, *Duerme’s*

protagonist is no intellectual. In what is perhaps an overture to Sor Juana's famous false modesty, Claire admits that she does not have the charm or grace to tell stories. In her case, however, the modesty may not be so false as her main talent is not with the pen but the sword. Claire's writing, like her swordsmanship, more closely resembles that of the lieutenant nun, whose autobiography is admired more for its plot than its literary style. Unlike Erauso, however, Claire is thwarted in her attempt to live as a man and, as I have discussed above, this frustration makes Sor Juana's words ("pensé que huía de mí misma...") ring true for *Duerme*'s protagonist.

Claire's relationship to sleep and dream states (which gave rise to the novel's title) is another point of contact between Boullosa's fictional character and the seventeenth century nun. Sor Juana's intellectual talents reached their apex in her baroque poem "Primero Sueño," which has been hailed by the academy as sor Juana's greatest literary creation and the only piece of writing that she claimed to write of her own volition. In the poem, the poetic voice experiences the dream state as a lucid, revelatory encounter with the universe, packed with references to Classical culture and so linguistically complex as to cloud meaning for the average reader. Her encounter with the dream therefore is quite the opposite of the alienating and disorienting process that Claire endures. Claire, a "victim" of sleep, loses all power to rationalize and control her environment (and her own body), while Sor Juana controls and creates meaning from within a metaphorical lucid dream.

As we have seen in this section, Cherríe Moraga's cultural analysis of the importance of the *Malinche* myth in Mexican/Chicano culture might also apply to Catalina de Erauso and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz who in taking control of their own

sexuality threaten the Mexican culture into which they have been inscribed. *La Malinche* did so by forming alliances (both sexual and political) with the Spanish, while Sor Juana entered the convent in order to evade the prospect of marriage, and Erauso escaped the convent in order to live as a man who conquered women in the New World. The allusions to these historical Mexican women effectively tie the pirate story to new nationalism by co-opting and redeploying official history to put the subaltern subject at its center.

## **Nomadism and Piracy as Countercurrents to Nationalism**

Following Rosi Braidotti, Jill Kuhnheim has read *Duerme* as an example of “Postmodern Feminist Nomadism,” which centers on “the fractured, intrinsically power-based constitution of the subject” (Braidotti 29, 35). Braidotti’s theory proposes that the nomadic subject employs nonlinear modes of thinking, which is precisely what Claire does in her narration by following the circuitous flow of a dream. Indeed, Claire embodies this theoretical nomadic subject in that she does not take any kind of identity as permanent, rather “only passing through; s/he makes those necessarily situated connections that can help her/him to survive, but s/he never takes on fully the limits of one national, fixed identity” (Braidotti 33). At the same time, Claire’s movement is constrained to a particular geographical area and the series of identities that she takes on must fit into that physical and cultural context. In other words, she cannot take on *any* identity or completely reject a national affiliation, but must find a way to be legible in her surroundings (colonial Mexico).

Braidotti's theory of nomadism is strongly influenced by Gilles Deleuze whom she studied under at the Sorbonne. The nomadic subject that she conceives however, is distinguished from her mentor's, in that it is "a situated, postmodern, culturally differentiated understanding of ...the *feminist* subject" (4 my italics). At the risk of falling into the same trap as Deleuze and Guattari, who have been criticized for romanticizing the nomad in their treatise on nomadology, which does not reference real or culturally specific nomadic subjects, I would like to reflect briefly on the parallels between nomads and pirates that have recently been explored in theory, fiction and literary criticism. In doing so, it is not my intention to conflate piracy with nomadism, or to suggest that the two subjects are somehow interchangeable, but to consider the similarities in their relationships to space, movement and the nation-state.

To begin with, Deleuze and Guattari's theory of nomadic science understands the sea as similar to the desert in terms of the uncontrolled, non-linear modes of navigation that are possible within such spaces. By corollary, they admit the pirate as a subject with a similar (nomadic) relationship to space, citing fourteenth century Chinese piracy as an example of the failure of the state to control (or "stiate") its neighboring space (61).<sup>4</sup>

Interestingly, Alberto Vázquez-Figueroa explores this Deleuzian logic in his novel, *León Bocanegra* (1998), which centers on the title character's awkward navigation of the African landscape in the wake of a shipwreck. The Spanish sea captain meets with Bedouins and other nomadic subjects as well as pirates who penetrate the coast of West Africa in an attempt to thwart the slave trade—and the novel contains an extensive history of piracy in Jamaica. Bocanegra understands the desert through his knowledge of the sea, which he uses as an asset on various occasions. The salt mines in which

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of Deleuze and Guattari's use of the terms "smooth" and "striated," see note 3.



Bocanegra is enslaved for a time and is described as “mar seco” and the captain escapes by harnessing the wind and sailing across the salt flats in a makeshift, low friction vessel with a handcrafted sail (*León Bocanegra* 79). Comparisons are also made between the modes of communication of nomads and pirates, in particular, their ways of measuring distance in vast open expanses, their understandings of the concept of “home,” and ways in which these two types of transients say goodbye.

Returning to *Duerme* and circling back to my analysis of blood and water, Claire might also be considered a nomadic subject in the Deleuzian sense, who is subjected to the state when she is placed in a “striated” and land-based space that forces upon her a new domesticated relationship to water. The infusion of water into her veins irredeemably changes her relationship to water, which previously has been one of domination and power, to one of domestication and subordination. This new relationship better serves the needs of the state which

needs to subordinate hydraulic force to conduits, pipes, embankments which prevent turbulence, which constrain movement to go from one point to another, and space itself to be striated and measured, which makes the fluid depend on the solid, and flows proceed by parallel, laminar layers. The hydraulic model of nomad science and the war machine, on the other hand, consists in being distributed by turbulence across a smooth space [such as the sea], in producing a movement that holds space and simultaneously affects all of the point, instead of being held by space in a local movement from one specified point to another. (Deleuze and Guattari 21)

In the context of the comparisons between nomads and pirates, I would like to look backward toward the Boom, and specifically Gabriel García Márquez’s novella, *La increíble y triste historia de la cándida Eréndira y de su abuela desalmada* (1972), which foregrounds wandering, nomadic subjects who traverse the desert as if it were an ocean. I bring García Márquez’s short story into my reading of *Duerme* because the dismantling

and recreation of national myths that can be observed in Boullosa's novel has its roots in the Boom whose writers "tried to demolish or trivialize the 'mythic' subtext of national development" (Sommer 72). Indeed, as Doris Sommer has noted, "[t]he great Boom novels rewrite, or unwrite, the foundational fiction to show that in Latin America there was no romance, no political erotics that could bind national father to mother" (91). Such founding fictions emerged in the nineteenth century historical novel, a genre that included abundant examples of pirate novels (Gerassi-Navarro). Modern authors such as Boullosa and García Márquez challenge the construction of nationalisms that were promoted in nineteenth century fiction by presenting the desert and ocean as spaces of resistance in which national myths are challenged and trivialized.

The young Eréndira is not a pirate, but her lover, Ulises, is the son of contrabandists, the veritable pirates of the land—and is, of course, named after the famous navigator of Greek mythology. García Márquez's narrative, like *Duerme*, makes reference to the historical figures Captain Drake and John Hawkins, pirates whose actions against Spanish ships and settlements are frequently related in colonial literature (Barco Centenera; Castellanos; Miramontes y Zuázola; Rodríguez Freyle).

*Eréndira*, like Vázquez Figueroa's *León Bocanegra*, compares the geographical spaces of desert and sea and the modes of navigation particular to these spaces. These two entities are initially posed as mirror opposites in García Márquez's novella. According to Ulises, the ocean "[e]s como el desierto, pero con agua" (117) and the laws of sail are proven to permeate this land. Ulises unwittingly facilitates his capture by attempting to navigate the dry land upwind when he flees with Eréndira, and a similar mistake of a minor character proves fatal. The desert is also *politically* conceptualized in

a similar way to the high seas. Eréndira's tyrannical and possessive grandmother asserts: "el desierto no es de nadie" (121), which approximates the concept of the sea as an everyman's territory, a politically neutral area traditionally navigated by members of many different nations. The desert of *Eréndira* proves itself to be just as culturally amorphous.

The desert in *Eréndira* is inhabited by a large cast of characters of different nationalities. While the only characters born abroad are the Spanish missionaries and Ulises's Dutch father, it could be argued that Ulises himself is of Greek origin due to his namesake, and that the Brits also make their mark with the evocation of Sir Francis Drake. The hybrid culture also includes representatives of indigenous tribes as well as creoles, but what is most significant about the internationality in the story is that no one group seems to dominate. The amorphous desert-nation contains just as much foreignness as indigeneity, making it so that there is no *unifying* national identity, much as we might observe on a buccaneering ship where British, Dutch, French, African and Spanish individuals intermingle.

In addition to these political coincidences, oceanic metaphors predominate in García Márquez's tale. While traversing the desert space, Eréndira is captured by missionaries "envuelta como un pescado grande y frágil capturado en una red lunar" (122). When she later finds herself again in the custody of her grandmother, she is "encadenada y en la misma posición de *ahogado* a la deriva" (152). Eréndira's grandmother, for her part, is referred to as "una hermosa ballena blanca" (97) and the ambulatory brothel that the grandmother sets up is likened to a sunken ship (159). While these descriptions of sea creatures and objects traversing an arid landscape initially seem

out of place, it is not difficult to accept the similarities between the ocean and the desert when we consider that the two consist of the most inhospitable spaces for man with scant shelter from the sun and little or no source of fresh water.

In *Duerme*, *León Bocanegra* and *Eréndira*, the desert and the ocean, nomadism and piracy are all irresistibly compared to some degree, and as Deleuze and Guattari propose, these spaces and subjects act as points of resistance to hegemonic culture. In the case of *Duerme* and *Eréndira* in particular, nomadism and piracy blur the characterization of the nation and its unifying myths, thereby challenging the “fictions of nation building” (Gerassi-Navarro) and other “foundational fictions” (Sommer) that were promoted in nineteenth century historical novels, and above all, those featuring pirates.

## **Conclusions**

As we have seen in previous chapters, a female pirate’s story rarely ends in triumph. In fact, all retellings of the Bonny/Read story end with the disarming of the phallic woman, who is put back in her place—be that motherhood or death. *Duerme* differs from these stories in that it begins at the female pirate’s moment of failure—the end of her self-promoted masquerade—and takes a careful if disorienting look at what she later becomes and how. Gender post-piracy no longer depends on her will, but is projected from the outside, the community, onto the individual. This resignification process in *Duerme* mirrors Butlerian theories of identity formation, and plays with notions of “the real” as it applies to the nature of both race and gender. Properties believed to be natural to the body (such as blood, race, and sex) are altered in *Duerme*

through small gestures, such as minor incisions, changes of clothing and simple proclamations.

*Duerme* also questions and redefines the boundaries of the community that shapes Claire's identity (Mexico) by revisiting and rewriting Mexican history and nationalism. The drama of identity formation in the novel is specifically rooted in Mexico, with attention to *mestizo* racial hybridity and figures from Mexico's history. Like Claire, whose body is appropriated and ascribed new meanings according to the whims of strangers, Mexicans came to be through a succession of acts of piracy that privileged the white, upper-class males who appropriated the land and the bodies of the indigenous populations. In this sense, Claire's body acts reductively as a stand-in for Mexico and its people, land and waters. At the same time, however, Boullosa ultimately pirates Mexican nationalism by queering its founding myths and leaving the fate of the nation in a state of limbo.

*Duerme* revives the history of Mexican women, who are presented in the multi-faceted roles of saviors, mothers, daughters, fighters, lovers, victims and writers. But far from offering a prophetic, utopian vision of the future for women in Mexico, the proverbial Mexican woman in the end lies sleeping in expectation of an awakening that might come when the nation has changed enough for her to reinvent herself. "[D]espertaré y me ataviaré del modo que yo quiera," she imagines, "[m]e ilusiona el cambio, la que soy aquí no tiene para mí interés ninguno" (129). Yet instead of taking action toward this end, she slips into inertia, entrusting her body and fate to the hands of a doting, but unmotivated man with his own set of weaknesses, leaving the reader with the unanswered question: who is the Mexican woman?

## Chapter 5

### **Subjectivity and the Politics of Embodiment in *Son vacas, somos puercos***

*...their masters, forsaking all conscience and justice, oftentimes traffic with their bodies, as with horses at a fair; selling them to other masters, just as they sell negroes brought from the coast of Guinea.*

—Alexander Esquemelin

*No, no lograba reconstruirme. Pero sentía en mi cuerpo tal satisfacción que casi lo embotaba el gusto de la aventura, el placer de ser filibustero. ¿Me había perdido? Pero al preguntármelo yo sabía que lo que había perdido era mi cuerpo, que yo había sido sólo un esclavo, engagé y que al dejar de serlo yo era el esclavo que perdió su cuerpo.*

—Carmen Boullosa

*The subject has no fixed locus, and can consequently take up residence anywhere, even at the site of the fantasy's verb or action.*

—Kaja Silverman

### **Introduction: Piratical Fragmentation**

In spite of the fact that there have been many portrayals of pirates as flawless men with perfect physiques, especially in American film of the early to mid-twentieth century,

the mere mention of the word pirate now conjures up images of “fragmented” bodies adorned with patches, peg-legs and hooks. Notwithstanding the tremendous popularity of films such as *Captain Blood* (1935), *The Sea Hawk* (1940), *The Crimson Pirate* (1952), and *The Buccaneer* (1958) at the time of their release, the prosthetically-adorned pirate has replaced the archetype of the strapping outlaw of early Hollywood. This is especially true for younger generations who are more familiar with screen portrayals of the one-handed Captain Hook, the one-legged Long John Silver, or even the more able-bodied, but equally unappealing Captain Jack Sparrow.<sup>1</sup>

These prostheticized imaginings of pirates were popularized in literature at the turn of the twentieth century when piracy was no longer a common threat to civilians, and though they made their way onto film as early as 1924, these battered seamen did not come to dominate screen representations of pirates until much later. The fictions that arose at the time, such as Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island* (1883) and J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan* (1902) featured whimsical visions of an extinct species of pirate that roamed the Caribbean Sea from around 1520-1750 (Gerassi-Navarro 16). The physical impediment of Stevenson’s Long John Silver was most likely inspired by Francois le Clerk or “Jambe de Bois” the peg-legged French privateer who operated off the coast of Spain, the Canaries and the Caribbean during the mid-fifteen hundreds. The very notion of “a seafaring man with a wooden leg” inspires horror in *Treasure Island*’s young narrator who has the good fortune of meeting the pirate after his wooden leg has been lost at sea. The menacing image of Captain Silver’s lost peg leg, however, continues to haunt young Jim. Stevenson’s Silver no doubt helped popularize the image of the peg-legged

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to the *Pirates of the Caribbean* series, there have been several recent film revivals of the *Peter Pan* and *Treasure Island* stories (which feature famously dismembered pirates) including *Finding Neverland* (2004), *Hook* (1991), and *Treasure Island* (1990).

pirate while Barrie's Captain Hook made famous the hook-armed one. These characters and the maladies they carry along with them persevere in the popular imagination most likely because of their appeal to children who never tire of their reproductions in print, on television and on screen.

While these disfigured beings might logically be considered *less* imposing due to their handicaps, in pirate fictions they inspire fear and horror since their disfigurement is a mark of their badness, of the evil deeds they have performed. But perhaps more than the actual disfigurement, what provokes fear is the mechanical correction of it: the patch over the missing eye, the wooden leg in place of the fleshy one and, most imposing of all, the hook, which replaces the human appendage with a veritable weapon, one that becomes a part of the body.

In fictional representations of pirates, the centrality of the prosthetic device cannot be overstated, for often it is the loss of the limb and the acquisition of the prosthetic device that makes the pirate. What (or who) would Captain Hook be for instance without the instrument of his namesake? In the Latin American literary tradition as well, dismemberment marks the beginning of a piratical career for Laura Antillano's narrator in "Tuna de mar" (1991). Indeed, Cristóbal Martín becomes the pirate captain's "left hand man" when his right hand is severed by the latter in a duel.

In keeping with contemporary American culture's fascination with material goods, recent Hollywood productions give much attention to these prosthetic adornments in pirate films. In the 2003 feature film, *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*, for instance, one pirate's greatest aspiration is to exchange his wooden eye for a glass one. His prosthetic device makes for much comic relief when it is impaled



with a fork or when its owner scrambles anxiously after the rolling object shouting “my eye!” like a boy chasing a marble. In *Peter Pan*’s filmic sequel, *Hook* (1991), the hook itself is an object of pride and vanity for the captain and an object of reverence for his crew. It is manufactured with care, embossed with flowery adornments like a jewel, and carried to the ship on a red velvet cushion through an enthusiastic crowd of pirates who chant “hook, hook, hook” until the object is attached to its master and the beloved villain appears in all his splendor. Outside of Hollywood (but still within the U.S.) plastic patches, hooks and peg-legs have become part of the vast catalogue of pirate *kitsch*—fetishized trinkets that overflow the shelves of touristy port-town shops invoking the character of piracy with their presence (as discussed in chapter 1).

The compensatory instruments of piracy attest to the fact that the pirate’s body is just as vulnerable to serious injury as any one else’s. Paradoxically, however, the perseverance of these individuals after they have lost an appendage is a testament to their invincibility; they may be hacked apart, but they keep on fighting. This legendary ability to endure peril, evade capture, and challenge the most powerful nations (even when literally single-handed) has turned them into supernatural beings in several fictions from a spectrum of time periods, genres and geopolitical locations. Pirates escape bodily limitations in María Luisa Bombal’s “Lo secreto,” Carmen Boullosa’s *Duerme* and Gore Verbinski’s *Pirates of the Caribbean* through conditions of immortality that are not always welcome. The repeated transcendence of death in literature and film from Latin America and the US over the course of three decades suggests to me not so much that they are borrowing from each other as that they come to similar metaphorical-artistic

conclusions from the pre-existing corpus of literature and film on pirates which features men that are virtually invincible.

While in no means breaking ties with the tradition of presenting the pirate as fragmented and disembodied, Boulosa gives new meaning to these concepts when she creates a back story for Hendrik Smeeks alias Alejandro Oliverio Exquemelin the author of the extremely popular *De Americaensche Zee-Roovers* (1678).<sup>2</sup> Starting with a text that is itself fragmentary, poorly written, historically questionable, and significantly altered from its original, Boulosa deconstructs notions of truth, authorship, History, and identity when she establishes the problematic relationship between the body and psyche of Smeeks. His fragmentary identity, lack of connection with his body and lack of credibility as an author/historian mimics the nature of *De Americaensche Zee-Roovers* which suffered significant alterations in reprintings and translations and it is hypothesized that generous portions of the text were not written by the original author/eyewitness.

Smeeks/Exquemelin's identity is historically questionable not only because he writes under a pseudonym, but because he is an individual of little or no social prominence. His absence from any sort of historical record (apart from his narrative) in combination with his extremely poor language skills (some have gone so far as to call him illiterate) have raised questions for scholars as to his place of origin (believed by most to be Holland, but by others to be France). Boulosa further complicates his identity

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<sup>2</sup> The author of this tale was a Dutchman whose given name was Hendrik Smeeks, but who published under the pseudonym of Alejandro Oliverio Exquemelin. The aliases of this paradoxically functionally illiterate author proliferate with the multiple spellings of his pseudonym which was adapted to suit the language of translation, going so far in the English version as to change his name altogether from Alexander to John. The chronicle was translated into Spanish, French and English within less than a decade of its original publication in Dutch. The English translation was based on the Spanish, rather than the original Dutch. The original title literally translates to "American Sea-Robbers," but this neutral terminology became more politically charged in translations. It should also be noted that reprintings and additional translations of the text were generously expanded and these additions are believed to be added by writers other than Smeeks/Exquemelin.

by proliferating the names of this unfortunate character in her fictionalization. The narrator of *Son vacas* thus becomes Jean instead of Hendrik and acquires yet another spelling of his pen name. Finally, he is bestowed with the nickname “Trepanador,” which is derived from the term for an archaic form of surgery that involves drilling through bone, especially of the cranium.

*Americaensche Zee-Roovers* was in large part responsible for the international fame of British pirate, Captain Morgan. Boullosa’s novel appropriates Smeeks’s voice and vocation (as a pirate surgeon), but focuses instead on the French pirate L’Olonnais, who is also featured in the chronicle. It would seem that her portrait of the French pirate is actually a composite of Morgan and L’Olonnais (Luiselli 70). What has caught critics’s attention is not so much this historical modification but the fact that Boullosa converts Smeeks from a distanced observer into a compromised participant in piracy (Franco 28; Goosses 135; Schmidt 43). Even more important to this chapter, Boullosa takes a text (*De Americanesche Zee-Rovers*) that explains what pirates did and how they lived and asks questions like: “what are the social conditions that lead one into piracy?” and “what are the psychological effects of piracy?” The resulting novel is divided into two sections, the first of which centers on the back-story to Smeeks’s pirate adventures (which is completely lacking from the original). Her answers to the above questions carve out a path toward defining alternative subjectivities in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and delve into experiences of key interest to contemporary gender and queer studies. In imagining this uniquely complex individual, Boullosa also draws on common tropes from pirate literature, such as the theme of bodily dismemberment and immortality and ascribes new (feminist) meanings to them.

## Genre Ambiguity: *Son vacas, somos puercos* within the Literary Tradition

Carmen Boulosa is a Mexican author with an impressive number of highly acclaimed publications. Her previous and subsequent work includes fourteen published volumes of poetry, fourteen novels, five plays, and several volumes of essays and short stories. This vast corpus contains three pirate novels that have characters in common. *El médico de los piratas* (1992) is a re-worked version of *Son vacas, somos puercos* (1991), which has the same protagonist and relates many of the same events. *El médico* eliminates many of the postmodern elements found in *Son vacas*. *Duerme* (1994), which I discussed in chapter four, centers on the cross-dressing female pirate, Claire Fleurcy, believed to be the elaboration of a minor character from *Son vacas*. Typical of Boulosa's other works of fiction, *Son vacas* is a hybrid of several literary genres. It begins as a blend of travel chronicle and picaresque novel—genres that were highly popular in the colonial period—with the thirteen-year-old protagonist's disjointed reflections on his journey across the Atlantic. The short but rich novel is divided into two sections, the first of which narrates Smeeks's transatlantic experience including his decision to travel to the New World, the events of his journey, and his fate when he reaches the pirate-dominated Caribbean Island of Tortuga (located 12 kilometers off the northern coast of Hispaniola—just a stone's throw from modern day Port-de-Paix, Haiti) where he is sold into slavery and educated by two benefactors in the arts of herbal medicine and surgery. The second half of the novel relates his experiences as a pirate surgeon after escaping slavery. The first chapter contains historical descriptions

common to the chronicle, such as information about weather changes, the exact number of passengers on the ship, its precise origin and destination points, and its date of departure, but it also contains biographical information about the author and his various professions up to that point—elements that are more in keeping with the picaresque.

Throughout the course of the novel, Smeeks, similar to the picaresque narrators of *Guzmán de Alfarache* (Mateo Alemán 1599), *Lazarillo de Tormes* (Anon. 1554), and *El periquillo sarniento* (Lizardi 1816) proves himself to be a young man who has served many masters, and similarly aspires to social ascent. The novel contains other elements of the picaresque, such as social critique and autobiographical style.<sup>3</sup> The fictional author and protagonist of Boullosa's novel is, like most picaresque antiheroes, "un muchacho de origen humilde, abandonado muy pronto a su suerte" (Marín and Río 108). Because of his journey to the new world, *Son vacas* particularly calls into mind *La vida del Buscón* (Francisco de Quevedo 1626) and *La historia de la monja alférez escrita por ella misma*.<sup>4</sup> The story of el Buscón concludes at the threshold of a new adventure in which Pablos, the anti-hero, having exhausted all possibilities for travesty and social ascent in Spain, embarks to find a better fortune in the New World. In Catalina de Erauso's autobiographical novel, the heroine, a young Spanish nun cross-dressed as a soldier, meets success in the New World, boasting many battles, duels and romantic conquests. The colonies allow Erauso to appropriate freedoms only available to men at that time. Boullosa's novel makes an overture to women such as Erauso by briefly introducing a similar character who reveals her true sex to the narrator on their journey across the

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<sup>3</sup> For more information of the picaresque see Diego Marín and Ángel del Río.

<sup>4</sup> This autobiographical tale by Catalina de Erauso was written in 1646, but remained unpublished until 1829. Though it was first translated into English in 1918, it was re-edited and republished in 1996 as the *Memoir of a Basque Transvestite in the New World*.

Atlantic. In the style of both these Golden Age genres (the picaresque and the travel chronicle), *Son vacas* utilizes narrative section headings that summarize the main events in both parts of the novel.

Boullosa's overtures to antiquated genres and historical figures have in turn made her work difficult to classify by literary scholars who anxiously try to pigeonhole her writing. Spurred by Seymour Menton's treatment of this work of fiction, there has been much debate over whether Boullosa's text should be considered a historical novel, and if so, whether it should be classified under the subcategories of the traditional or the new historical novel. Menton, who introduces and defines the new historical novel, sustains that *Son vacas* fits in the category of the traditional novel. Friedhelm Schmidt has taken issue with this designation, affirming that it conforms better to Menton's description of the new historical novel, and Alessandra Luiselli has gone to great lengths to prove the same. Jean Franco, nonetheless rejects the historical classification all together, maintaining instead that it belongs to the "corpus enorme de literatura de piratería" (Franco 28). The temptation to define Boullosa's novels in the negative (by what they are *not*) is irresistible to Franco who has also classified some of her texts as anti-

*Bildungsroman*:

en *Mejor desaparece* no hay "Bildung"; la infancia no es la preparación para la edad adulta. El adulto no puede atrapar a la memoria como una presa. [. . .] En un relato incluido en *Quizá*, el padre de un niño precipita un desastre catastrófico, cuando niega dejarle estudiar Letras. El niño decide destruir un libro—y destruye *El Quijote*, con lo cual desaparecen primero los libros que cita, los críticos, el lector, y luego calles y monumentos hasta que se borra todo... (22)

It could likewise be questioned whether the protagonist of *Son vacas* ever really learns anything. Friedhelm Schmidt has similarly designated this novel as "una especie de

*Bildungsroman* al revés,” and has no qualms in claiming that the “fracaso casi total” of the protagonist’s “*éducation sentimentale* es una de las características más sobresalientes de la novela” (Schmidt 43). Rather than learning from his experience, Boullosa’s narrator seems to degenerate physically and morally as he enters adulthood; his text likewise disintegrates as it matures, becoming riddled with contradictory perspectives, mysterious intertexts and gaps in narration.

As with most of Boullosa’s novels, the most salient feature of *Son vacas* is the *breaking* of literary conventions, and the skillful blending of genres effectively makes this novel “genre-queer,” which, as I will discuss later, is in keeping with the genders and sexualities of her characters that also resist classification. Not surprisingly, the author herself has little interest in identifying a particular niche for her publications. She is of the opinion that “los géneros son más el invento de la academia y de algunos autores que en un momento de desliz sienten la necesidad de organizar o de ordenar” (quoted in Spielmann 264). Boullosa, in fact, is quite dismissive of all attempts to classify her novels— she also believes that feminism is too small a window through which to approach her texts (Spielmann 262).<sup>5</sup>

The blended generic forms of *Son vacas* put the novel in a class alongside Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981) and D.M. Thomas’s *The White Hotel* (1981). Like these novels, *Son vacas* unsettles the difference between History and fiction by problematizing the narrator’s subjectivity. Boullosa employs similar tactics to these predecessors, such as multiple, contradictory perspectives—which destroy the verisimilitude of the pseudo-autobiography, in direct contrast with the efforts of

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<sup>5</sup> As I will discuss later, *Son vacas* fits better under the broader rubric of gender studies rather than as a feminist text because of its focus on masculinity.

pioneering picaresque authors—exposure of the fallibility of the narrator’s memory, and most significantly for this analysis, the fragmentation of the subject.<sup>6</sup> Also in the vein of these and other postmodern novels, *Son vacas* “overtly pose[s] questions about subjectivity that involve the issues of sexuality and sexual identity and of the representation of women” (Hutcheon 160). Boullosa, however, moves beyond the traditional customs of feminist studies that centered exclusively on women and forges into the broader territory provided by gender studies by applying these questions of subjectivity, sexuality and sexual identity to a male character.

Boullosa also ventures into this territory when she plays with the topic of male body alienation. For when the gendered body is discussed—as it has been repeatedly in feminist scholarship—it is most often in reference to the female, as the male body is not generally considered problematic or vulnerable. Psychoanalysis has defined the female body as dangerously lacking; its absence of penis is a threat to both boys and girls that may come back to haunt them in adulthood (Freud). This belief is in no way a strictly modern one; in *The Second Sex* (1949) feminist theorist Simone de Beauvoir quoted the similar prejudices of Aristotle and St. Thomas who considered the female body to be defective, lacking and imperfect. While de Beauvoir would seem to be opposed to these negative conceptualizations of the female body, she likewise views it as problematic, suggesting that women’s reproductive experiences *alienate* her from her body (Arp; Beauvoir). Psychoanalytic feminists such as Luce Irigaray have since taken up the topic of the female body in order to redefine it in positive terms, yet the myths regarding the female body persist. Irigaray may no longer see the female body as problematic, but her

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<sup>6</sup> For more on the relationship between the picaresque and “the real,” see Francisco Rico (especially pp. 35-44).



exaltation of women's sexual pluralism does not escape the essentialism of her feminist and misogynist predecessors. Needless to say, there has been much preoccupation with the uniqueness of the female body, while the male body has been largely ignored by great thinkers.

In actuality, the male body is not impervious to threat. While it may not occur as often, males can be beaten, raped and owned just as females can, and male trauma victims have just as much difficulty feeling at home in their bodies as their female counterparts. Since the men are not expected to be victims, however, they tend to find different resolutions to their body problems and may resort to committing violence against others. This is the case with the protagonist/narrator of *Son vacas*.

## **“El esclavo que perdió su cuerpo”: Subjectivity and the Body**

*Son vacas* begins with two epigraphs, the first an excerpt from *La vida del Buscón* (again, an overture to the picaresque) and the second the poem “El esclavo” by Eugenio Montejó (b. Caracas, 1939), poet laureate of Venezuela in 1999. Boullosa cites the first line of this poem: “Ser el esclavo que perdió su cuerpo,” as being the “voz cantante de toda la novela” (Ibsen 61). And it is certainly true that Smeeks, apart from having two aliases/alter-personae, introduces himself as a *physically* fractured being, claiming only to have the eyes and ears of Jean Smeeks. Boullosa's novel thus opens by playing with the fragmentation motif that has become popular in twentieth-century representations of pirates, yet she manages to layer onto it questions about subjectivity, identity and even authorship and historical truth. For while popular representations of pirates depict bodies

without an eye or ear, Boullosa's narrator is all eyes and ears—a disembodied, dislocated observer with no clear identity (certainly not a reliable historian).

Montejo's poem also speaks to the novel in that it weaves together the experiences of slavery and *authorship*, both of which are lived through by the narrator, who was a slave in the literal sense as well as in Montejo's usage as a "slave to the word." The poetic voice of "El esclavo" imagines himself dispossessed of his body and inhabited by words that transmit themselves to him through the music of the flutes which replace his bones.<sup>7</sup> His body thus becomes an instrument that is played by an external force and he in turn feels compelled to decipher its music. The experience of writing as he describes it is compulsive, nocturnal and solitary and is also anxiety provoking because the poet-slave fears being figuratively thrown to the dogs when his poem becomes public.

The question of reception does not inspire the same sense of anxiety in Smeeks, who is not just the narrator, but also the professed author of the story we read. Unlike the poetic voice of Montejo's poem, he is not driven by a need for personal fulfillment or recognition, but by a promise made to his good friend and lover, Negro Miel who nursed his body and spirit when the boy was enslaved. This African man had been destined for slavery himself, but he escaped this fate by tending to the ailments of the slave drivers on his journey across the Atlantic. When he dies, Smeeks affirms: "yo era libro escrito de Negro Miel," because his friend has orally transmitted his extensive knowledge in herbal medicine to the boy, knowledge that he has refused to share with anyone else, including the Island's surgeon (*Vacas* 46). Smeeks's identity, not as a person, but as a disembodied

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<sup>7</sup> "Ser el esclavo que perdió su cuerpo / para que lo habiten las palabras. / Llevar por huesos flautas inocentes que alguien toca de lejos / o tal vez nadie" (no pag.).

text, a catalog of someone else's knowledge is just one of many indications of his lack of subjecthood and subsequent disconnection from his body. This crisis of disembodiment continues throughout the novel as Smeeks desperately seeks to reconstruct himself once he becomes a free man.

If Smeeks, through the transmission of this medical knowledge is converted into the text of another, the intellectual property of another if you will, he is also dispossessed of his body ownership through transmission of *sexual* knowledge.<sup>8</sup> He is the passive and unwilling recipient of numerous sexual advances, the first occurring as a young teen at the hands of the cleric whom he served. The lasting effects of these traumatic experiences will be explored later. Smeeks's evaluation of this inappropriate relationship is mixed. Unable to directly name the experience of rape, he alludes to it in veiled language, at times painfully truncating his tale, and primarily referring to his abuser as benevolent. Vacillating between narrating his experience in the first and third person, he explains: “. . . hace pocas tardes, él [Smeeks] era un muchacho de trece años vagando sin rumbo en Flandes, algunas veces haciendo de criado, si corría con fortuna (hasta excesiva buena fortuna, como cuando aprendí a leer y escribir por un amo clérigo que parecía estimarme más que a un criado, y más que a un muchacho). . .” (16). The traumatic nature of this experience reveals itself in Smeeks's simultaneous obsession with, and aversion to relating his sexually abusive past. In the passage cited above, the memory of the abusive cleric is controlled textually by its confinement to a parenthetical clause. In the same paragraph, the memory rears its head again and Smeeks cuts it off with ellipses:

Mi primer trabajo había sido de criado, de criado de un criado si soy más preciso, pero me duró poco porque tuve la suerte de topar con el clérigo

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<sup>8</sup> The concept of intellectual property certainly does not belong in the Early Modern context, but considering that the text is written by a contemporary author, I think it is appropriate to use this term.

que... ¿Para qué retroceder más? Allá, en el patio de atrás de los años, no me espera ningún recuerdo merecedor de ser traído al presente, ni que ayude en algo a la historia que deseo contar, la historia de Smeeks en el mar Caribe. (17)

This memory suppression is typical of trauma victims who tend to expend energy during their waking hours trying not to think of their experience.<sup>9</sup> When the traumatic memory of sexual assault does arise for Smeeks, he attempts to diminish its importance by claiming it has nothing to do with his later adventures in the Caribbean, but he is terribly wrong in this respect, for this sad chapter of his past is, as the author agrees, one of the most formative experiences in alienating him from his own body, from his own sexuality.

Although Boullosa called attention to Montejo's epigraph in her 1994 interview with Kristine Ibsen, and therefore to the role of slavery in dissociating one from one's body, she diminished its significance in her elaboration and accentuated instead the link between disembodiment and erotic dysfunction, between sexual abuse and bodily estrangement. While all the characters in *Son vacas* are by her account "personajes sin cuerpos, sin acceso a su propio erotismo" (Ibsen 60), Smeeks in particular as a "niño violado" cannot access his own body (Ibsen 62). These two avenues to dissociation may be considered interconnected if we take into consideration the possibility that there are many different forms of slavery, of asserting ownership over another and that rape might be one of them. To demonstrate just how much Smeeks is scarred by sexual assault, how much he loses touch with his body, I would like to look more closely at his subsequent sexual experiences.

In his first sexual encounter with a woman, while he is the active, rather than the passive partner (in the sense that he penetrates rather than being penetrated), he is not in

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<sup>9</sup> Initially theorized by Freud, the phenomenon of (unsuccessful) memory suppression by trauma victims is now a diagnostic criterion for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). See Sigmund Freud, *Beyond*.

control of the situation, nor does he enjoy it. The experience brings back memories of sexual abuse (by the cleric) and sexual usage (by Negro Miel). He distances himself from his present surroundings by evoking the memory of Ella who had revealed her true sex to him by casually sliding his hand under her shirt and placing it on her breast (once again, an erotic encounter in which, though not violent, his agency is negated). This ambiguous young woman is eroticized precisely because of her *refusal* of the erotic, because she has reclaimed her own body and her agency. Once a prostitute, she has altered her destiny by donning a man's clothes and quite literally, changing worlds (from the Old to the New, from the feminine to the masculine).

All these past erotic experiences flood into Smeeks's consciousness in the moment that he couples for the first time with Isabel, a prostitute who has called on his medical expertise after the death of Negro Miel. This woman takes it upon herself to educate him sexually. In the following passage, the convergence of trauma and lack of desire, both past and present can be observed:

Isabel se encargó de explicarme qué corresponde a un cuerpo de mujer. *No diré que haya sido para mi agrado. Yo tenía que hacer lo que hasta entonces sólo me habían hecho a mí, lo supe cuando Isabel pasaba apresurada en mi ropa sus manos y acomodaba las mías, atolondradas en su espalda y en sus dos pechos, provocando en mí un estremecimiento radicalmente distinto al que un día me provocó otra teta en mi palma, y tan radicalmente distinto que en una zona oscura se igualara. Sobrevino la erección, lo que sólo me había ocurrido a solas, y sin que yo lo deseara me vi adentro de su cuerpo. Agité mis caderas como las agitara contra mí Negro Miel y no pude evitar pensar en él y romper a llorar al tiempo que confusamente mi verga rompiera en agua dentro de Isabel. No, no fue grato. Sentí que mi llanto se sumaba al río colorado que había nacido en los lienzos y pensé en el clérigo que me enseñara a leer y que por primera vez usó mi cuerpo y recordé el dolor... Todo en el mismo instante, cuando aún estaba yo adentro de Isabel, vaciándome, y en el mismo instante, también pensé que la aversión por la mujer no incluía a Ella, sí, pensé en Ella otra vez... Pensé que su cuerpo jamás exudaba el rojo maloliente, pensé que ya no lo usaba nadie, pensé que lo habían usado muchos, pensé*

que Ella y yo juntos haríamos otra la ceremonia de la carne y empecé en el mismo instante a fabricar el culto erótico por Ella, un nuevo oculo ritual que sólo con Ella podría compartir y que, como se hizo, se desbarató sin que yo me diera cuenta. (52 emphasis mine)

The erotic cult to Ella eventually finds its satisfaction in Adele, another prostitute who possesses certain masculine characteristics, namely that she doesn't smell like a woman, and that her social mannerisms somehow seem manly, fraternal. After making love, Smeeks judges, "Parecíamos dos amigos varones platicando en el sillón mientras nos vestíamos presurosos, liberados de la maldición de nuestros cuerpos" (70). But this masculine edge is perhaps not what causes him to make the initial parallel, one that surprises even himself. Instead it is Adele's seductive air, her penetrating gaze that draws him in. This element is unique to any of his previous sexual encounters. His male lovers, even though they may share close friendships, simply pin him to the bed and use him when they get the urge, and, void of all seduction, Isabel focuses on the mechanics of love making, placing the hands where they should be, the penis where it should be with no display of desire. Quite to the contrary, Adele takes him by the hand and draws him into a room where she performs a strip tease with her eyes fixed on him. She then undresses him, and the two caress, that is, engage for the first time in foreplay, and proceed to make love slowly, achieving simultaneous orgasm.

It is after this unique experience of mutual desire that Smeeks, for the first, and perhaps the only time in the novel, occupies the space of his body, owns his body. Coming out into the street, a filibuster demands that he drink from his wine bag at gunpoint. As he gulps away watching the blue sky he relates:

Siento mi cuerpo, extrañamente feliz, dolorosamente feliz y completo, como si quienes lo hubieran usado hasta hoy o a quienes yo hubiera usado algo le hubieran arrebatado. Mi entrada al misterio oscuro de la carne,

siento con el vino escurriendo también por mi cuello, me ha puesto al cuerpo en el lugar del cuerpo [. . .] y por primera vez en mis diez y siete años estoy por primera vez ebrio y por primera vez completo [. . .] (71)

If it is the gaze that primarily creates the conditions that allows Smeeks to overcome his traumatic past and reenter his body, this opens up a topic for further exploration. For the text is riddled with scenes involving mirrors, doubles and false representations including male and female characters in drag, reflections that betray the location of vulnerable women, or that protect that of vulnerable men, and profane representations of religious scenes. Given that Smeeks himself is reduced to eyes and ears, all these visual tricks have profound implications, ones that reach out beyond the personal history of Smeeks and into the realm of History and its challenges with perception, truth, identity and deceit in constructing its master narratives. But remaining within the realm of body and trauma, for now, let us delve deeper into the gaze in Boullosa's novel.

While the gaze may allow for a temporary bodily (re)integration, it can also produce the opposite effect. Smeeks's subjecthood is seriously endangered in his first encounter with Ella, precisely because of the gaze dynamic between them. In the following passage, she demands his attention verbally, physically and visually:

De pronto, sin violencia, al ritmo de la charla, tomó mi mano y la acomodó entre la ropa que cubre su pecho, hasta alcanzar la piel, y al mismo tiempo, casi interrumpiendo la sensación de azoro de la palma de mi mano ante la sorpresa de la forma con que la habían juntado, me preguntó, *mirándome fijo a los ojos*:

—¿Habías tocado antes a una mujer?,  
y sin esperar mi respuesta, ni separar mi mano azorada e inmóvil de su pecho, agregó:

—A mí me han tocado más hombres que todos los que viajan en este navío. Pero eso se acabó, quiero que lo sepas. Por eso voy a cambiar de tierras. Y prefiero pasar por hombre, aunque los hombres sean seres que desprecio, que seguir siendo una puta. Se acabó. (20 emphasis mine)

While Ella initiates physical contact nonviolently, her actions become infused with hostility. There is a certain antagonism in the directness of her gaze and in her persistence in binding his hand against her body, and while it would be difficult for a breast to cause physical harm, Smeeks describes his hand as “injured” by the tactile revelation of her true sex (20). Smeeks is also subordinated verbally when he is prevented from answering her question. To borrow a term from psychoanalytic trauma theory, Ella gains *mastery* over the situation in this scene at Smeeks’s expense.<sup>10</sup> She is looked at and touched, but she is the instigator of these actions against her body while the male is put into a passive role. The scene becomes more aggressive and manipulative when she projects onto Smeeks all the anger toward other men who have used her. Before her captive has a chance to speak or act, she repeats the final phrase of the previous passage and proceeds to reject him both physically and visually. Smeeks relates:

zafó con enojo mi mano de su cuerpo y de sus vestidos (¡como si hubiera sido mi voluntad quien la pusiera en tal lugar!), se separó abruptamente de mi compañía, *mirándome de reojo* con intensa furia, poniéndome el membrete de enemigo, y se incorporó a un corrillo que perdía el tiempo fijando las miradas entre ellos mismos... (20 emphasis mine)

In this segment, the used woman gains power by sucking it away from a surrogate perpetrator who also happens to be—though perhaps unbeknownst to her—sexually used.

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<sup>10</sup> In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud describes a child’s game that reenacts the painful experience of having his mother leave for periods of time. In his analysis of the impulse to repeat this unpleasant detachment, he explains: “At the outset [the child] was in a passive situation—he was overpowered by the experience but, by repeating it, unpleasurable though it was, as a game, he took on an active part. These efforts might be put down to an instinct for mastery acting independently of whether the [repeated] memory were in itself pleasurable or not” (15).



Significantly, when Smeeks reciprocates the gaze, she turns her back on him, a fact that seriously endangers his subjecthood.<sup>11</sup>

A discussion of the process of identity development would be useful at this juncture. In psychoanalysis, the gaze is considered to be an integral part of subject formation. In his explanation of the mirror phase, Jacques Lacan has insisted that the child's ego is formed through the process of recognizing his own reflected image. This process also necessitates the presence of the mother whose reflection appears along with his, but who visually exists outside the mirror. In psychoanalytic terms, the mother's look "facilitates the 'join' of infant and mirror image" (Silverman 127). Essentially, the mirror allows the subject to exteriorize himself, to look at himself as a whole and integrated being. Without the aid of the mirror, we can only see our body in parts. But the mirror is not always available to the subject. Fortunately, its exteriorizing effects can be produced through other modes of visual framing, such as photography and film, and there has subsequently been a major interest in the gaze in these disciplines. But even in the absence of all these modes of objectification, the child is eventually able to see himself being seen, even when there is no real mirror or frame. This process involves

the clicking of an imaginary camera which photographs the subject and thereby constitutes him or her. "What determines [the subject], at the most profound level, in the visible," remarks Lacan, "is the gaze that is outside. It is through the gaze that [the subject enters] light and it is from the gaze that [he or she receives] its effects. Hence it comes about that the gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which... [the subject is] photographed." (Silverman 128)

This virtual photography can take place quite adequately in the absence of camera, movie screen or mirror, but visual participation from a third party, is indispensable. When Ella

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<sup>11</sup> For more information on the gaze (or the look) and male subject formation see Kaja Silverman and Laura Mulvey.

refuses to exchange the gaze with Smeeks, this already vulnerable character is put in danger of losing his subjecthood. Orphaned, impoverished, violated and soon to be enslaved, he is in desperate need of confirmation of his identity and his existence. In the broader social world, the gaze communicates something about ourselves that we alone cannot distinguish: our place in society, our meaning. Power and privilege are therefore entangled with the gaze and social dynamics are revealed in its angles and intensities. Are we looked up to, down upon, or away from? Are we looked in the eye? Are we looked at with respect, horror, desire, curiosity, or fear? For that matter are we spied upon or stared at? An averted gaze may mean submission, yet at the same time it might also be disturbing, even aggressive, especially when it is a male who is denied.

Drawing on a separate psychoanalytic principle, film critic Laura Mulvey has pointed out that a gaze between a man and a woman is particularly charged because it recalls the castration complex. Through his look, man may demand from woman, “a three-dimensional space corresponding to that of the mirror-recognition,” therefore utilizing her to confirm his subjecthood (Mulvey 838). Yet the woman also “connotes something that the look continually circles around but disavows: her lack of penis, implying a threat of castration [ . . . ] Thus the woman as icon, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controller of the look, always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified” (Mulvey 840).

The scenario that Mulvey describes here obviously does not match up with the visual relation between Smeeks and Ella in *Son vacas*, for it is the female and not the male that is the active controller of the look in Boullosa’s novel. Ella likewise does not offer herself for display, and in fact rejects this role by disguising her body in male dress,

by defining herself as unavailable, and by physically turning her back on the desiring male. This only serves to heighten the threat of the “original trauma” because Smeeks is symbolically castrated when Ella severs his power of gaze and his power of speech (Mulvey 840). Interestingly, the castration complex is initially triggered not by the visual, but by the kinesthetic: her breast in his hand. Nonetheless, the activation of this original trauma soon shows its effects on his entire body while the thwarted gaze drains him of any unique characteristics he might possess. In subsequent interactions, Smeeks explains,

ella se empeñó en *esquivar y desviar la mirada*, siendo lo más que conseguí que un día, sólo un día más, me dirigiera la palabra, pero no me habló como hablándome a mí, sino que me habló como si hablara con uno que no fuera yo, con cualquiera, con el que fuera y no con el que ya entonces *tenía herido el cuerpo entero* por la eficaz munición que era en mí su pecho suave y firme... (20 emphasis added)

Smeeks’s resolution to this problem is not to impose himself on her, but to integrate himself with her, “ser parte de ella” (21), or subordinate himself to her, “ser *de ella*” (21). The only way to reclaim some identity is by *joining*, notably the term that Lacan uses to designate the relation between the mother and the child in the mirror. Smeeks thus returns to the mirror phase, (or even to the pre-mirror phase when the child does not see himself as separate from his mother), in order to resolve the identity crisis that Ella provokes in him.

But there may also be another reason for his desire to integrate himself with Ella. He discusses his attraction to her in erotic terms, considers himself to be sick with *love*, but he may be drawn to her for a different reason. He himself wonders “¿Qué me emocionaba tanto en *ella*?” (22). The answer may lie in their jointly traumatic pasts and in a process that Cathy Caruth calls “listening to another’s wound” (8). Caruth

introduces her argument about the wound and the voice by quoting a story by Tasso that captivated Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*:

Its hero, Tancred, unwittingly kills his beloved Clorinda in a duel while she is disguised in the armour of an enemy knight. After her burial he makes his way into a strange magic forest which strikes the Crusaders' army with terror. He slashes with his sword at a tall tree; but blood streams from the cut and the voice of Clorinda, whose soul is imprisoned in the tree, is heard complaining that he has wounded his beloved once again. (Caruth 2)

Caruth adds to Freud's observations about the story by underlining the importance of "the moving and sorrowful *voice* that cries out, a voice that is paradoxically released *through the wound*" (2). She further complicates Tasso's tale when she points out that

the wound that speaks is not precisely Tancred's own but the wound, the trauma, of another. It is possible, of course, to understand that other voice, the voice of Clorinda, within the parable of the example, to represent the other within the self that retains the memory of the "unwitting" traumatic events of one's past. But we can also read the address of the voice here, not as the story of the individual in relation of the events of his own past, but as the story of the way in which one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of the listening to another's wound. (8)

If one's trauma is wrapped up with another's, then this process of "listening to another's wound" might, aside from being inevitable, also have curative properties. It might answer questions about one's own experience, or at the very least might confirm it. When Ella's wound speaks to Smeeks, she provides a model of trauma survival that is completely different from his. Smeeks's instinct is to give in to power, to submit, while hers is to rise above, to travesty, to invert, to claim male power for her own. It is notable that Smeeks turns to Ella, invokes her memory when he finds himself in the emotionally painful erotic encounter with Isabel, and that his central thought is about her body's sexual past, and its current asexuality ("pensé que ya no lo usaba nadie, pensé que lo

habían usado muchos” (52)). Since the eroticism is painful, he eroticizes instead the non-erotic—that is, Ella’s refusal of the erotic, her refusal to let her body be used by men. This metaphor of listening to another’s wound is even more poignant given that the male turns to the female who is, even before any experience of trauma the “bearer of the bleeding wound” (Mulvey 834).

Returning now to the gaze, in her discussion of the castration complex, Mulvey suggests that the gaze is problematic for all men. Yet the problem is made more acute for Smeeks because of his experience of trauma (and here I am not referring to the original trauma of castration threat, but to Smeeks’s experience of sexual assault and his subsequent body fragmentation). The gaze is a means of facilitating reintegration of body and mind, for if there is to be any reintegration, first the body must be noticed, acknowledged and understood, a task which requires some sort of mediation since we can only see our body in parts without the aid of a mirror. But the literal mirror is also problematic because the survivors’s sense of what is normal has been warped and his dissociation makes his body unreadable. He must turn to the gaze to try to achieve some sort of understanding of his own body. The drama of self-reintegration therefore necessitates a witness who might through the gaze confirm not only how we are, but also who we are.

It perhaps goes without saying that Ella proves to be of little help to Smeeks in resolving his body conflicts. Not only does she avert her gaze, denying him recognition, but his obsession with her is physically and emotionally painful. Even apart from Ella, the thwarted gaze continues to mark Smeeks as an outsider among outcasts. For it seems that even amongst other “jóvenes que han mendicado por las calles, que han trabajado de

servientes, que han sido vendidos por sus familias” he remains external to circles of visual inclusion (Boullosa 16). Note that it is not only Ella that refuses to meet his gaze, but also the “carrillo que perdía el tiempo fijando las miradas entre ellos mismos” (20). As I will argue in the next section, it is in large part this perpetual outsider status that leads him to join the pirates.

## **Becoming One: On Joining the Collective**

In the context of Carmen Boullosa’s work, body troubles are a recurring theme. In *Duerme*, for example, Claire Fluercy’s body is transformed multiple times through dress.<sup>12</sup> She is unquestionably read as belonging to whichever economic, racial or gender class she is dressed as. Similar to Smeeks, Claire’s body was traumatized by repeated unwanted entries in her life as a prostitute. Additionally, her body is extremely vulnerable when she falls into her sleeping episodes. In this condition she is raped by the count that stole her identity. Later in the novel she is repeatedly stabbed by enemies in battle. This affront to her body would certainly have resulted in death, were she not immortal. Her unhealing wounds, though they never bleed, cause her a constant and prolonged pain. This physical attack against Claire is particularly illustrative of a trauma experience in which the victim goes into a numbed, anxiety free state, and does not come to understand or assimilate what happened until later (Caruth; Freud *Beyond*).

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<sup>12</sup> As I explained in chapter four, Claire first appears cross-dressed by choice as a pirate, but this identity is hijacked when a Spanish Count who has been condemned to death drugs her and trades outfits with her. In order to save her from death by hanging, an indigenous woman replaces her blood with a sacred water potion. This gives her body both debilitating and super-human properties. Despite the fact that she is hung, Claire does not die, yet the water in her veins makes her fall into a deep sleep anytime she leaves Mexico City. In addition, she is subjected to two other costume changes in which she assumes the identity of an indigenous woman and an aristocratic lady. In all these examples, clothing seems to write over her body, to reshape it.

In addition to *Duerme*, *La Milagrosa* (1993) also has a protagonist who is unable to access her body. The novel's narrator, known to all as la Milagrosa, serves as a conduit for resolving other people's problems. In order to concentrate on this task, she must deny her body's existence by depriving it, for example, of the luxury of night-time baths which would make her lose herself and her memory (*Boullosa Milagrosa* 14). In an attempt to integrate herself, she repeatedly meditates on the words *uno* and *yo* often stringing them together, as "uno-uno-uno" or "yo-yo-yo." La Milagrosa is a character whose ego is always in danger of not being recognized, who might look in the mirror and see someone other than herself.

Simone Coudassot-Ramírez has commented on the troubled bodies of characters in several other Boullosa novels and has concluded that all of Boullosa's characters have blurry body boundaries and are in essence phantoms, or "almas en pena buscando algo o alguien de donde agarrarse para cobrar vida" (45). She explains that when they are unable to find something to fill their body-void, "algo se encarga de llenárselo y los invade por completo sin que tengan ningún control sobre lo que les pasa. Todos son en realidad 'el esclavo que perdió su cuerpo'" (45). We might interpret this "algo" as water in Claire's veins as well as the knives that stab her and men that penetrate her or the supplicants that invade la Milagrosa's dreams or Smeeks's male and female sexual partners who penetrate him or oblige him to penetrate them without desire. Each of these characters stumbles upon a different resolution to their problem of disempowerment and bodily alienation and Smeeks's recourse is to become a perpetrator of sexual and physical violence by becoming a pirate. Notably, this would make him the ultimate master of his experience.

Smeeks's use of violence makes him stand out from Carmen Boullosa's other troubled characters who are primarily females. The author finds this to be a significant difference. Despite the fact that she considers Smeeks to be a "niño violado," much like her female character in the novel *Antes*, Boullosa doesn't have the same compassion for him. She elaborates: "Le tengo un poco de repulsión, más bien, porque él fue actor, mientras que mi niña solamente fue una víctima, está condenada por el destino desde el principio. En cambio, él pudo haber sido muchas cosas, y él escoge ser [pirata]" (Ibsen 62). This characterization of Smeeks as an "actor" is certainly an interesting one, because from his telling of the story it would seem that the few life decisions he makes are rather circumscribed, making him appear more a reactor than an actor. His decision to sign a contract with the French West Indies Company, for example is made abruptly with scant information due to the fact that the young unemployed orphan had few other options to choose from. The rapid change in lifestyle leaves him disoriented in the first few days aboard the Company ship and he describes his consternation at finding himself "en un viaje que nunca imaginé, *que no busqué*, un viaje salido de la nada un día cualquiera" (17 emphasis mine). While Smeeks is not forced onto the ship, he considers his signing with the company a bewildering accident of fate that sweeps him off the streets as if by magic.

His decision to sign on as a part of L'Ollonais's pirate expedition is also circumscribed because he is first forced to drink at gunpoint. In this, his first experience with alcohol, he loses consciousness and regains it just in time to witness himself "firmando un papel con otro que no era, que no había sido mi nombre, y en el que había dejado caer una gota de mi sangre" (77). His agency is seriously reduced by the fact that



he is, at best, only semi-conscious as he signs the document, a condition only furthered by the fact that he seems to have taken on a new identity during the time that he was unconscious. So even if it is his hand that signs the paper, he is really not “himself” at the time; it seems rather that the decision was taken by an other.

Nonetheless, it is indeed true that Smeeks, consciously or not, adopts a violent lifestyle in an attempt to maintain his initial sense of completeness. In this he deviates from the course taken by Boullosa’s female characters who deal with their loss of subjectivity by adopting a decidedly *inactive* stance (la Milagrosa refuses to help others and Claire puts her fate in the hands of another and allows herself to fall into a deep sleep). As occurs with the gaze, this adoption of a violent lifestyle also fails to cement Smeeks’s grasp on himself. Instead it provokes further body disturbances as he begins to feel responsible for the brutal actions of his pirate friends. He confesses: “No podía yo reconstruirme al regreso del asalto de Maracaibo. Yo ya no era nadie sino el puño que blandiera la espada chorreando sangre, el ojo apuntando, el dedo apretando el gatillo, aunque no fuera yo quien disparara y usara la espada, yo era los cuerpos que habían matado a veces sin razón...” (106). In this passage we might also note the ambiguity of Smeeks’s role among the pirates, for he does not cast himself as actor, but as observer. This characterization aligns itself with his assertion at the beginning of the novel that he possesses the *eyes* and *ears* of Smeeks, notably the body parts associated with passive observation. In this sense, his discomfort in his new role as pirate parallels his experiences with physical and sexual abuse in that he remains to some extent passive and powerless over the atrocities he is exposed to, even if he is no longer the primary victim.

Given that his early experiences among the pirates yield more psychological distress, we might ask why it is that Smeeks would choose to continue serving them. For one, despite his inability to recuperate himself, despite his sense of bodily *loss* and even identity loss (“yo ya no era yo” (105)), he also experiences pleasure and relief in this new lifestyle (106). His body may be fragmented, may be confused with other bodies, but it is also somehow sated, for the “adventure” of piracy allows him to maintain his access to the pleasure that he first experienced in his erotic encounter with Adele and in his drunken foray afterwards, even if he has lost the sense of completeness he also felt in those moments. More importantly, even though he may not feel whole, he has become a part of something bigger. For the first time he experiences the pleasure of belonging to a community.

Before joining the pirates, Smeeks’s personal history had been one of repeated loss. We learn that he was either orphaned or turned away at a young age and that at thirteen he was again rejected by his adoptive family. In this condition he elects to leave Europe, which he describes as “tan poco generosa” not only to him, but to other youths of his station, thereby renouncing his ties to geography and the vague sense of a “motherland” (16). His relocated “place” is no more generous to him than the other since he is sold into slavery and worked nearly to death. By fortune he earns himself two “fathers,” Negro Miel and Pineau, his teachers and lovers but when they are murdered he is orphaned again. So, dispossessed of family, protection and place, Smeeks has no sense of community or belonging. It is reasonable then to expect that he might want to be a part of something bigger, that he might want protection, that he might want to have a surrogate family, and that all this might potentially resolve his identity crisis.

Consequently, it is apt to interpret Smeeks's distress during his formative experiences with the filibusters as being partially related to the struggle of becoming part of a whole, of assuming a *collective* identity and of losing himself to become a part of this larger "body." Fittingly, at the moment that he begins the process of assimilation into this larger community, he also takes on the role of surgeon, severing limbs in order to save the body to which they belong. His personal identity is similarly truncated in order to serve the interests of the larger group. A dangling limb himself, his assimilation remains always somewhat incomplete. His past rears its head at times, distancing him from the "cuerpo que los filibusteros formaran como un todo cálido y dispuesto" (119). At certain moments, however, he does manifest an affinity with the group, punctuating his shared identity with a preference for the second person plural in his narration and assuming collective guilt for the actions of his comrades. Even if he is not always a part of the larger body, he is haunted by the sense that the body parts he repairs and severs are his own: "yo era los cuerpos que habían matado [...] yo era los cuerpos que había curado" (106). His body is interchangeable with those of his comrades and enemies alike.

Smeeks's role among the pirates maintains this ambiguous edge throughout the text. At times he implicates himself in the atrocities committed by his companions, but he never relates in detail experiences in which he has harmed others. During scenes such as the violent rape of a Spanish woman and her daughter, he remains in the background, describing the actors in the third person plural. At other times, such as at the murder of a rival tavern owner, his impulse to violence is sterile, occurring after the murder has been executed when he repeatedly kicks the corpse of the man who had killed Negro Miel and Pineau. In contrast he relates his personal interactions that are of a more charitable vein,

such as helping a pirate-battered woman drink a cup of water. Smeeks's role as a pirate surgeon makes it possible to imagine that he may not have been an active participant in aggressive assaults, but regardless of his actual role, the fact remains that Smeeks consistently materializes in the text as a being differentiated from the mass of pirates only *after* the violence has taken place. In other words, his own physical body is *dislocated* during moments of violence and the reader is always uncertain what his role was in the tortures and beatings because he doesn't describe his own actions or pinpoint his physical location until after the incident is over.

This vacillation between individual and collective embodiment, between observer and participant permeates the second half of the novel, which relates his life with the pirates. At the moment that he joins them, his relationship to the body becomes even more complex. The ambiguity of the body, in and of itself, is a property of all "gender pirates," a category that includes Smeeks, who, despite being born into a male body, must consciously appropriate masculinity. Though we have seen such issues arise for the female pirates of chapters 2-4, the problematic integration of an individual into a group is unique to *Son vacas*. No longer are we speaking solely about an individual's personal experience with trauma and subjectivity, but also the drama of a community's creation of a unifying identity. Smeeks continues to attempt to find his place within his own body, while also attempting to find his place within this larger "body" which is simultaneously trying to define itself. Although Smeeks's adventures in America begin in 1666, long before the Nationalist period, I will argue that the community of pirates in *Son vacas* takes the shape of an early nationalist experiment, and that as with any nationalism, sexuality and gender are essential to defining and maintaining a unified whole.

Smeeks's adaptation to communal life is in many ways synonymous with becoming a national for the first time. The linguistic use of "we" parallels the writing of early Mexican nationalists who "wrote of themselves as *nosotros los Americanos* and of their country as *nuestra América*" (Anderson 63). Though the Brethren of the Coast do not claim a stake to the land, through Smeeks's eyes we observe the self-conscious construction of their collective identity, one most notably based on a rejection of dynastic power and land right.<sup>13</sup> Unlike pre-Modern tribes or communities, the Brethren are not related by language, religion or place of origin (though the majority are from Europe, they are from varied regions), nor are they related by customs or kinship *prior to their coming together*. They are instead related by an economic interest and arguably by social class and the experience of being outcasts. Many pirates, including the famed L'Ollonais and his biographer Esquemelin were orphans who came to the new world on contract and lived out a portion of their service as slaves. Excepting the privateers who were contracted by their home states to wage war against other imperial strongholds, most pirates were of the lower classes with little potential for access to power and social ascent.

Despite the fact that they were not an upper class like the Creole elite that later launched successful nationalist movements in the Americas, the Brethren share frustrations in common with these subjects. They are socially paralyzed by the imperialist monopoly over the traffic of goods and thus unable to benefit from the early

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<sup>13</sup> The Brethren of the Coast more specifically refers to signing members of piratical expeditions in which members agreed to a certain set of principles including the renouncement of private property and the oath to share all stolen goods equally. In Boullosa's text it is applied to any person who adheres to these principles regardless of their individual involvement in piratical excursions.

capitalist experiment. In reaction to this social paralysis, the Brethren invent a wholly modern utopia that dreams up an economy of social relationships anew, based neither on feudalism nor early capitalism, a utopia paradoxically dependent upon war. In contrast to later nationalist movements, the type of Caribbean pirate foregrounded in *Son vacas* had no long-term aim in their political attacks. They did not demand or desire recognition of their independence and did not wish to become a State power, but rather continue to thwart this type of power by appropriating “lo que a nadie por ley legítima perteneciera” (the land and goods of the New World) (Boullosa 138).<sup>14</sup> After forming an alliance, their subsequent collective identity is shaped using gender, sexuality and kinship in order to help maintain group unity by conceptualizing a national body.

It is no coincidence that it is with the pirates that Smeeks first awakens to a sense of gender consciousness and positions himself at one pole of a perceived dichotomy. Gone are the days of eroticizing the ambiguity of gender, of fantasizing about his transvestite Ella. Instead, he acquires a sharp “us” versus “them” mentality toward gender, one that is soldered to his the identity of his community. It dawns on him that “desde que había dejado Europa yo vivía como mujer, repitiendo la rutina del mismo rincón protegido para dormir a diario y casi a las mismas horas” (79). After his change in lifestyle, he triumphantly claims “¡Nosotros, los filibusteros [...] rehuimos la rutina [...] no vivimos como mujeres!” (79). His new identity then, is defined *against* gender and significantly begins at the moment that he is first able to find erotic pleasure in women. It may further be noted that his old identity is described above using the first person singular, while his new pirate identity is communicated using the second person plural,

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<sup>14</sup> As an interesting side note, pirates were later involved in American independence movements, attacking Spanish strongholds and merchant ships in order to weaken the Empire. See Daniel Cichero.

highlighting the shift from an individual to a collective identity, one that founds its power in gendered terms. If Smeeks has acquired this gendered consciousness through his nexus with the pirates, it would be instructive to examine how gender functions as an organizing principle among this “nation” of men.

## **Of *Vacas* and *Puercos*: Animalistic Gender Relations**

The complete title of the novel, *Son vacas, somos puercos: filibusteros del mar Caribe*, articulates an “us” versus “them” dichotomy that is posited in gendered, animalistic terms. The rivalry to which it refers is in fact not between animals, nor between women and men, but between two bands of exclusively male inhabitants on the Island of Tortuga. The one (*vacas*) is associated with its economic ties to women and heterosexuality, while the other (*puercos*) is fervently opposed. It is not clear if the monikers of the two groups refer to this political stance, or if they are designed to associate the groups with one of two sexes.

As the title would indicate, the *puercos* are aligned with the filibusters, but the *vacas* side of the equation is left intentionally vague, not only in the title, but also in the body of the novel where their violent attacks against the *puercos* remain somewhat mysterious to our narrator.<sup>15</sup> Regardless, the *vacas* are emasculated by their association to a female animal best known for milk production as opposed to the more neutral *ganado* or even the masculine *toro*. These docile and slow moving pasture grazers

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<sup>15</sup> According to Nina Gerassi-Navarro, the use of these two terms differed according to language. In Spanish and French, the term *bucanero* or *boucanier* was very similar to *filibustero* or *flibustier*, however the first set of terms is more specific, referring to cattle hunters who established themselves on the island of Santo Domingo and later “exerted thousands of bloody vexations on the Spanish colonies” (Sierra-O’Reilly quoted in Gerassi-Navarro 15). The terms eventually became interchangeable in all languages.

contrast sharply with their pig counterparts who, even if uncouth and gluttonous have the advantage of being more enterprising and clever than their bovine rivals. Furthermore, one might note that “vaca” is the term used by strait men to refer to overweight women, and “puerco,” the counterpoint for women to refer to uncouth or overweight men, or for men who are sexually inappropriate with women.

The *vacas* in the novel are consistently linked to domesticity and by corollary, femininity and cowardice on the part of the filibusters. The famed French-born pirate captain L’Ollonais refuses an enormous fortune at the besieged home of a Spanish noblewoman because it is offered to him as a handout. His anti-*vaca* ethos inspires his rejection of that which is given to him freely and his need to usurp that which is refused, in this case the Marquesa and her virgin daughter. He orders his crew: “¡No tomen nada de esta casa porque no debe interesarnos lo que dan a las vacas si hay dos joyas [la Marquesa y su hija] con qué poder premiarnos, filibusteros!” (107). With this mandate, L’Ollonais steadfastly defines himself against complacency and demands that his crew do the same. Goods cannot be taken as a handout; there must also be an exchange of power in order for there to be pleasure and true gain in the interaction. This exchange of power is effected by devaluing what is perceived to be the colonist’s most prized jewel.

Though the *vacas* are characterized above by passively accepting handouts, they are also perpetrators of mortal attacks against the *puercos*. The violence perpetrated by the *vacas* band seems to target specific individuals who are politically allied with the Brethren of the Coast—the self-descriptive moniker adopted by pirates— though not necessarily active pirates themselves. Smeeks’s medical teachers and lovers are two such victims of the *vacas*. Negro Miel is poisoned and Pineau is slain by a band of nocturnal



assailants in Smeeks's presence. Smeeks does not seem to bear any guilt by association, else he would have been murdered along with his two friends, yet after he joins the filibusters, he is singled out and threatened by the *vaca* owner of a gambling house even though he is in the company of many of his comrades.

The most viable explanation for what defines the two groups and the nature of their rivalry is the acceptance or rejection of private property, which is once again linked to gender, as I will explain below. In Boullosa's novel, a shift in the political climate of Tortuga related to the rise in power of individuals allied with the known *vaca* Benazet, result in the demise of the free enterprising career of the filibusters which is dependent upon collective ownership. Our narrator explains:

la ambición de unos pocos (cerdos que se atrevían a llamar a los grandes puercos) se esmeraban en cambiarle el rostro [de Tortuga], porque ya había en Tortuga el tuyo y el mío y el quién vive, porque aunque hubiera muerto Benazet, el dueño del garito, ahora había tres como él que no podía matar por no saber quiénes eran, y otros tantos poderosos, enriquecidos, bien protegidos que no dejarían que nadie les quitara lo suyo. (137)

There is also indication in Boullosa's text that *vacas* are associated with imperialism. For a secret document in circulation by the Brethren of the coast proclaims: "quienes se deben al Rey o al Cardenal no son personas, son vacas" (136). *Vacas* then, are accused both of being imperialists and capitalists, but in either case out for *personal* gain (either through the endorsement and protection of a King or by amassing personal wealth) as opposed to the *collective* gains that pirates sought to achieve by preying upon imperial strongholds. Though there may be a play on the idea of "capitalist pigs" here, the *puercos* of the novel seem more socialist than capitalist. They prohibit personal property in the form of wives, houses and goods and discourage amassing personal wealth (there is an expectation that all wealth will be spent upon return from a successful mission). The

imperialist/capitalists on the other hand are in favor of welcoming women to the island in order to help tame the uncouth ways of the buccaneers and filibusters—or in other words, in order to domesticate them (again a “feminine” term) and bring them into alignment with Catholic doctrine.

The Brethren, on the other hand, were well aware of the social and economic effects of introducing women to the island. Pineau for one believed that: “la Hermandad de la Costa se vendría abajo si entraban las mujeres a la isla, que nacerían rivaldades, que sería imposible seguir prohibiendo la propiedad porque todos querrían a su mujer para sí como un bien intransferible y ellas a su vez sus cosas y sus tierras” (62). This did indeed turn out to be the case, according to Smeeks, for the introduction of women was more devastating to the filibusters than the soldiers sent to eradicate or domesticate these rude men. Personal rivalries stemming from the protection of private property effectively paralyzed the filibusters by drawing them into “falsos campos de batalla” on land where they defended their meager possessions from each other instead of fighting alongside one another for their mutual benefit (137).

## **Queering Kinship**

Perhaps it goes without saying that, in the absence of women as a legitimate, obligatory part of their social system, this group of pirates radically rejects the heterosexual imperative and its derivative metaphors of marriage and “natural” birth as organizing principles for their community. The concomitant *queering* of this proto-nation does not necessarily imply that homosexuality was condoned or, conversely, that heterosexuality was taboo, yet it does call for a reorganization of *kinship* in the anthropological sense of “a system of categories and statuses which often contradict

actual genetic relationships” (Rubin 169). Exemplifying this disconnect between (hetero)sexual practice and (homosexual) family associations is the fact that Smeeks names Negro Miel and Pineau his two fathers after a series of three formative and nearly simultaneous events: his successful erotic encounter with a woman, his signing-on with the filibusters and his professed self-definition as “not a woman.” This, of course, does not erase the fact that the men he calls his two fathers were also his lovers, but let us set aside erotic practice for a moment to focus instead on the articulations of family among the pirates of *Son vacas* and their historical analogue.

Having two fathers in and of itself sets Smeeks apart from most residents of the Caribbean (not to mention the rest of the Western world). Accordingly, when he mentions a young Cuban’s mother he finds it necessary to explain parenthetically, “Habana no es Tortuga, ahí los jóvenes tienen padre y madre” (95). In the absence of mothers, the institution of marriage and the production of legitimate offspring, the pirates of Tortuga also sacrificed the common protocol for inheritance. While all pirates were considered “brothers” and therefore family to some extent, the problem of inheritance was resolved through the practice of *matelotage* or apprenticeship. In the social hierarchy of pirate communities, the bottom tier was occupied by *matelots*, apprentices who joined the crew on a trial basis and who often served one man in particular. This servitude could hardly be compared to a father-son relationship except in regards to the question of inheritance: “According to European law, wives or children were entitled to all property of the deceased, but in the Caribbean wives and children were as uncommon as observance of legal niceties, and when a man died all goods went to his partner, whether master or *matelot*” (Burg *Perception* 129).

This new system of inheritance could be considered queer in more ways than one. The notion of family, in this case, is completely divorced of blood. Burg, whose methods and conclusions are sometimes dubious, has gone so far as to call these boy-slaves “husbands” of their masters (129). If Burg’s description of this inheritance relationship is accurate, then the *matelot* was surely no ordinary slave—imagine a social system in which a slave was the sole beneficiary of his master. Considering what they stood to gain, one wonders what safeguards existed in this community to defend against murderous *matelots*. There remain other unresolved questions as well. With the money, does the *matelot* also move from an apprentice or auxiliary member of the community and become a profit-sharing “citizen”? In other words does he inherit his master’s status upon his death or is he dispatched from the community or assigned to another master? Certainly the inherited money might afford him, at the very least, the luxury of buying his freedom. This makes the *matelot*’s social position somewhat more privileged than a woman in a heterosexually conceived system of kinship. Even if the *matelots* temporarily become an exchange commodity, they have the advantageous potential of becoming full citizens, since their social role is not locked-in by an unchangeable physiology. *Matelots* are at worst, only temporary commodities who later gain full “access” to themselves.

The fact that women are no longer the primary commodity in exchange by mature community members does not mean they are any less fortunate in this queer society, for even their peripheral “citizenship” is denied. Since women are not a part of the pirate’s economy, their sexual use has no bearing on relationships *among* members of this community. As a case in point, women are referred to as communal “property”;

prostitutes in particular become “*nuestra prostituta*,” “*nuestras meretrices*,” or “*la chica que habíamos usado alguna noche*” (113, emphasis mine). Colonial women are also used communally as can be seen with the Marquesa and her daughter who are gang raped by almost the entire squadron. Since these two women as wives and daughters remain an integral part of the political economy of the enemy (the imperial State), they become strategic targets that might mediate power relationships *between* communities. The symbolic value of these two women is intentionally destroyed as the pirates change them from “*gazmoñas*” to “*putas*” to “*carnes destrozadas*” that prefer to die than to live out their devalued and traumatized life (109).

If the *matelot* can indeed be considered family, it remains unclear whether this relationship is filial or spousal or perhaps a mixture of the two. Smeeks’s relationship to Negro Miel and Pineau would advocate for the latter. Though not technically a *matelot*, the young boy is an apprentice to these two father-lovers who fashion him for his future career in piracy by teaching him the arts of herbal medicine and early modern surgery at the same time that they instill in him a respect for the political beliefs of the pirates of Tortuga. While both these men have conflicting views toward piracy as a practice, they unconditionally support the “*Ley de la Costa*,” or the political tenets on which it is based, which include most notably the denunciation of private property, the banishment of women from Tortuga and the rejection of any loyalty to a sovereign.

On his deathbed, Negro Miel confesses to Smeeks: “*Sé que debí hacerte huir con los filibusteros y no dejarte en manos de quien no sigue la Ley de la Costa*” (43). The “*quien*” he refers to in this case is the French governor of the island who was Smeeks’s slave owner at the time. Pineau, for his part, melds his political beliefs about human

liberty with his teachings on surgery when he lectures his (ironically enslaved) pupil: “*la cirugía hace al hombre su propio amo o un cirujano debe defender la libertad del hombre o su libertad de culto y pensamiento*” (55 italics in original). The medical knowledge these two men have imparted make Smeeks a very attractive recruit for any pirate crew. The majority of Pineau’s patients were filibusters who had been “malheridos o malcurados de las batallas, maltratados por los barberos improvisados que traían a bordo” (55). The presence of a surgeon’s apprentice on board could potentially avoid some of this misguided medical attention. Smeeks is thus readied for his future pirate career by the two men he considers his fathers who have imparted their knowledge about both the ailing and the sexual body.

Apart from the incestuous insinuations, the designation of these two men as fathers is an indication of Smeeks’s tendency to mark his arrival in the New World as the beginning of a new life, divorced from his European past. He even goes so far as to say in one instance, that he does not have a past (79). His adoption of these two fathers in particular rectifies his history of abandonment by living parental figures, as both his birth parents and their replacements turned him out by the time he reached the age of thirteen. In contrast, his adopted fathers never turn their backs on him in life, and even in death Negro Miel affirms, “no te abandono, Smeeks” (43). But Negro and Pineau are also fathers in the spiritual sense: not only have they nurtured his body and soul, but his admiration for the pirate life is figuratively born of them. Claiming Negro and Pineau as fathers additionally affords him a sense of belonging, not just to a human community, but also to a particular geographical space. With proto-nationalistic fervor, Smeeks recounts his connection to Tortuga:

Me eché a caminar hacia donde no había construcciones, tierra adentro, pisando los caminos que Pineau amara tanto y que Negro Miel recorriera tantas veces en busca de yerbas o raíces para sus remedios. Sí, yo, como Pineau, amaba la isla. Una emoción confusa me movía, movía mi corazón en ella. Pineau y Negro Miel, mis dos padres, habían muerto aquí. Ésta era mi tierra. (135)

The History of piracy is not solely queered in *Son vacas* by Smeeks's formative homoerotic nexuses with these two men. In a document that falls into his hands, the pictographic history and future of the Brotherhood is shown to be dependent upon homosexual practices between brethren and threatened by heterosexual couplings. The pictures (which are textually described rather than graphically produced in the novel) relate the destructive rivalries between brethren that would prophetically arise were women allowed in Tortuga. The erotic legend is followed by the caption "si no se prohíben ellas llegará el día en que el hermano asesine al hermano y acabará la fuerza del filibustero" (135-136). We might take this pictograph to be a parodic commentary on History which has traditionally elided the topic of sexuality. Moving in the other extreme, sexuality here is shown to be the exclusive determinant of the fate of a community. Interestingly, race is used in these pictographs to help illustrate sexual disloyalties among brethren. If the marker of race did not exist, the men would not discover the woman's disloyalty nor make a subsequent deduction about their male partner's disloyalty, for the pictographs show

un hombre blanco usando de un hombre negro, un hombre negro usando de un hombre blanco, el negro y el blanco tomados de la mano; el blanco usando de la negra, el negro usando de la negra; la negra tomada con un mando del blanco y con la otra del negro; el negro, la negra, el blanco y el niño mulato; la negra con un puñal clavado en el pecho por el negro; el negro con un puñal clavado en el pecho por el blanco; el niño mulato y el padre blanco en un navío... (135)

The intersection of race, gender and sexuality in this scenario does not take on the character of our modern day forms of sexualized racism. It is not the dangerous sexuality of black men that might threaten the white-woman-property of the white man, but heterosexuality in and of itself that threatens the homosocial bonds between men of varying racial backgrounds. As if the “sameness” of the male-male bond eradicated the “difference” of race, racial difference is shown to be insignificant in the male homosexual world until bisexuality is instituted. And, unlike the familiar scenario of racially inspired violence in twentieth-century America in which a white man might punish the woman for having a dark baby and/or punish her black lover, in this pictograph it is the *black* man who becomes enraged because the child is too *white* to be his own.

If the history of piracy in general is eroticized in the novel, it bears noting that Smeeks’s personal history is its prime detailed example. All his formative experiences were shaped by erotic encounters: the European cleric who taught him to read also sexually abused him, his first Atlantic crossing is marked by an eroticized encounter with a young transvestite, his medical instructors, Negro and Pineau used him sexually, and his sexual encounter with Adele “gave birth” to his alter persona, “Trepanador” and his life as a pirate, which is replete with sexual violence. Fittingly, his “afterlife” as a writer and historian is also woven through with eroticism. In a metanarrative aside, Smeeks posits his existence as a historical subject and an author as dependent on the erotic encounter with the reader. He confesses:

sin tu cercanía, lector, sin la cálida compañía de tu cuerpo, yo no hubiera podido cruzar hacia arriba, en sentido vertical, la historia, porque cuando tu cuerpo se acerca a mí, yo me abandono, me dejo ir, y en ese dejarme ir me sostengo para recorrer la historia en una dirección distinta, en dirección vertical... Así es cuando se acercan los cuerpos. La carne revela lo que ni los ojos ni la inteligencia pueden ver... A pesar de tu erotismo, firme y vigoroso,



en el que me he dejado caer, como en el regazo de una hembra, meándome hacia un lado y el otro como yo siento que tú me lo has pedido, sé que la veracidad está a punto de desbarrancarse, sé que puedo caer, deshacerme,irme al cuerno, y conmigo todo cuanto he descrito aquí [...] (65)

In this passage it can be seen that self and story are both simultaneously created and destroyed, that one cannot exist without the other and that Smeeks therefore must write in order to exist, but in so doing risks “unwriting” himself from history. The outcome rests on the reader’s perception of truth: if the story appears to lack credibility, both the story and its autobiographical author will be dismissed as fakes. This may be another overture to the picaresque in which the false autobiography of an unfaithful narrator is passed off as real—originally, in the case of Lazarillo, going so far as to pen the character’s name on the title page. But the notion of writing and disembodiment also returns us to Montejo’s poem. Recall that the exercise of writing and the loss of the body are simultaneous experiences for Montejo. Smeeks does not have as much at stake as the contemporary poet because he is already “el esclavo que perdió su cuerpo” before he even considers the possibility of authorship. He is already a disembodied text, a “libro escrito,” so by picking up the pen, he attempts to claim *authorship* over this text which we might consider synonymous with the self and the body.

As a historian and writer, then, Smeeks’s subjectivity is still in danger and his relationship to his body persistently tenuous. While he claims at times in his metanarrative musings to be embodied—dipping the pen in ink with his hand or possessing the eyes and ears of Smeeks—at other moments his physicality is more questionable. In one instance, he claims to be writing from Europe, but immediately adds the parenthesis “si aún estoy en algún sitio” (118). This lack of location is an interesting predicament for a subject who has made a couple of transatlantic crossings and even

more so for one who lived the majority of his life roaming the seas as a pirate. The extensive amount of time that has elapsed between the narrator's present (which is synonymous with the reader's present) and the story he relates (his life in the mid-seventeenth century) suggests that our storyteller may no longer be among the living (and thus disembodied). Yet on a symbolic level, we might also consider that it is through refusing to inhabit a fixed location and living outside the State for so many years that Smeeks becomes incomprehensible, invisible and ultimately dematerialized.

## Conclusions

Regardless of how Smeeks's bodily loss can be symbolically read, it is clear that it is a long standing problem, one that arises in his youth, plagues him throughout his adult life and haunts him even in his afterlife. He attempts to rectify this problem through a series of mechanisms in the different phases of his existence: as a youth he employs the gaze, as an adult he resorts to thrill seeking and violence, in his afterlife he relies on writing to return him to his body and his sense of self. While he repeatedly claims to write in order to immortalize Negro Miel's memory as he agreed to do when this man was dying, his decision to author a text might be considered more than just a completion of a promise to a friend, but also a shaky attempt at self integration or even self-creation, for what is more affirming of one's existence than an autobiography? What could be more akin to taking one's own life in one's hands? Assuming the power of authorship proves to be one of the few initiatives that Smeeks takes over the course of his life. All other decisions are almost entirely accidental. And this authorship does in fact appear to be tied to his physical destiny. Note for instance that he feels he must *write*

himself out of the Caribbean and that if he shares historical information too soon, he will be left stranded there:

si contara en este instante cómo fue esta Segunda Cincuentena, sus estragos en Tortuga, su pronto fin y el descubrimiento que me trajo sobre Pineau y Negro Miel, aquí terminaría esta historia [...] Y yo quiero contar aún, para no dejarlo con vida, cómo fue el merecido fin del cruel L'Olonnais y tampoco quiero dejarme en esos mares revueltos, quiero regresarme a Europa, desde donde hoy cuento (si aún estoy en algún sitio) estas historias. (117-18)

Ultimately all of Smeeks's attempts to recuperate his body act as a double-edged sword. When he relies on the gaze he is sometimes denied. When he joins the pirates, his exposure to violence is somewhat retraumatizing and he must find a place for his problematic body within the larger "body" of this proto-nation. Finally, when he writes, he is not fully able to own his authorship and finds himself at the mercy of the reader for confirmation of his existence. As a result, in his imagined erotic encounter with the reader as with his self-positioning before and after moments of violence, we discover a body that psychologically and textually flickers; it materializes and dematerializes as if it were one of Verbinski's enchanted pirates.

I have argued that this predicament is catalyzed by formative experiences with trauma and that these resulting body troubles comprise an underexplored realm in masculinity studies. This topic generates even more critical potential for studies of gender when we consider that the man whose body is troubled is a pirate, a figure that has long been imagined as the most masculine of men. In giving Smeeks a past, Boullosa has already altered the modern pirate tale which begins with the seafaring hero at the apex of his career. The details of this past further debunk the myth that the pirate is a manly hero, a veritable champion of masculinity. Instead, what we find at the very epicenter of would-be masculine triumph is a "male subjectivity at the margins" (Silverman).

## Conclusions

In the preceding pages, I have endeavored to resuscitate the figure of the pirate and demonstrate its centrality to the study of Hispanic literature and culture. As I argued in chapter one, the pirate has often been overlooked in Hispanic literary criticism, yet s/he has had an important role in fixing identities and ideological standpoints through literature, since the fifteenth century. In Medieval and Early Modern literature, Hispanic identity was always defined *against* the pirate, with the pirate exemplifying the ultimate religious and cultural Other. In the nineteenth century, however, the pirate began to be used as a positive figure on which to model burgeoning Latin American nations, by marking the Spanish State as the new Other, a tyrant to rebel against at any cost. This tendency to define Latin American nationalism through the pirate became ever stronger in the early twentieth century, especially with the cycle of Puerto Rican literature on the pirate Cofresí.

Responding to the effects of globalization, the pirate is especially prominent in Latin American literature of the 1990s and early 2000s. This generation of pirate literature looks back on the pirate in order to rediscover and reinterpret the history of

Latin America, breaking with the myths of nationalism that were set up in the nineteenth century historical novel (per Doris Sommer). These narratives are written primarily by exiles, immigrants and other multi-national writers who have experienced some semblance of the dispersed, disarticulated life that their pirate subjects did. I have read these contemporary versions of pirates through “trans” theory, a concept that incorporates gender and transatlantic “in between-ness,” and might apply to the authors in addition to the subjects that they write about. In the novels central to this study, Zoé Valdés’s *Lobas de mar* and Carmen Boullosa’s *Duerme* and *Son vacas, somos puercos*, I have shown the pirate protagonists to be constant state of “becoming,” in between the “here” and the “there” as it applies to location, gender, race, and embodiment.

Fusing this “trans” theory with the pirate, I have discussed three modes of crossing or piracy. The first is a form of gender robbery or “gender piracy,” a concept that I introduced in chapter two using the cross-dressing female pirates: Anne Bonny and Mary Read as a case study. The second mode of crossing constitutes the occupation of the extra-national space of the ocean/sea, and the defiant rejection of national and international laws. I have relied on transatlantic theory to define this second mode, which was also introduced in chapter two.

The third and final mode of crossing is associated with the appropriation of cultural and linguistic Others into the story of the nation. This mode, which was studied most directly in chapter three, but also in chapters four and five, applies to the cultural and linguistic “translation” of the stories of non-Hispanic subjects into texts intended for Spanish-speaking audiences. In such bodies of writing, the history of the foundation of Latin American nations is expanded to include the non-Hispanic, non-Amerindian

subject, thus breaking with the nineteenth-century paradigm that has been explained by Sommer. Zoé Valdés did this by appropriating the Anglo female pirates Anne Bonny and Mary Read and incorporating them into Cuban history through their interaction with Spanish and Afro-Cuban dialects, music, dance, and religion. In *Duerme*, Carmen Boullosa's French pirate protagonist was engulfed into the history of Mexico when she was magically bound to its geographical borders and dressed as ethnic and historical subjects specific to that region (and significant to its nationalistic mythology). In *Son vacas, somos puercos*, Boullosa tells a fictionalized version of the life of the Dutchman Hendryk Smeeks, a historical figure who was grossly misrepresented and used for ideological purposes when his story was unfaithfully translated into different languages and cultural contexts. Boullosa dramatizes the dislocation and misinterpretations of this historical figure through his problematic sense of ownership over his body and authorship of his story.

Though I identified, in chapter one, a vast array of pirate literature from the 1990s, I have centered my analysis on texts that engage all three modes of figurative piracy. Zoé Valdés and Carmen Boullosa's female pirates are transatlantic gender-benders who are used to reconfigure national ideology. Carmen Boullosa's male pirate is not a cross-dresser, but has a problematic relationship to gender and body nonetheless. He relates to transgender theory in the sense that the male body (presumed to be stable and "real") is displaced and disarticulated both physically as well as through the processes of writing.

My analysis of the "corpus enorme de literatura de piratería" (to quote Jean Franco) began mid-way through the release of the *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie series

and has concluded at a time of heightened international concern over contemporary acts of piracy off the coast of Somalia, including the hostage crisis involving American Captain Richard Phillips who was freed by US Navy snipers on April 13, 2009. Though the US military became involved in this event, pirate activities in the Gulf of Aden have not specifically targeted shipping of a particular nationality (or religion for that matter) and, contrary to Early Modern piracy, Somali attacks are not motivated by international politics. Instead, this wave of piracy (which comes on the heels of a similar upsurge in the Strait of Malacca by Indonesian pirates) is motivated by civil unrest within Somalia, which has hampered the local government's ability to police organized crime and attend to the dire economic needs of its citizens.

The recent upsurge in pirate novels, films and actual attacks attests to the ubiquity and ever-transformative nature of piracy in contemporary culture. Perhaps even more emblematic of such transformations is the blatant violation of copyright laws and the illegal sale of "pirated" CDs and DVDs which can be easily purchased on the streets of major Latin American and Caribbean cities, as well as stateside in New York, Miami and other metropolises. This petty piracy serves as a means of survival for the individuals that peddle such contraband goods, as well as a portal into the world of popular film and music for individuals who cannot afford legal copies of such items. As such, this contemporary contraband, much like the Early Modern pirate's illicitly acquired stores of sugar or alcohol, brings such commercial items to a wider group of consumers, including individuals normally excluded from the market of such luxury items. For better or for worse, commercial piracy brings income and entertainment to those on the fringes of society. From the Early Modern Caribbean to contemporary Gulf of Aden and the streets

of Havana, Caracas and New York, piracy remains a recourse and benefit to the marginalized and a thorn in the side of powerful corporations and governments. Furthermore, as exemplified by representations of “gender pirates” from the eighteenth century through today, piracy continually challenges traditional power relationships that go beyond the strictly political and economic, to include those pertaining to gender, sexuality and race.



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## Filmography

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*The Spanish Main*. Dir. Frank Borzage. Perf. Paul Henreid, Marueen O'Hara and Binnie Barnes. RKO, 1945.

*Treasure Island*. Dir. Fraser Clark Heston. Perf. Charlton Heston and Christian Bale. Agammemnon Films, 1990.

*Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*. Dir. Gore Verbinski. Walt Disney Pictures, 2003.

*Captain Kidd's Kids*. Dir. Hal Roach. Perf. Harold Lloyd, Bebe Daniels and Snub Pollard. Rolin Films, 1919.

*Anne of the Indies*. Dir. Jacques Tourneur. Perf. Louis Jourdan Jean Peters, Debra Paget, Herbert Marshall. Twentieth Century-Fox, 1951.

*Finding Neverland*. Dir. Marc Forster. Perf. Johnny Depp and Kate Winslet. Miramax, 2004.

*Captain Blood*. Dir. Michael Curtiz. Perf. Errol Flynn, Olivia de Havilland and Basil Rathbone. First National Productions, 1935.

*The Crimson Pirate*. Dir. Robert Siodmak. Perf. Burt Lancaster, Nick Cravat and Eva Bartok. Warner Brothers, 1952.

*Hook*. Dir. Stephen Spielberg. Perf. Dustin Hoffman, Robin Williams and Julia Roberts. TriStar, 1991.