

## **Playful Subversions: Hollywood Pirates Plunder Spanish America**

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The figure of the pirate evokes a number of distinct and contrasting images: from a fearless daredevil seeking adventure on the high seas to a dangerous and cruel plunderer moved by greed. Owing obedience to no one and loyal only to those sharing his way of life, the pirate knows no limits other than the sea and respects no laws other than his own. His portrait is both fascinating and frightening. As a hero, he is independent, audacious, intrepid and rebellious. Defying society's rules and authority, sailing off to the unknown in search of treasures, fearing nothing, the pirate is the ultimate symbol of freedom. But he is also a dangerous outlaw, known for his violent tactics and ruthless assaults. The social code he lives by inspires enormous fear, for it is extremely rigid and anyone daring to disobey the rules will suffer severe punishments. These polarized images have captured the imagination of historians and fiction writers alike.

Sword in hand, eye-patch, with a hyperbolic mustache and lascivious smile, Captain Hook is perhaps the most obvious image-though burlesque- of the dangerous fictional pirate. His greedy hook destroys everything that crosses his hungry path, even children. On a more serious level, we might think of the tortures the cruel and violent Captain Morgan inflicted upon his enemies, hanging them by their testicles, cutting their ears or tongues off; or of Jean David Nau, the French pirate known as L'Ollonais (*el Olonés* in Spanish), who would rip the heart out of his victims if they did not comply with his requests;<sup>1</sup> or even the terrible Blackbeard who enjoyed locking himself up with a few of his men and shooting at them in the dark: «If I don't kill someone every two or three days I will lose their respect» he is said to have claimed justifyingly. In March, 1997, the *New York Times* published an extensive article detailing a number of current discoveries, among which lies the ship believed to have been Blackbeard's flagship found off the coast of North Carolina.<sup>2</sup> More recently, *The New York Times* reported on the recovery of the Whydah, the fabled pirate ship sailed by Black Sam Bellamy that sank off the coast of Cape Cod, Massachusetts, in 1717.<sup>3</sup> These and other findings have historians and archeologists enthusiastically rediscovering and trying to shed new light on the lost world of piracy. Philip Masters, head of the team that found Blackbeard's wreck claims that «pirates were nowhere near to be the monsters they were made out to be.»<sup>4</sup> In his book on pirates, the English revisionist, David Cordingly, states that real pirates did not have time to torture or make their prisoners walk the plank, they just hacked them to death or threw them overboard.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, their typical plunder was not a chest of doubloons but rather «a few bales of silk and cotton, some barrels of tobacco, an anchor cable, some spare sails, the carpenter's tools and half a dozen black slaves.»<sup>6</sup>

Yet, despite these findings and important works by scholars such as those written by Cordingly and Marcus Rediker among others, that discuss the pirates' daily life and social structure demythologizing their stereotyped portrait, the world of pirates continues to evoke fascinating images of heroes and assassins that transcend the limits of the historically grounded.

Hollywood has had a long fascination with piracy. From the silent films of *Captain Blood* (1923) and *The Sea Hawk* (1924), both based on Rafael Sabatini's novels, or the 1926 film *The Black Pirate* (with Douglas Fairbanks) to the more comical contemporary versions such as *The Pirate Movie* (1982) or *Hook* (1991), pirate films still continue to captivate a wide audience. Whether portrayed as comedy, musicals or in a more realistic fashion, piracy offers a world of perils, to be overcome only by the exemplary effort, cooperation and bravery of the hero and his men. In these films, good and evil stand face to face, and the hero-which at least in the early films is the pirate-, lacking all kind of internal contradiction, proves his extraordinary qualities by overcoming the dangerous obstacles set off by the enemy. His triumph is furthermore legitimized in the end by his romantic coupling with the beautiful heroine.

At first, pirate films seem to offer no more than a simple and entertaining adventure story. However, beyond the stereotyped image of good and evil, these films endorse a particular interpretation of history and project distinct images of national identities. The pirate films I focus on in this essay offer, in addition to adventure and romance, an interesting perspective on how the subtext of war marked these period films, exposing the ways in which Hollywood used the historical setting to mythologize a national identity as it playfully represented the past.

The history of piracy is as old as the history of trade. As far back as 5000 BC, in the Persian Gulf, the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean, maritime bandits, or «enemies of the human race» as Cicero called them, emerged to make a profit from the transportation of goods from one point to another. In the Caribbean, piracy was particularly widespread and vigorous, lasting almost three centuries. The English,

French and Dutch forces assaulted the Spanish colonies, refusing to recognize Spain's monopoly on the territories of the New World. Not only did pirates seize Spanish vessels at sea transporting silver, gold, precious stones and spices, but they also came down upon villages and ports, raiding churches and homes, and harassing the civilians for treasures. Envious of Spain's wealth and power, the government of these European nations viewed such assaults with a certain satisfaction and, in fact, many adventurers received covert official support, as in the well known case of England's Sir Francis Drake, or Sir Walter Raleigh. By the end of the sixteenth century, pirates became Spain's most feared commercial and political enemies, and would remain a menace to the Spanish colonies up through the eighteenth century.

European nations attacking the Spanish colonies invoked their religious differences with Spain to justify their economic interests in obtaining the goods the Spanish had monopolized. This was no surprise as Spain had asserted its claim over the New World in the name of Catholicism. The conflict was a brutal one, between Protestants and Catholics, or between rival Catholic nations. For Spain, all foreign trade or intrusion within its territories was considered an act of piracy, they were seen as heretics; whereas the rest of Europe saw these men more often as heroes and considered their acts in more lenient terms, often referring to their perpetrators as privateers.<sup>7</sup>

Although pirates may not have lived the way they have been portrayed in novels and films, their attacks were indeed devastating for Spain. In 1522, Giovanni da Verrazano, sent by France to find a north west passage, took three caravels with some of the fabled Aztec treasure off the Azores. In 1572-73, Sir Francis Drake took the emporium of Nombre de Dios by surprise, where twice a year all the riches from the New World were loaded onto the Galleons and transported to Spain. Drake captured a stunning booty of 200 mules each with 300 pounds of silver and gold. Another well-known assault was committed by the Dutch man Piet Heyn in 1628, who took the entire silver fleet heading back to Spain with 46 tons of silver, huge amounts of gold, pearls, spices, indigo and hides. Piracy was undoubtedly a very profitable business. Whether as privateers, freebooters or buccaneers, pirates were an important instrument through which England, France, and The Netherlands battled the Spanish empire hoping to enlarge their own territories in the New World. Hence, their representation as heroes.

During the late 30's and early 40's, Hollywood saw the golden years of piracy as a great subject for adventure films. Among the films produced that reconstruct the fascinating world of pirates are: *Captain Blood* (1935), *The Buccaneer* (1938), *The Sea Hawk* (1941), *The Black Swan* (1942) and *The Spanish Main* (1945). But more than an adventure, piracy offered the possibility of recreating a patriotic act. An act that entailed a dangerous fight in which more than seizing a prize, the objective was to uphold certain values and morals over the enemy. For Hollywood the Spanish were easily portrayed as the ideal enemy, torturing the indigenous population, robbing them of their treasures and enslaving them without mercy. In addition, the Inquisition, Spain's most important and powerful institution of the time, was easily portrayed as the emblem of a corrupt legal system governed by a religious fervour that condemned any individual who dared not follow its mandate. These acts would in turn justify the use of violence against the Spanish and place the English, at least for an American audience, as the heroes. By reviving Spain's black legend and translating it into film, Hollywood constructed the ideal enemy: cruel, vicious, unjust, guided by a dangerous religious fervour.

Except for *The Buccaneer*, which reconstructs the 1812 Louisiana purchase and consequently frames the conflict between the Americans and the French (with the English as the other enemy), the aforementioned films position the English as the great defenders not only of the nation but of humanity as they battle the perverse Spanish foes. This symbolic displacement from the particular (defenders of England) to the universal (defenders of humanity) reflects the power movies have in transforming and charging with meaning their representation. Thus, the *mise en scene* of a violent usurpation on behalf of the English pirates is redefined in these films and presented as a true commitment toward the fight for freedom.

The first of these films, *Captain Blood* (1935) directed by Michael Curtiz, established Errol Flynn as the consummate swashbuckler hero, pairing him up with Olivia de Havilland who would be his co-star in seven other films. Peter Blood is a physician and humanist turned buccaneer after being accused of treason against King James II for attending a wounded rebel. He is sent off to Port Royal where he is bought by the governor's niece, Arabella Bishop (Olivia de Havilland) who seeks to save him from a more cruel slave owner. Blood and Arabella cross paths numerous times and despite Blood's resentment and anger at being bought-no less by a woman-, the seed of the romance has begun to grow. Eventually Blood is able to escape and becomes a successful buccaneer. He then teams up with a fiendish and corrupt French buccaneer, Levasseur (Basil Rathbone), who disregards an agreement both pirates had made and assaults on his own a ship that happens to be carrying Arabella and an emissary from the new King, William (III) of Orange. The two pirates duel and Levasseur is killed. The emissary informs Blood that

England is currently at war with France; hence, Blood has done well in killing a national enemy. Furthermore, the new King has decided to pardon all pirates, urging them to fight for their country. Blood is ultimately made governor and marries Arabella who has discovered Blood's true heroism.

Piracy in this film is underscored as a form of freedom. In perhaps the most telling scene when Blood and his men swear their lives into piracy, Blood stands at the helm of his ship as he reads off the articles that will bond his men in «a brotherhood of buccaneers:» «We the undersigned are men without a country, outlaws on land and homeless outcasts. ...» The articles of agreement that follow explicit how the booty shall be equally divided among the men, and the punishments they are to receive if anyone is caught stealing, drunk on duty, or molesting a woman. The scene ends with a triumphant cry «It is the world against us and us against the world.»

These men become pirates because there is no justice in their country; they have been unfairly enslaved. Hence, their fight is ultimately a legitimate one. As the white sails are filled with wind and the grandiose musical score triumphantly announces this new way of life, Blood cries out «Take us all to freedom.» The shot of the pirate ship from a low angle alludes to the greatness of this venture. Despite being unruly men and fighting «against the world,» their union is an organized one. As Blood reads off the articles uniting his men, he explicates the deep, horizontal comradeship that defines this community of outcasts. Following Benedict Anderson's definition of nation as an imagined community which is imagined as «both inherently limited and sovereign,» it is clear that these men, affirming to be equally united, are determined to die for the sovereignty of their imagining. The pact these pirates agree on portrays them as men with a sense of justice, dedication to a cause and, of course, gentlemanly as the prohibition to take a woman against her will proves. These pirates are a product of the Enlightenment, civilized and educated (they have «a brain»). Yet as Anderson also states, the nation is imagined as limited, for beyond all boundaries, no matter how extensive, lie other nations. In *Captain Blood*, the boundaries oscillate between the confinement to the ship and the vastness of the ocean. The nation has been temporarily displaced onto the ship, which metonymically represents England. The pirates are «desperate men» seeking a «desperate fortune,» but their ultimate goal is to be reunited with England. These outlaws institutionalize violence, but only to ensure their freedom; their violence is a form of resistance towards the injustice that reigns over England, and eventually will be rectified as Blood is repositioned into society. Thus, piracy is portrayed as a heroic endeavour.

History in this film is used as a setting to allow for daring adventures while reinforcing a particular social order that is being menaced. Like every genre film, Hollywood pirate films have a static nucleus that manifests its thematic oppositions or recurring cultural conflicts. The determining feature in these films is a conflict in which the hero confronts the destabilizing force to reaffirm a well-ordered community. Marked by a linear plot structure, genre films assure that specific cultural values will not succumb to the «foreign» menace. This narrative closure, together with a generic conflict of good against evil, also assures a continuity between the historical past and the present.

In the case of the pirate films analyzed in this study, the present was clearly marked by the foreign menace of Nazi Germany. The war years in the United States made it essential to establish a narrative that could articulate «a discourse of affirmation,» a discourse in which reality could be transcribed within a closed set of values, where conflict, tragedy and the insecurity brought about by the war could be contained within an ideological framework that would explain the crisis and ultimately reinstate the stability of the social order in peril. War ideology constructs a specific kind of story: one that is marked by a dramatic beginning, a conflictive middle and a happy ending.<sup>8</sup> The intense power movies had achieved over audiences by 1935, Hollywood's classical era, proved that film was the ideal medium through which this discourse could be achieved. When analyzing popular culture in Latin America, William Rowe and Vivian Schelling underline that film more than print culture created, to use Benedict Anderson's phrase, «the imagined community» of the nation.<sup>9</sup> Film enables the audience to discover, visualize and live a national identity. Its seductive force lies in its power of appropriation: to take a myth, a story, a historical event or a fantasy, give it a voice and image, and inscribe it as a collective experience. As the Colombian critic Martin Barbero states, film is the first language that legitimizes and puts on the screen a collective national identity, hence its power. With the war, film became the setting where an «American» (i.e. United States) ideology could be framed within the limits of a story in which the enemy would be clearly identified and scorned. Thus, American values and morals could be upheld and confirmed while Hollywood fulfilled its «self appointed role as public comforter.»<sup>10</sup>

The clearest example of this oppositional narrative strategy is the *The Sea Hawk* in which the need to reinforce the discourse of affirmation is imperative as it portrays the encounter between the British and the dangerous and corrupt Spanish Empire. Bearing a strong similarity to Francis Drake,

Captain Geoffrey Thorpe, again played by Errol Flynn, is a bright, handsome and defiant pirate who, while robbing foreign ships that cross his path, claims to be serving England and the Queen.

Although the film is set in the distant past, it evokes pure nationalist sentiments for the American public to the extent that viewers would easily identify with the English (their future war allies), sharing their heroism and sense of justice. But more importantly, they would identify with the English because the Spanish, as villains eager to expand their empire, seemed to be the historical analog of a much more dangerous force, that of Nazi Germany.

Hollywood went to war almost three years before Washington did. While the US government was wavering between a sympathy for its European friends and a mistrust of intervention, film studios released «a flock of features» to win the war in the hearts and minds of American citizens.<sup>11</sup>

The opening scene of *The Sea Hawk* clearly outlines the two ideological positions from the outset. The imposing map of the world draped across the back wall, frames the scene; King Philip II of Spain (Montagu Love) sits to the side discussing with his councilors how to go about fulfilling the destiny of Spain that he has claimed his own. The Spanish colonies are barely discernible on the map, whereas North America disproportionately stands out engulfing most of the landmass. Philip's goal is to seize the world and his frustration lies in that «Puny rockbound island as barren and treacherous as her queen, who secretly gives aid to our enemies while her pirates plunder our commerce.» War, he concludes is inevitable if he is to succeed in his endeavour: «You know as well as I that we will never keep Northern Europe in submission until we have a reckoning with England.» As the camera slowly moves into a low close up of King Philip, his voice and greed overflow the frame as, determined to achieve his vision and the destiny of Spain, he states, «With England conquered nothing can stand in our way .» The ominous shadow his silhouette casts over the map reinforces the danger of his sinister dream: «One day before my death, we shall sit here and gaze at this map upon the wall. It will have ceased to be a map of the world: IT WILL BE SPAIN!» (emphasis added) The confrontation and positioning of each force is now clearly set up. The Spanish, like the Nazis are moved by only one goal, the consolidation of their empire, at whatever price. The English, reduced to the spacial setting of a puny rockbound island, are the only ones to stand in the way. These underdogs however, will prove themselves to be quite forceful, and in the end, their determination and conviction will be enough to crack the great Spanish empire.

Following the traditional framing of the adventure film, the encounter between both forces takes place in a removed setting: at sea, somewhere near the English channel. The distance from everyday life allows the dangers to be maximized and increases the magnitude of effort made by the characters.<sup>12</sup> The stage is larger than life, so the hero may be tested against adversity and prove his worth by performing outstanding deeds. In this case, the sea is a cultural realm in which fundamental values collide against each other. As we watch the two vessels slowly advance, the narrative begins to take on epic proportions.

The Spanish ship is carrying Spain's Ambassador, Don José Álvarez de Córdoba ( Claude Rains) and his beautiful niece, Doña María (Brenda Marshall). Highlighting the unfair treatment of the Spanish towards their subjects, we see a group of well dressed men upon the deck, gazing down at Doña María and her maiden, gleefully playing badminton. Their portrayal reinforces the stereotypical image of the evil Spanish: swarthy men with black pointed beards, morions, and wicked Toledo blades. Down below, in the dark and gloomy dungeon of the galleys, bare men, sweating and in pain, are whipped in unison with the deep thump of the rowing beat. They are slaves and Englishmen.

Having spotted the English ship, the Spanish prepare to attack. Aboard the Albatross, the English are eager to fight, Thorpe remains calm and composed as he carefully organizes his men. Despite their disheveled aspect and lack of sophistication, Thorpe's men work as a team, each endowed with a specific responsibility that is promptly fulfilled. The Spanish ship is imposing, but as one sailor says to another, «Did you ever see a Spaniard the Captain couldn't swallow?» Thorpe offers a peaceful surrender to which the Spanish respond by firing their cannons. The English sails are barely scratched, making the Spanish the laughing stock. Leading the attack, Thorpe majestically swings through the air onto the Spanish vessel taking on two or three men at a time with his sword, proving himself to be both a great captain and a true hero. Having easily seized control of the Spanish vessel, the English proceed to ransack their prize. As they enter the Ambassador's quarters, Thorpe, as any proper English gentleman would, asks his prisoners to «Please be kind enough to stand aside, as we are pressed for time.» Thorpe informs Don Alvarez that he and his men will be released as soon as they reach land, since there is no Inquisition in England, but for the time being they will have to accompany him as their own ship is sinking.

Despite the impressive force of the Spanish and their determination to rule Europe, the only sea battle the audience witnesses ridicules them. This is highlighted as we watch the Spanish ship slowly go under with its emblems and sails collapsing into the water amidst a cheering crowd, while the English vessel sails off into the horizon. In this scene the English have been simultaneously positioned as

conquerors as well as saviours. Not only have they defeated the Spanish and then saved them from drowning-thus proving themselves caring individuals; they have also freed the men in the galleys. Standing erect at the head of his ship, Thorpe announces to his audience, both viewers and sailors «By now you know what the purpose of the Sea Hawks is: in our own way to serve England and the Queen.» Spain's authority has now been essentially destroyed. Furthermore, the events prove that the pirates have been misjudged, for they are not ruthless warriors but rather dedicated subjects of the English Crown who, in addition, are good, astute soldiers fighting for the Queen and her scepter of justice.

The encounter at sea also allows for the romance to take place. Although Dona Maria finds Thorpe ruthless and uncivilized at first, she soon realizes that she too has misjudged him. She accuses Thorpe of stealing what is not his, but Thorpe outwits her by ironically replying that he cannot understand how the Indians were persuaded to part with the beautiful jewels-in particular an Aztec piece- she claims to be hers. When Thorpe returns the jewels to Maria, with a letter stating that: «Only a pirate would deprive you of these,» she realizes that beneath the superficial trappings of costumes, manners and titles, what matters most are the moral and social values represented by action.

These events are crucial in setting up the frame for the discourse of affirmation and redefining the pirates' actions as patriotic acts. Portrayed as inept sailors, incompetent soldiers, and treacherous individuals with no compassion towards their subjects or slaves, the Spanish have been completely minimized. This representation is a curious one as well as, to say the least, a distorted one, if we bear in mind that these were the same Spanish soldiers who successfully repelled many English, French and Dutch attacks, and built one of the most impressive empires in history. By contrast, the English stand out as morally, physically and intellectually superior. Although Thorpe will go on to other illegal ventures which the Queen will not officially approve but most definitely support, his actions will now be justified, for the Spanish have been branded as the true evildoers.

Although both sides use violence to enforce their social order and values, by constantly reiterating the moral opposition between the Spanish and the English, the division between good and evil is clear and the use of violence is legitimized for the English. As portrayed in the colonial chronicles, morality is the shaping force that defines and secures the uncertain order of the world and ultimately distinguishes the «other» as the enemy. Morality encloses the conflict within a higher structure and allows the coupling of the social order endorsed by a nation with the personal destiny of the hero. Thorpe's triumph in other words will reflect the triumph of England. And he will succeed in his quest because he represents the right morals and values. Thus, from the beginning of the confrontation the audience inevitably recognizes and identifies with the victorious forces. There can be no other ending. Despite the location of a distant past, the emplotment of events surpasses its temporality, delineating a moral and visually clear-cut patriotic message: united, the English-and by extension the United States-will succeed, for their cause is just.

The appeal of patriotism is that it intensifies the experience of securing order while justifying the need to fight. In *Captain Blood* the unfairly condemned pirates must fight until true justice is reinstated. In this sense Peter Blood and his men represent the ideal values England stands for. In *The Sea Hawk* only the English-not the Spanish-are able to articulate a sense of community. And it is precisely this imagination of a political community, sovereign and limited, that allows these individuals to feel united and define themselves as English subjects. In both films, the English create a horizontal bond between different members of society despite class differences. Being English gives these men a common identity that in turn will incite them to defend their nation. And they will succeed, because they share the same moral cause. This contrasts with the Spanish whose power lies in their brutal control over their subjects but not in the forging of a common identity. They have no imagined community, thus their empire must ultimately crumble.

Within the forging of this community, women, though positioned at the margins, have the role of endorsing the project through their romantic involvement with the pirates. As men battle each other throughout the films, women passively watch and await the outcome. However, their role as spectator is to decide, to differentiate, «right» from «wrong.» Focusing on the pirates' actions, Arabella in *Captain Blood* realizes that beneath the masking of the pirate lies a true gentleman with principles and a sense of justice. In *The Sea Hawk*, Maria refuses to accompany her uncle back to Spain. Her decision is extremely significant: influenced by her feelings for Thorpe, her act confirms the positioning of the English as heroes. Though she is half English and half Spanish, she now claims to be more attached to England. Belonging to both cultures, but choosing one is the corroboration that one nation has triumphed over the other. The acts of these women, who at first reject any affinity with the pirates, ultimately corroborate the importance of redefining piracy. The happy ending is only possible if women commit to the pirates' cause.

In *The Sea Hawk*, Queen Elizabeth (Flora Robson) is portrayed as a strong, willful but caring head of State. She does not rush into any decision and only agrees to break off relations with Spain and go to war after her men have proven that the Spanish are in fact treacherous. Throughout the whole film she resists the sea hawks constant requests to strike at Spain before the Armada is unleashed on England. Though Spain's evil intention is obvious, she is worried about her people and what it will cost the national purse: «There are times when a Queen must think not of right or wrong, but only of the good of those she rules.» Hence, once her decision has been made, it is clear that it is the best one because it is based on the good of the people. Though women stand at the margins of the battles and cannot form part of that brotherhood of men since they are not given the right to die for their country, their commitment is to endorse what men have proven to be best. The final scene of the film in which the Queen knights Thorpe is the affirmation that the English are not only on the side of the just, but that going to war is the only way to prevent the treacherous Spanish from controlling the world. It is a war, however, in which women's role will be to simply support their men.

*The Sea Hawk* is a film in which the subtext of war is clear. Thorpe represents the ideal American hero: daring, trustworthy, confident, with a clear sense of justice. At a time when Hollywood needed to create a sense of national identity, piracy articulated a confrontation in which there could be both romantic allure and an iconographic battle. By appealing to the Spanish stereotypes embedded in Anglo Saxon culture, the Spanish were the consummate evildoers, the dangerous enemy that had to be contained. As the Queen states: «When the ruthless ambition of a man threatens to engulf the world it becomes the solemn obligation of all free men to affirm that the earth belongs not to any one man but to all men and that freedom is the deed and title to the soil on which we exist.» Like the Germans during the 1940's, hungry to engulf the world and impose their world order, the thought of Spain's empire evoked for the English haunting images of power that threatened the well-being and future of the global order. The last scene of the film presents a direct rejection to Philips is eagerness to rule the world presented at the very beginning. This war is not just for England but for the freedom of «generations to come.» Thus, the pirates have now become the seamen of England and the saviours of humanity .

Myth abolishes the complexity of human acts, it organizes a world without contradiction because it is a world without depth. Hence, the power and danger of myth is that it creates a world in which there is nothing beyond the immediately visible. Spain's black legend was extremely useful in illustrating the boundaries between the morally acceptable and visible, and the dangerous presence of otherness for England as well as for the World. In the same way that Northern Europe used the black legend to legitimize their colonial enterprise between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, Hollywood's updating of this legend in the 1940' s helped create an atmosphere which prepared the ground for the US entry into World War II, and comforted the American audience by underlining the patriotic endeavour embedded in this kind of war.

Yet, this is only one reading of history .As previously stated, the pirate is not only a heroic symbol of freedom but also a dangerous traitor who knows nothing about obedience or law abiding civility .This becomes clear if we take into account how history is emplotted within a different cultural and political context, one in which Anglo Saxon values are presented as a sinister desire for power.

A recent example of this is the 1982 Malvinas/Falkland war between England and Argentina, in which references to piracy reappear, this time positioning the English as the invaders without morals. The number of headlines, especially in the tabloids comparing the arrival of the English marines to the arrival of pirates is quite telling, the most obvious one being from the daily newspaper *Crónica*: «Pirates send galleons.» In the same way that Americans had vindicated piracy as a heroic act, Argentina redefined it as a violent usurpation. The colonial rhetoric was once again evoked and became the structuring guide behind the unifying discourse. Argentine pilots, for example, referred to their enemies as «infidels.» In June, 1982, a member of the Armed Forces declared to *Gente*, a weekly magazine, that God was on the side of the Argentines «in this war between Christians and Protestants.» «We fight for a just cause and that is a conviction that the English lack,» he added<sup>13</sup> Just like the Spanish chroniclers of the XVI century and Hollywood before, morality during the Malvinas was once again linked to religion and in this context, Protestants were portrayed as heretics.

Pirates, infidels, Protestants, English, all fall into the same category when there is an armed confrontation that calls upon patriotism. The national narrative is constructed through a symbolic system rooted in the origin of the nation: flags, anthems, myths of heroes and patriots. Under the flag, heroes defend the national boundaries, its legality , its past and its future. The nation may be abstract but war, with its powerful patriotic symbols and narrative discourse makes the nation visible and real. The values and conflicts of the past that once united a nation to confront the foreign enemy must be reaffirmed in the

present. Past and future come together to form what Ernest Renan called the soul or spiritual principal of the nation<sup>14</sup> Armed confrontations unite internal differences to reaffirm and legitimize the nation.

The most telling and creative use mass media has made of the imagery of pirates is perhaps the cover of *Tal Cual*, another weekly magazine that portrayed Margaret Thatcher dressed as Captain Hook, eye patch and all, under the heading «Pirata, Bruja y Asesina» (Pirate, Witch and Assassin)<sup>15</sup>. Once again the iconography of danger, usurpation and illegality were reinforced in the collective consciousness of the Argentine nation. The power the media has, whether it be through film or the press, is to actualize the cultural heritage of a community through the immediately visible. With one swift stroke, the pirated image of Thatcher as pirate condenses and visualizes historical confrontations while mocking the English. This is one of the most powerful operational strategies of popular culture. Given its intimate connection with violence, the icon of the pirate, as a national symbol, seems to flourish with particular strength during moments of political crises, when the need to reinforce a national identity is imperative as a means of justifying an armed confrontation. In this sense, the pirate not only articulates popular myths of adventurers and traitors but, more importantly, he exemplifies the power film as well as popular culture has in visualizing the enemy and reaffirming specific political and cultural values that define a community. As liberator and plunderer the pirate becomes a social signifier capable of embodying the enemy just as well as the hero, depending upon the gaze appropriating the image. The pirate has no fixed identity, he crosses cultural, political and geographical boundaries, opening up the referential topography. Cultural and historical differences will determine the meaning of the signifier. When violence is the structuring axis delimiting frontiers, this Janus-like figure seems to be ideal image to articulate that confrontation. His lack of political anchorage enables him to sail the seas, free to represent the enemy or hero. These are the political subversions that defy the imposition of one reading. Thus, behind the riveting Hollywood films and adventure stories and popular portrayals lie these ideological battles clashing amidst the violent waves of national confrontations, metaphors for the struggles of the collective imaginings of different nations.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES:

(1) For a detailed account of the cruelties committed by Morgan and L'Ollonais, see EXQUEMELIN, Alexandre Olivier. *The Buccaneers of America: A True Account of the Most Remarkable Assaults Committed of Late upon the Coast of the West Indies by the Buccaneers of Jamaica and Tortuga Both English and French Wherein Are Contained More Especially Unparalleled Exploits of Sir Henry Morgan, Our English Jamaican Hero, Who Sacked Porto Bello, Burnt Panama, etc.* Glorieta, New Mexico: Rio Grande Press, 1992.

(2) *The New York Times*, March 11, 1997

(3) Also see *The New York Times*, November 9, 1997

(4) *The New York Times*, July 26, 1998.

(5) *The New York Times*, March 11, 1997

(6) CORDINGLY, David. *Life among the Pirates: The Romance and the Reality*. Great Britain: Little, Brown, 1995.

(7) *The New York Times*, March 11, 1997

(8) REDIKER, Marcus. *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirate, and the Algo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

(9) When studying the history of piracy it is apparent that terms such as pirates, corsairs, buccaneers, and freebooters have different connotations in Spanish and English. For a discussion of these terms and their connotations see GERASSI-NAVARRO, Nina. *Pirate Novels: Fictions of Nation Building in Spanish America*. Durham: Duke University Press (forthcoming October, 1999),

(10) In this sense the swashbuckler can be classified as a film genre of determinate, contested space, see SCHATZ, Thomas. *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and The Studio System*. New York: Random House, 1981, p. 29.

(11) ANDERSON, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1991, p. 6.

- (12) POLAN, Dana. *Power and Paranoia: History, Narrative and the American Cinema, 1940-1950*. New York: Columbia University, 1986, p. 46.
- (13) POLAN, *Op. cit.*, p. 47.
- (14) ROWE, William, and SCHELLING, Vivian. *Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America*. London: Verso, 1991.
- (15) RAY, Robert. *A Certain Tendency of The Hollywood Cinema, 19340-1980*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985, p. 29.
- (16) WOLL, Allen L. *The Hollywood Musical Goes to War*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1983, p.3.
- (17) The films which preceded US entry into the war were of two types: the contemporary (*Confessions of a Nazi Spy*; *The Mortal Storm* (1941)) and the metaphorical. The latter avoided the European conflict directly but looked to history for analogies of the present situation so that the American audience could learn from history and understand how important it was to defend democracy and the American way of life.
- (18) SOBCHACK, Thomas Sobchack, «The Adventure Film», *Handbook of American Film Genres*, Wes D. Gehring ed. New York: Greenwood Press, 1988, p.10.
- (19) POWELL, Philip Wayne. *Tree of Hate: Propaganda and Prejudices Affecting United States Relations with The Hispanic World*. Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1985, p. 6.
- (20) SOBCHACK, *Op. cit.*, p. 13.
- (21) BARTHES, Roland. *Mythologies*. trans. Annette Lavers. New York: Hill and Lang, 1982, p. 143.
- (22) *Gente*, May 6, 198
- (23) BUCH, Esteban. *O juremos con gloria morir: Historia de una Epica de Estado*. Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1994, p. 23.
- (24) RENAN, Ernest. «What is a Nation?», Trans. Martin Thorn in Homi Bhabha, ed. *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge, 1990, pp. 9-22.
- (25) *Tal Cual*, April 4, 1982.

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