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*Women at the Helm:
Rewriting Maritime History through Female Pirate Identity and Agency*

Wendy Vencel

Dr. Deno
History Departmental Honors Thesis

Abstract: The subject of Atlantic-based Golden Age (1650-1720) piracy has long been an area of historical and mythical fascination. The sea has historically been a realm outside the reaches of mainland society, where women could express any aspect of their personal identity. *Women at the Helm: Rewriting Maritime History through Female Pirate Identity and Agency* queers the history of Golden Age piracy while placing the colonial period's seafaring women within a longer historical tradition of female maritime crime and power.

Notable female pirates of this era, including Ireland's Grace O'Malley and the Caribbean's Anne Bonny and Mary Read, through the act of piracy and maritime crime transcended the traditional gender roles placed on women. *Women at the Helm* discusses how these maritime women gained agency and autonomy through the transcendence of gender and sexuality norms, as well as how women manipulated their social situations to establish power in a world seemingly run by men. This contradicts the traditional heteronormative and patriarchal narrative of pirate women, which sees them as anomalies. Using the works of gender and sexuality theorists such as Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, female Golden Age piracy can be understood to be a historical trend where women rework their social positions and perform genders in an advantageous way.

Introduction

The television show *Black Sails*, one of the most recent adaptations of Caribbean piracy, blends the worlds of pirate fiction and history by showcasing the democratic nature and fraternity felt by those that participated in piracy through the fictional pirates we have grown up with, such as those from *Treasure Island*.¹ Popular culture has had a long-standing fascination with the figure of the pirate. This interest in pirates by Western society is due to the sense of adventure and freedom that is associated with pirate life. It is exactly this liberation and freedom that female seafarers sought during the Golden Age. This work provides a new analysis of the subject of piracy and proposes that the “Golden Age of Piracy”, which lasted from 1650-1720, is not only a time to be glorified and romanticized but should also be recognized as part of a longer, global tradition of female seafarers whose maritime lifestyles allowed them to perform roles outside the common social structures.² This research analyzes the stories, legends, and histories surrounding female pirates in order to reevaluate the significance of women at sea.

This analysis operates within the definition of a pirate as an individual who partakes in illegal activities while at sea, such as illegal shipping, the selling of stolen

¹ *Black Sails*. STARZ. 2014-2017. *Black Sails* is a prequel to *Treasure Island*, however, it fictionalizes historical pirates, such as Anne Bonny, Jack Rackham, and Edward Teach (Blackbeard), and adds them into the fictional narrative of Stevenson’s fictional pirates. The main setting is the island of Ne Providence in the Caribbean Sea and centers around the outlaw nature of pirates as they trade on the black market and face the hostile European imperial presence of England and Spain. This show ran for four seasons on STARZ.; Stevenson, Robert Louis. *Treasure Islands*. London, 1883.; For more information about the democratic tendencies onboard pirate vessels see Linebaugh, Peter, and Marcus Rediker. *The Many-headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2013."Chapter 5: Hydrachy: Sailors, Pirates, and the Maritime State." 143-73.

² For a general history of piracy, see Angus Konstam’s *Pirates: The Complete History from 1300 BC to the Present Day*. Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2011.

goods on the black market, and the seizure or destruction of ships on the open sea outside of sanctioned warfare. The realm of the sea and the act of piracy were used by many to claim a sense of liberation from mainland society, however, I argue that women took advantage of this context to circumvent the strict social constructions of the female sex and gender. Women's roles in relation to maritime life have often been restricted to a tradition of folklore and superstition, as in the legends of mermaids and sirens as well as in modern fiction novels. Female pirates were not simply lovesick women running after a lover, nor were they the highly sexualized beings as portrayed in today's media, as seen in the main plotline of Disney's first three *Pirates of the Caribbean* films.³ Instead, throughout history women have profited from the world's oceans holding an ambiguous, subaltern space in western thought.⁴ Such acts of transgressing gender norms include cross-dressing, participating in hard manual labor of a working a ship, and engaging in violent criminal activities.⁵ Previous scholarship has failed to provide an in-depth analysis of these women on the sea. Seafaring has often been portrayed as a traditionally

³ *Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl* Directed by Gore Verbinski. 2003; *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* Directed by Gore Verbinski. 2006; *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End* Directed by Gore Verbinski. 2007.

⁴ Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Macmillan, 1988.

Subaltern, literally meaning 'of inferior rank', refers to the study of peoples that have been subject to the control of a ruling class. The term 'subaltern' was coined by Italian Marxist philosopher and writer Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) through his studies on cultural hegemony; however, the area of Subaltern Studies arose in the 1980s in order to rewrite the narrative of Indian and South Asian history. This work follows the tradition of Subaltern Studies in addressing the individuals that lived outside of the social and political norm. I also apply this term to the sea as a place believed to have been conquered by the world's political powers, though in reality it holds a different historical narrative.

⁵ For my purposes, 'cross-dressing' simply refers to the wearing of clothes typical of the opposite sex as determined by the traditional western gender binary. This definition does not represent the gender or sexual identities of the individuals that participate in cross-dressing.

male space in which women were not supposed to be active participants. *Women at the Helm* considers the sea as an indeterminate state not only between landmasses, but also between societal ideas of the gender/sexuality binary and the realities of human gender and sexuality experience.

The scholarly field of maritime studies has also been a male-centered space, which has had a significant influence on the scholarship produced.⁶ Jo Stanley has dubbed such narratives of maritime history as “malestreamed,” meaning that the majority of maritime historical narratives have been absolutely dominated by male, patriarchal historians.⁷ This narrative is partly influenced by the scarcity of primary sources. The sea does not lend itself to preserve artifacts, especially paper, and piracy in particular was not an occupation that kept consistent records due to the illegality of activities.⁸ In addition, it has been a common trend throughout history for the records of women to be ignored or forgotten, and pirate women are no exception. It is also important to emphasize that the challenge is also due to lack of dedication to how and why women went to sea. Stanley

⁶ Historical scholarship on seafaring communities has shifted from a predominant emphasis on the naval and trade-company activities, to an examination of history “from below”, allowing for examination of those who worked and lived in maritime communities on a more individual level, although still within the larger histories of navies, port cities, and trans-Atlantic travel. This lens offers an important framework for my own research as I showcase individual women who worked within the maritime social system.

⁷ Stanley, Jo “And after the cross-dressed cabin boys and whaling wives? Possible futures for women’s maritime historiography”. *Journal of Transport History*. Jan 1, 2002.

⁸ Much work is being done in the field of underwater archaeology in an attempt to understand maritime societies more through their remaining material culture, as seen with the recent excavations of the Queen Anne’s Revenge, Blackbeard’s famous flagship. However, for this project, the archaeological evidence does not aide in the discussion of gender in maritime history or the genders of pirates who sailed on these ships. For more information see Campbell, Peter. "The Archaeology of Piracy - Shipwrecks and Submerged Worlds - University of Southampton." FutureLearn. 2017; The Queen Anne’s Revenge Project in North Caroline at www.qaronline.org.

writes that, “The popular images we have of women on pirate vessels is an unrealistic composite which reflects little of their lives”.⁹

The subject of maritime women has yet to be fully explored. Seafaring women, whether they are pirates, sailors, or passengers, have been frequently mentioned in maritime history, but only as anomalies or victims of the western patriarchal social construct. For instance, both Anne Bonny and Mary Read are only discussed as a part of John Rackham’s crew and as highly sexually active, either with Rackham or other men, or each other. They have yet to be fully examined as their own historical subject. By applying a feminist historiographical lens to this field, this research brings this topic into a new generation of scholarship to counteract the glorified and sexualized imagery of women at sea. I have applied feminist and sexuality/gender studies approach to the topic of female piracy and cross-dressing is valuable to more fully understand its place in history. These women deserve to have their stories told, to the best of our abilities, in order for a more holistic picture of the history of seafaring to be formed.

The significance of this project is to contest the glorified and sexualized imagery of women at sea and to provide a counter narrative based in feminist theory, as suggested by leading feminist maritime historian Jo Stanley.¹⁰ These women have yet to be fully examined as their own historical subject. In particular, this project is framed via a feminist as well as a gender and sexuality studies approach to the topic of female piracy in order to understand its historical significance in its entirety. Thus, by applying the

⁹ Stanley, Jo “And after the cross-dressed cabin boys and whaling wives? Possible futures for women’s maritime historiography”. *Journal of Transport History*. Jan 1, 2002.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

theories of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, a new perspective on female roles as pirates can be explored.

Who were the Pirate Women?

With her “own spirit of adventure and manly courage,” the historian Herodotus’ semi-historical figure of Artemisia, a fifth century BCE queen of the Greek city-state Halicarnassus and naval commander in the second Persian War, represents the earliest example of a ‘pirate’ woman.¹¹ It is important to look at Artemisia and other ‘non-golden age’ maritime women, such as Jeanne de Clisson, because they represent a longer history of female maritime activities and piracy; therefore showing that the narrative of Golden Age female pirates that has continued in modern pop culture is not an anomaly but a part of a global and timeless narrative. Though Artemisia does not fit into the more modern conception of a pirate, she was a naval commander and she is nonetheless important to examine because she is an ancient example of a female military leader who is placed into the same male-centered and violence-centered realm as Golden Age pirates.

Though she can be argued to be more mythical than real, as is the trend with ‘warrior women’ types, Herodotus’ commentary offers insight into the prescribed gender roles of the ancient world and how Artemisia breaks such roles or not. It should be acknowledged that Herodotus’ account contains the author’s own biases when describing historical events and people. Herodotus hailed from Artemisia’s kingdom, Halicarnassus, so perhaps his mentioning of her is due to patriotism, but he nevertheless dedicated many lines to her military accomplishments.¹² However, it is important to note that because

¹¹ Herodotus, *The Histories* 7.99.

¹² Munson, Rosaria Vignolo. "Artemisia in Herodotus." *Classical Antiquity* 7, no. 1. 1988. 91-92.

Artemisia fought on the side of the Persians, her inclusion in Xerxes' forces emphasize the Greek-barbarian dichotomy which places those outside of the Greeks as weak, and more feminine, thus Herodotus is portraying the Persian forces as less than the Greeks.¹³

Numerous times throughout *The Histories*, Artemisia is presented as an adviser to the Persian King Xerxes, and not only that but she is one of his most trusted. He continually defaults to her opinion, even agreeing that she is right when he decides not to follow her advice.¹⁴ Herodotus describes several instances where Xerxes includes Artemisia in his war council, and ends up complimenting, if not outright following, her advice. Herodotus writes, "Not one of the confederate commanders gave Xerxes sounder advice than she did."¹⁵ To add to this, Xerxes trusts Artemisia with the safety of his children upon the end of the war. Xerxes even states, (according to Herodotus) "my men have turned to women, my women into men."¹⁶ This statement shows the strict gender binary of Classical Greece, which Artemisia was not totally outside of, but Xerxes recognized that she was an important and reliable ally and commander, exceeding her male counterparts. However, Herodotus does attribute Artemisia's success to 'luck' and not her own skills as a commander.¹⁷ Herodotus described that Artemisia gained command after the death of her husband, even though she had an adult son. This concept of a woman taking over command of a 'military' force from her husband is a theme seen with several of the female pirates of the 17th-19th centuries, as described later with the

¹³ Ibid. 93.

¹⁴ Herodotus, *The Histories*. 8. 68-69; 8.101- 103, 107.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid. 8. 88.

¹⁷ Ibid. 8.87-88.

lives of Grace O'Malley and Ching Shih.¹⁸ In addition, like both O'Malley and Ching, she commands a fleet of ships (Herodotus states that she controls five ships). However, this surprised Herodotus, thus perhaps there was no precedent for this, at least in the ancient Mediterranean. Artemisia is just one early example of an active and capable female naval leader; later women follow her story, also striking awe in their male observers.

Jeanne de Clisson (c.1300 -1359) was a Breton noblewoman turned privateer that fought against the French crown in the War of Breton Succession during the Hundred Years War (1337-1453).¹⁹ De Clisson takes up arms after her husband is tricked during the conflicts and is killed by the French. She is also referred to as the 'Lioness of Brittany' as her main goal was to drive French forces out of the territory of Brittany, where she had once held lands until her husband's death. Though there are not very many accounts of the exploits of Jeanne de Clisson, all that do appear agree that she was violent and brutal. At some point de Clisson decides to fight via sea rather than land, so she acquired three ships in England; this fleet has been dubbed through her legend as the 'Black Fleet'. Sources estimated her pirate and privateering career lasted thirteen years before she retired and married into the English court of Edward III. De Clisson can be considered more of a 'privateer' because of English documents that list her as an ally in the 1367 truce between England and France, as well as documents naming her as a traitor to France.

¹⁸ Ibid.7.99.

¹⁹Duncombe, Laura Sook. *Pirate Women: The Princesses, Prostitutes, and Privateers Who Ruled the Seven Seas*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, Incorporated, 2017. Due to her political role in the affairs of France and England, Jeanne de Clisson seems to have mainly operated in the British Channel.



Image A
Grace O'Malley meets Queen Elizabeth I of England at Greenwich Castle in 1593. Illustration from *Anthologia Hibernica*, vol. 11, 1793.

De Clisson was not the last woman of noble birth to turn to piracy as a political instrument in a time of personal and political strife. Two hundred years before the start of the Caribbean's Golden Age, Ireland gave the world the "Pirate Queen" Grace O'Malley.²⁰ O'Malley (c. 1530-1603) was an Irish noble woman who used her power over her clansmen not only to ravage the western coast of Ireland, but also to resist English colonialism from the east.²¹ She was labeled as a pirate due to her support of rebellious Irish activities against the British. Eventually, O'Malley clashed with the English military in Ireland, leading to her son being taken prisoner. At first, O'Malley wrote a letter to Elizabeth I asking for his release, but it went unanswered. O'Malley,

²⁰ Ibid. 83; Grace O'Malley is the Anglicized version of her name, Gráinne Ní Mháille in Irish Gaelic. Other name variations include: Gráinne O'Malley, Gráinne O'Maly, Graney O'Mally, Granny ni Maille, Grany O'Mally, Grayn Ny Mayle, Grane ne Male, Grainy O'Maly, Granee O'Maillie, Granuaile and Gráinne Mhaol. For more information on Grace O'Malley see Chambers, Anne. *Ireland's Pirate Queen: The True Story of Grace O'Malley*. New York: MJF Books, 2003.

²¹ Duncombe, Laura Sook. *Pirate Women*, 2017; Stanley, Jo. *Bold in Her Breeches: Women Pirates across the Ages*. London: Pandora, 1996; Appleby, John C. "Women and Pirates in Ireland: From Gráinne O'Malley to Anne Bonny." *Bandits at Sea: A Pirates Reader*. Ed. C. R. Pennell. New York: New York UP, 2001; Klausmann, Ulrike, Marion Meinzerin, and Gabriel Kuhn. *Women Pirates and the Politics of the Jolly Roger*. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1997.

then, decided to travel and seek a personal audience with the queen. Queen Elizabeth I agreed to meet with her, however there are only rumors of their conversation since no one else of importance was present during their meeting (Image A). O'Malley and Elizabeth must have gotten along because her son was allowed to return home and O'Malley was given a pardon for her past illegal activity.²² Though initially a part of rebel fighting against the British, the O'Malley family did side with the English later on when they push to fully incorporate Ireland into its growing empire. For 17th century European governments, pirates were seen as political devices as European powers navigated the world's oceans in an effort to gain colonial territory and resources. Sir Francis Drake and Sir John Hawkins were both privateers/pirates turned naval commanders under Elizabeth I, which shows that she did not necessarily see pirates as a threat so much as a means to support English expansion.²³ Pirate Queen Grace O'Malley has been picked up by popular culture through the centuries. One example of how pop culture adoption of O'Malley has affected her historical image is the shifting from her being depicted in conventional sixteenth century dress (seen in Image A) to her being shown in male garb, i.e. wearing pants. This alteration in the female piracy image continues into the Golden Age with the pirates of Anne Bonny and Mary Read.

The names of Anne Bonny and Mary Read are two key figures in female pirate history, if not all of maritime history, in that their stories contributed to the queering of pirate women so that these women could be manipulated by society's perceptions of

²²Duncombe, Laura Sook. *Pirate Women: The Princesses, Prostitutes, and Privateers Who Ruled the Seven Seas*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, Incorporated, 2017. 83-84; Klausmann, Ulrike, Marion Meinzerin, and Gabriel Kuhn. *Women Pirates and the Politics of the Jolly Roger*. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1997. 158.

²³ Duncombe, Laura Sook. *Pirate Women: The Princesses, Prostitutes, and Privateers Who Ruled the Seven Seas*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, Incorporated, 2017. 73.

them, either as cautionary curiosities or as support for the modern feminist agenda. They appear on the front page of *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pirates* (1724) by Captain Charles Johnson. Mentioned above the names of their male contemporaries, Johnson describes Bonny and Read as two of the most (if not the most) fearsome pirates in the Atlantic. Both Anne Bonny and Mary Read sailed under the pirate Captain “Calico Jack” Rackam in the Caribbean Sea (Images, B, C, and D).²⁴ Anne Bonny (c. 1690-1780) was born in Cork, Ireland, but moved in her youth with her father to a plantation in the colony of Carolina in North America.²⁵ She took to the sea after being disowned by her father for marrying a sailor. The couple ran off to Providence, Jamaica, where they became engaged in piracy. Bonny decided to leave her husband to join Rackam, both as a member of his pirate crew and as his lover.²⁶ Charles Johnson’s description of Bonny reads, “She was of a force and courageous temper” which he states before recounting rumors that she had killed an English maidservant in a fit of passion in addition to gravely injuring her would-be rapist.²⁷ Johnson continues to describe Bonny as inclined towards violence by reporting that she and Mary Read alone fought the naval forces that captured them and that her last words to Rackham, on the day of his execution, were “if he had fought like a man, he need not have been hanged like a dog.”²⁸

²⁴ Johnson, Charles. *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pirates*. London: Conway Maritime, 1724, 2010.

²⁵ Ibid. 113; The dates surrounding Anne Bonny are highly contested, some chroniclers stating her born around 1697, while some place her birth in 1702; no records have been found that state a firm birth or death date for Anne Bonny.

²⁶ Ibid. 113.

²⁷ Ibid. 117.

²⁸ Ibid. 109, 118.

Mary Read (c.1680 – 1721) was born in England and joined the company of a man-of-war ship in her early teens to work as a cabin boy.²⁹ The ship was attacked by pirates and Read decided to join them. Read met both Rackam and Bonny in the Caribbean and joined Rackam's crew. While on Rackam's ship, Bonny and Read were believed to have donned men's clothing at all times, and Captain Johnson writes that only Rackam knew that Bonny and Read were really women. However, one witness testified that the women only wore men's clothing while attacking other ships. If this witness' account is true, everyone on board would have known Bonny and Read's gender.³⁰ Bonny and Read were captured and tried for piracy along with "Calico Jack" Rackam and the rest of his crew in 1720; however, both women escaped execution because they were pregnant.³¹ Mary Read shortly died in prison due to an unknown illness or complications with pregnancy, while it is rumored that Anne Bonny was bailed out by her father and returned with him to live out her life in Carolina.³²

²⁹ Ibid. 106-109. Before going into piracy, Read married a fellow sailor from the navy, his died shortly after their marriage and his identity is unknown.

³⁰ Appleby, John C. "Women and Pirates in Ireland: From Gráinne O'Malley to Anne Bonny." *Bandits at Sea: A Pirates Reader*. Ed. C. R. Pennell. New York: New York UP, 2001. 294.

³¹ Johnson, Charles. *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pirates*. London: Conway Maritime, 1724, 2010.

³² Cordingly, David. "Hannah Snell, Mary Anne Talbot, and the Female Pirates." *Women Sailors and Sailors' Women: An Untold Maritime History*. New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2002. 86-87; Johnson, Charles. *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pirates*. London: Conway Maritime, 1724, 2010.118.

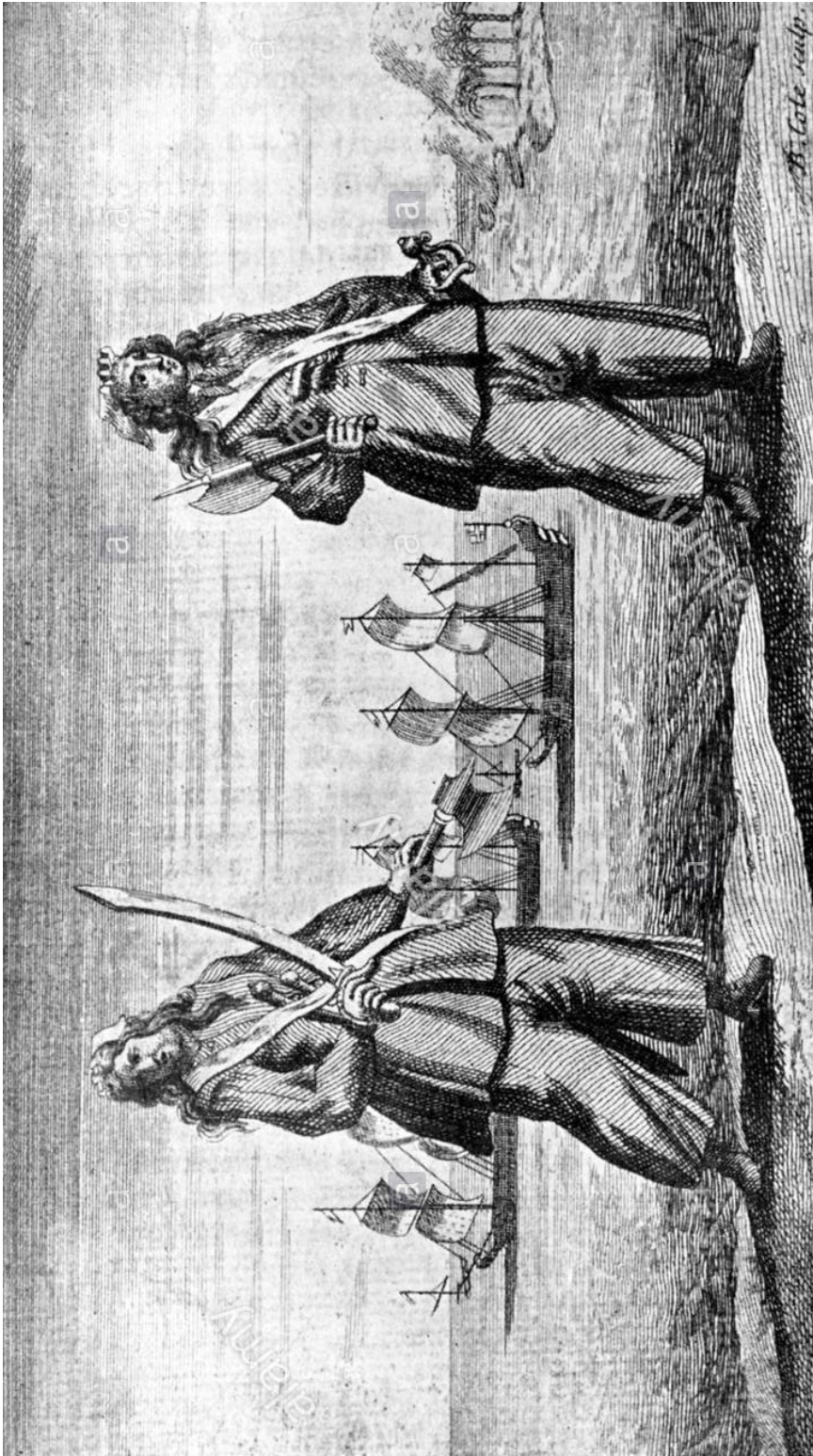


Image B
Anne Bonny and Mary Read
A General History... Captain Charles Johnson, 1724, London.



Image C
Mary Read
A General History...
Captain Charles Johnson
Amsterdam 1725



Image D
Anne Bonny
A General History... Captain
Charles Johnson
Amsterdam 1725

Charles Johnson highlights that both Bonny and Read were dressed as boys in their youth, a childhood detail not provided for other pirate women and one that makes Bonny and Read's lives even more connected.³³ Their parents did this as a means of concealing their less-desirable gender. Bonny was an illegitimate daughter, and her father dressed her as a boy in order to deceive his wife about the child's existence.³⁴ Read was also an illegitimate child and was dressed as a boy by her mother after the death of an older male child so that the mother might still receive money from her deceased husband's family.³⁵ Bonny and Read's status as illegitimate children quite possibly contributed to their desire to leave mainland society since from birth they were already deemed as deviant women because they would never be considered the respectable women society required them to be. Their later return to male dress coincided with Bonny and Read's individual decisions to leave mainland society and to find a lifestyle with more freedom. For Bonny this freedom meant being able to love (or not love) any man she chose. For Read it meant leaving a life of poverty and servitude in England. Though this choice to don male clothing might be one of practicality, it would have been easier to do the work required of a ship in pants and shirt than a dress and corset, but many scholars, including David Cordingly and Jo Stanley, the choice was a manifestation of their lesbian sexual identity or a hint that this represented a transgender identity.³⁶ This

³³ Johnson, Charles. *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pirates*. London: Conway Maritime, 1724, 2010. 106-107, 117.

³⁴ Johnson, Charles. *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pirates*. London: Conway Maritime, 1724, 2010.

³⁵ Ibid.107.

³⁶ Cordingly, David. "Hannah Snell, Mary Anne Talbot, and the Female Pirates." *Women Sailors and Sailors' Women: An Untold Maritime History*. New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2002. 83; Stanley, Jo. *Bold in Her Breeches: Women Pirates across the Ages*. London: Pandora, 1996.

notion further queers these women and makes it easier for society to manipulate their history, either to demean their person or support a feminist agenda. These rumors function to release the anxieties held by society, while still allowing the possibility of a same sex relationship or non-binary gender to be explored at a safe distance. However, when the primary accounts of the lives of Bonny and Read are examined, there really is no evidence of a sexual relationship between the women. Charles Johnson never suggests that they were lovers after their initial meeting. On the contrary, Johnson emphasizes the sexual freedom that Bonny and Read had with their male partners.³⁷ On the other hand, the biographers of Hannah Snell and Mary Anne Talbot wrote how both women took female lovers once back in mainland society.³⁸ In both cases, the emphasis on the sexual freedom of these women, while giving the subject a platform, also allowed authors and the general public to further marginalize these women rather than accepting their personal liberations.

Non-pirate women are also known to have used cross-dressing to live a life of freedom at sea. David Cordingly's book *Women Sailors and Sailors' Women: An Untold Maritime History* (2002), discusses female pirates, but mainly focuses on Hannah Snell and Mary Anne Talbot (Images E, F, and G).³⁹ Snell (c.1723 – 1792) dressed as a man to join the British military after being abandoned by her husband. Legend has it that she took to the sea in order to seek revenge on her husband; however, there is no real account

³⁷ Johnson, Charles. *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pirates*. London: Conway Maritime, 1724, 2010.

³⁸ Cordingly, David. "5: Hannah Snell, Mary Anne Talbot, and the Female Pirates." *Women Sailors and Sailors' Women: An Untold Maritime History*. New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2002. 68-87.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 65- 79.

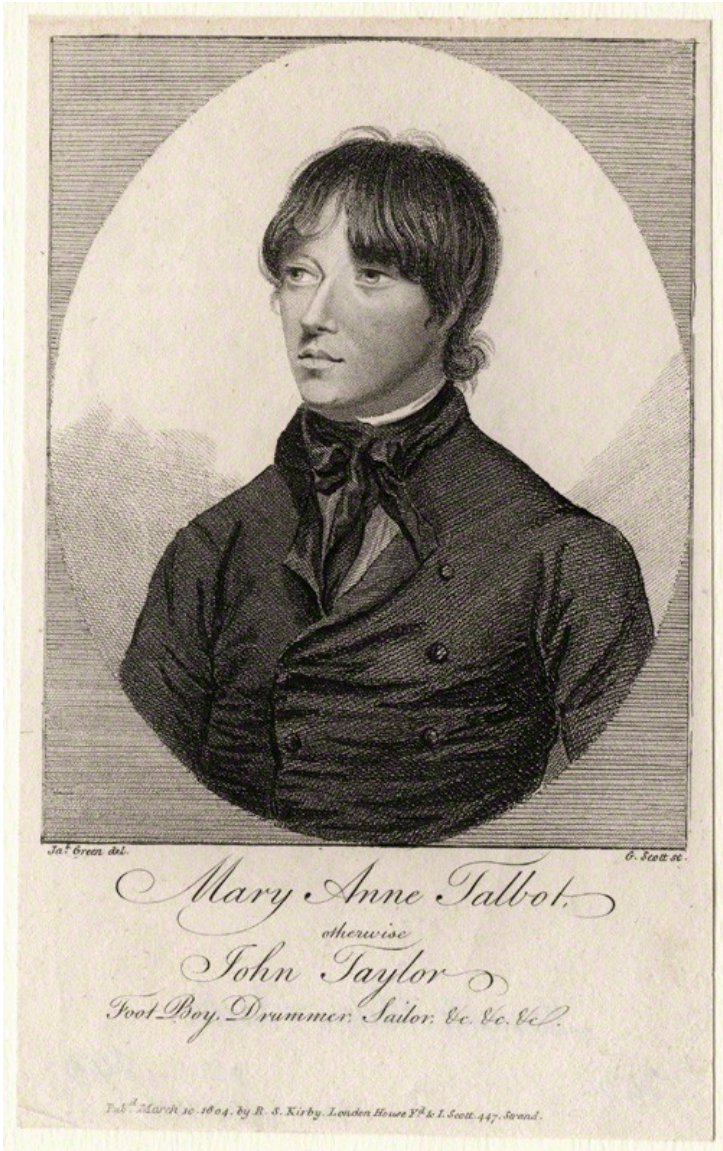


Image E
 Mary Anne Talbot
 c. March 30, 1804
 G. Scott and R.S. Kirby
 London
 Caption reads: "Mary Anne Talbot
 otherwise John Taylor, Foot Boy,
 Drummer, Sailor"



Image F
 Mary Anne Talbot
 1807
 R. S. Kirby



Image G
 Hannah Snell
 J. Young and Richard Phelps. 1789.

of these events.⁴⁰ The legend functions, however, to express the same cultural anxieties about gender and sexuality as seen with the tales of Bonny and Read. Talbot (c. 1778 – 1808) made her way to the sea after coming under the wing of a British army captain who later transferred into the navy. Talbot was dressed in male clothing to pass as the captain’s footboy.⁴¹ After returning to England, both Snell and Talbot report their stories, becoming “celebrities” as women who dressed as men. Both Snell and Talbot became “harlequinade” (side show) attractions for London theaters. The images of Snell and Talbot show how they both assumed male clothing publicly, and shows Talbot as taking on a hermaphrodite appearance. Cordingly’s analysis neglects to analyze Snell, Talbot, Bonny, and Read as significant figures within the context of Golden Age maritime history. Though both Snell and Talbot capitalized on their images as cross-dressing women, it did not prevent their further marginalization by mainland society. Similar to Anne Bonny, Hannah Snell and Mary Anne Talbot came to the sea by following a man, meaning that they did not choose maritime lifestyle solely for the appeal of them alone. However, both women kept to the sea and the freedoms that came with it after those men were gone from their lives.

Traditionally, the historical narrative of piracy has centered on Europe and the European colonies in the Americas. However, the history of piracy (and of female pirates) is actually “Global History”. Pirates operated in every ocean, from northern Europe to southern Africa to East Asia; failing to recognize the global factor creates a barrier in the larger narrative of female piracy. Ching Shih was a prostitute out of

⁴⁰ Ibid.68-87.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Singapore who married a pirate captain and then took over his fleet following his death, becoming the most successful pirate in history (Image H).⁴² Not only did she continue to



Image H
Ching Shih in battle.
Image published in *The Invisible Hook: The Hidden Economics of Pirates* by Peter T Leeson, New Jersey, 2011.

be a successful captain in her husband's footsteps, but she also expanded the fleet to include approximately four hundred ships and forty to seventy thousand men. She was the most successful pirate of all times, even more so than the famous Edward Teach (aka Blackbeard). In addition to her success, it is believed that Ching had a strict code of conduct for her men, most likely stemming from her own experiences as a prostitute, making her a proto-feminist and advocate of women's rights to their own bodies.⁴³ It is reported that the crewmembers that violated this code of conduct, especially in instances

⁴² Duncombe, Laura Sook. *Pirate Women: The Princesses, Prostitutes, and Privateers Who Ruled the Seven Seas*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, Incorporated, 2017; Stanley, Jo. *Bold in Her Breeches: Women Pirates across the Ages*. London: Pandora, 1996. Ching Shih is also known by the names of Cheng I Sao and Madame Ching.

⁴³ Duncombe, Laura Sook. *Pirate Women: The Princesses, Prostitutes, and Privateers Who Ruled the Seven Seas*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, Incorporated, 2017. 178.

of rape, were sentenced to death.⁴⁴ At this time, the Qing Dynasty of China was in decline, mainly due to the rising European imperial influences in the region. Though there is no evidence that Ching was directly involved with the growing British presence in Southeast Asia, such as the rising trade of Opium in China, she absolutely took advantage of the weakening Qing dynasty in the wake of European colonialism in order to increase her own material wealth.

Historiography

As noted earlier, the briny air and turquoise blue waters of the Caribbean and the Atlantic, though beautiful, make it very difficult to recover primary source documents pertaining to maritime history. On top of that, we must remember that pirates were participants in explicitly illegal activity, for which the punishment was death. Thus, they would not have been very successful pirates if their knowledge and activities were frequently shared throughout the seas. Therefore, the main sources for pirates are actually secondary sources produced at roughly the same time, such as Johnson and the Snell and Talbot biographers. It is hard to decipher how much of these accounts are true and how much has been made up by the authors. It also must be considered that pirate adventure stories have survived because they sold well and provided entertainment for the general literate public who were conditioned to see pirates as characters in a fantastical adventure land. The appeal of pirates was, as remains today, their ability to exist and prosper while on the fringe of acceptable society – they were constantly travelling, mostly in ‘exotic’ places, which fascinated the reader who was stuck in (for example) London.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

It is still important to look at the work by Captain Johnson and other contemporary chroniclers because they provide the little documentary evidence that we have on piracy. There is enough evidence provided by the court records of Bonny and Read's trial to at least support that some of what Johnson describes. However, each source like this must be taken with a grain of salt and must be read against the grain so that we can fully decipher what the text is telling us not just about the female pirates but about their societal context as well.

Marcus Rediker, in his chapter "Liberty and the Jolly Roger: The Lives of Anne Bonny and Mary Read, Pirates" in *Bandits at Sea: A Pirates Reader* (2001), examines Bonny and Read and the liberation that they experienced while being part of a pirate crew.⁴⁵ Rediker's analysis of Bonny and Read argues that cross-dressing and maritime life allowed women to gain freedoms denied to mainland female lifestyles. Rediker even speculates that Read preferred to appear male, suggesting a possible transgender identity.⁴⁶ However, Rediker does relay the accounts of both Bonny and Read wearing feminine dress while on board Rackham's ship.⁴⁷ In addition to this argument, Rediker analyzes the images and media surrounding the tales of Anne Bonny and Mary Read. Rediker also includes a chapter specifically about Anne Bonny and Mary Read in his book *Villains of All Nations* (2012), which reiterates his previous claims. *The Many Headed Hydra* (2013), co-authored by Rediker and Peter Linebaugh, provides a history of the marginalized and "hidden" individuals that traditional maritime history overlooks.

⁴⁵ Rediker, Marcus. "Liberty beneath the Jolly Roger: The Lives of Anne Bonny and Mary Read, Pirates." *Bandits at Sea: A Pirates Reader*. Ed. C. R. Pennell. New York: New York UP, 2001.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 300.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 302.

This book provides the much-needed context of maritime society during the 16th through the 19th centuries, especially as tensions in the American colonies began to create trans-Atlantic conflicts with Europe. It is a history “from the bottom up”, meaning that it focuses on those in the lower levels of society that propel history. It is this “bottom up” approach that I am following as I examine these women who have yet to make their way to the top of maritime studies.

Recent scholarly work pertaining to female pirates and cross-dressing women at sea comes from John C. Appleby, who discusses the years leading up to the “Golden Age” of piracy and how female pirates are remembered throughout history for their illegal acts. In particular, he looks at two Irish women in piracy, Grace O’Malley and Anne Bonny.⁴⁸ O’Malley was named a pirate more than a hundred years before the emergence of the famous Bonny. O’Malley, as far as historians can tell, did not cross-dress during her pirate activities. She came to be labeled as a pirate due to her support of rebellious Irish activities against the British.⁴⁹ Appleby’s work places a great amount of emphasis on O’Malley and Bonny’s shared Irish heritage, however, that should not be considered a primary factor in their comparison, considering Bonny never returned to Ireland during her adult life.⁵⁰ If anything, it could be argued that Bonny was an American pirate because she spent the majority of her formative years in the American colonies. Appleby’s insistence on a national identity for pirates overlooks the central aspect of the sea as an intermediate space between societies. There is an effort in

⁴⁸ Appleby, John C. "Women and Pirates in Ireland: From Gráinne O'Malley to Anne Bonny." *Bandits at Sea: A Pirates Reader*. Ed. C. R. Pennell. New York: New York UP, 2001.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 285- 288.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 285.

maritime scholarship to recover the women who have been ‘lost at sea’ in the historical narrative, however, there is a lack of attention to uncovering and analyzing female pirates and other women who had direct connections to pirates in port cities.

Whereas earlier generations of historians have focused on the rarity of women on the sea, Jo Stanley in *Bold in Her Breeches: Women Pirates Across the Ages* (1995) provides a counter history to the way that the literary tradition of piracy depicts women and how female pirates are portrayed in traditional maritime histories. Stanley offers a rare history of women in piracy and focuses on debunking the myths of pirates created by pop culture. Though Stanley covers a large period of maritime history, from antiquity to the 19th and early 20th centuries, she does have a substantial focus on the Golden Age period, and showcases, like Rediker, the images of female pirates after their stories spread into popular culture. Stanley looks at Anne Bonny and Mary Read as real women who defied the Western cultural standards for women. She makes a point of explicitly confronting the popular images of pirate women and the problems that have arisen from those constructions, such as sexualization and exoticism of women linked to piracy and the sea. Though Stanley writes, “women pirates have been reclaimed by feminists”, there has yet to be a surge in feminist academia concerning pirate women.⁵¹ Stanley correctly notes that the focus has been fixed on these women’s sexual activities, which has prevented female pirates from escaping the hold of fantastical categorization.⁵²

As much as these pirate women fascinated the Western world, society strived to project their existence as transgressive and wrong. Sally O’Driscoll, in her article “The

⁵¹ Stanley, Jo. *Bold in Her Breeches: Women Pirates across the Ages*. London: Pandora, 1996. 274.

⁵² Ibid.

Pirate's Breasts: Criminal Women and the Meaning of the Body," compares the images used in two publications of Captain Charles Johnson's *Pirates: A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pirates* (London, 1724).⁵³ Though these images have been discussed by other maritime scholars, O'Driscoll is the only one to analyze and examine the sexual imagery across the publications of *A General History*. This piece of scholarship has been the foundation for my own analysis of Bonny and Read and of their portrayal over time. The first publication of *A General History*, showed the women fully covered in men's clothing, and if they were not explicitly identified in the text as women, the viewer might not know their gender. This image is meant to showcase Bonny and Read's ferocity and their masculine aspects as pirates⁵⁴. However, the next publication of the book, (Amsterdam 1725), shows Bonny and Read with bare chests, breasts visible, and in overall tighter and more revealing clothing. O'Driscoll writes that the images of the women have them "occupy an indeterminate space: their clothes present their gender as masculine, while the caption [and their showcased breasts] names them as female".⁵⁵ Though both publications portray Bonny and Read in traditionally male dress, the 1725 publication makes a conscious decision to draw attention to the female bodies of the individuals. O'Driscoll's argument is that as the stories of these women traveled, and because of the changes in eighteenth century ideas surrounding gender, Bonny and Read's images had to be changed in order for the

⁵³ O'Driscoll, Sally. "The Pirate's Breasts: Criminal Women and the Meanings of the Body. *The Eighteenth Century* 53.3, Essays in Memory of Hans Turley (2012): 357-79. JSTOR. Web.; Johnson, Charles. *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pirates*. London: Conway Maritime, 1724, 2010.

⁵⁴ O'Driscoll, Sally. "The Pirate's Breasts: Criminal Women and the Meanings of the Body. *The Eighteenth Century* 53.3, Essays in Memory of Hans Turley (2012), 359.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

“process of sexualization” which allowed the images of Bonny and Read to “reframe and normalize excessive or problematic female behavior.”⁵⁶ Though they were being described by Johnson as terrifying and violent pirates, Bonny and Read were depicted in the later editions sexed as female, the “softer sex,” highlighting them as oddities to the general Western European public.

Viking warrior women, like pirate women, have existed as legendary figures and their significance has been dismissed as fiction rather than considering them as representations of actual women. A 2016 analysis of the Viking burial of grave Bj 581 in Birka, Sweden has confirmed that the sex of the buried individual is female, where it had previously been believed to be male based solely off of the grave goods and traditional historical narrative. Thus, “women, indeed, were able to be full members of male dominated spheres” as Viking warriors, rewriting the understanding of sex/gender as organized in Viking culture.⁵⁷ For my research purposes, I am not exploring the roles women held in Viking communities because they do not fit the definition of ‘pirate’ for my purposes. Viking-Nordic society was a vast complex organization that encompassed a rather large area of Europe. I am attempting to do the same as these modern archaeologists by reexamining the evidence we already have in order to change the historical narrative.

Reconstructing the Context of Female Piracy

⁵⁶ Ibid. 359-360. For more information regarding gender in the 18th century see *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* by Anne McClintock (New York, 1995).

⁵⁷ Hedenstierna-Jonson, Charlotte, et al. “A Female Viking Warrior Confirmed by Genomics.” *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, vol. 164, no. 4, Aug. 2017, 853–860.

Judith Butler echoes Mary Douglas in stating, “all social systems are vulnerable at their margins, and that all margins are accordingly considered dangerous.”⁵⁸ The sea and piracy occupy one of those marginal spaces as they are not a part of a particular society and are fluid environments of quick decision and adaptations. This marginal status may partly explain why there has been less study of the history of pirates in comparison to their use as a fictional narrative.⁵⁹ In particular the sea has provided a space for revolutionaries, capitalists, and religious refugees to search for opportunity and asylum.⁶⁰ The sea and pirate ships are truly a space on the periphery of human society.

Maritime history proves to have many challenges, the first one being the lack of primary sources available for study. Laura Sook Duncombe writes, “Historically, sea conflicts are chronicled less faithfully than fighting that takes place on land.”⁶¹ The types of archival records available to dissect land history are not available to maritime historians because people at sea did not have the same kind of relationship with chronicling bodies on land, and pirates in particular are not believed to have kept the same sorts of meticulous records found with mercantile and naval vessels. Historians of piracy must rely on a critical reading of contemporary commentaries on pirate activities and the account of legal records for those prosecuted for their crimes in addition to the long narrative of pirate legends and rumors that may be based in fact.

⁵⁸ Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge, 1990. 180; Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Penguin Books, 1966.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p.186-188.; Scott, Joan W. “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis” *American Historical Review*, vol. 91, issue 5 (Dec., 1986).

⁶⁰ Linebaugh, Peter, and Marcus Rediker. *The Many-headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. Boston: Beacon, 2013. 160-70, 62-167.

⁶¹ Duncombe, Laura Sook. *Pirate Women: The Princesses, Prostitutes, and Privateers Who Ruled the Seven Seas*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, Incorporated, 2017.

Records of pirate activities stretch seem to stretch as far back as the beginnings of human history, but the accounts of “Golden Age” pirates began in the 17th century, and much of the historical literature was not published until the 18th and 19th centuries.⁶² Influential accounts include Captain Charles Johnson’s *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pirates*, first published in 1724 in England and later re-published throughout Europe, including translations into Dutch and French. *A General History* highlights the life stories of the female pirates Anne Bonny and Mary Read, mentioning the two women on its cover page. The actual identity of Captain Charles Johnson is unknown, though it has been speculated that Johnson’s real identity was Daniel Defoe, the author of colonial adventure novels such as *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Moll Flanders* (1722); however, that theory has been discredited by recent scholarship.⁶³ Though Johnson’s writing is most likely based on rumors and oral storytelling, his accounts coincided with the 1722 British trial records of Captain John “Calico Jack” Rackam from Jamaica, which include the trials of Bonny and Read.⁶⁴ Johnson’s work, even if controversial, is the main foundation of my research because it is the first attempt at an account of women pirates and their exploits during the Golden Age.

In her book, *Good Wives*, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich explores the ways that colonial women in British America’s Northeast deal with the harsh environment of the New

⁶² Ibid. 1-4; The phrase “Golden Age of Piracy” to refer to piracy in the early modern period was first used by Swedish journalist George Powell in “A Pirates Paradise”(1894), however the phrase did not take up common use until 1897 with American historian John Fiske’s *Old Virginia and Her Neighbors*. Fiske also set the time span of the Golden Age at being from 1650-1720, though for this project I take the time span to be flexible.

⁶³ Cordingly, David. “Introduction” to Charles Johnson’s *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pirates*. London: Conway Maritime, 1724, 2010.

⁶⁴ Baldwin, Robert. *The Tryals of Captain John Rackam and Other Pirates*. Jamaica: n.p.,1721.

World. Ulrich explains that these women reconstructed their gender to reflect society's expectations while also adapting to their needs for more 'male' roles to survive in their new environment, such as partaking in business transactions.⁶⁵ While Ulrich does not discuss piracy or women at sea, her work does overlap with the Golden Age Era and provides a useful framework for a new analysis of gender during the larger colonial period. Ulrich's work shows that gender, at least in the Anglo-American colonies, is more complex than previously believed and presented by historians. Thus, if women on land can and must be reexamined, so too must women at sea.

Two sections of Ulrich's work are of particular interest when contextualizing pirate women's history, "Jael" and "Bathsheba". "Jael" explores the relationship between women and violence in the context of northern New England. Ulrich's reader must understand that northern New England was a frontier and colonial inhabitants were constantly at risk of violence, mainly from indigenous tribes as well as their natural environments.⁶⁶ Historians too easily put women into a box as being peaceful, weak, and incapable of violent outbursts, as conditioned by eighteenth and nineteenth century constructions of gender binaries. Ulrich also proposes this interesting dialogue of when it is appropriate for a woman to act violently and what that means within the social expectations of women. Judith Butler refers to Joan Riviere's essay "Womanliness as a Masquerade" as it "introduces the notion of femininity as masquerade in terms of a

⁶⁵ Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of the Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750*. Vintage Books, 1991.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 167-169. Ulrich explores this idea through the narrative of Hannah Dunston and Mary Rowlandson, two women held as captives by indigenous tribes. Dunston has historically been celebrated for her violent escape from her captors, taking their scalps with her as she fled.

theory of aggression and conflict resolution.”⁶⁷ Similarly to Ulrich, Butler and Riviere discuss the seemingly arbitrary construction of the gender binary, and how in reality, the assigned attributes of each gender do appear in the other. Considering why a woman might be drawn to violence and how the larger community receives that act allows for a larger conversation of violence during the colonial period as a whole, including the draw to piracy.

In “Bathsheba” Ulrich introduces the concept of the deputy husband. The idea of the ‘deputy husband’ refutes the idea that historical women have always been contained to strict gender roles and feminine behaviors.⁶⁸ Ulrich writes, “The premodern world did allow for greater fluidity of role behavior than in nineteenth century America, but colonial women were by definition basically domestic.”⁶⁹ Ulrich’s work provides a new understanding of the term ‘domestic’. In the case of these New England women, domestic duties included the ability to stand in for a husband when necessary.⁷⁰ Ulrich ends her discussion of “Deputy Husbands” by emphasizing, “The role of deputy husband reinforces a certain elasticity in premodern notions of gender.”⁷¹ As previously noted, Ulrich does not argue that deputy husbands challenge the domestic role of women. However, colonial women of New England did challenge gender stereotypes through their roles as deputy husbands which allowed women to reach beyond traditional gender expectations. This idea of gender elasticity is essential when reading Ulrich because it

⁶⁷ Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. 1990. 68.; Riviere, Joan. "Womanliness as a Masquerade." *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 10 (1929): 35-44.

⁶⁸ Deputy husband refers to the fact that married woman would often assist their husbands in their work or business in addition to taking complete control of that work or business if the husband is absent.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 35, 37, 51.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 37.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 50.

forces the reader to keep in mind the difference in gender construction prior to the strict gender outlines created in the Victorian era.

Ulrich provides a much-needed social context for women not only during the Golden Age of piracy, but for women during the colonial age in general. Her work shows that women, at least in colonial New England, were able to and required to live outside the traditional gender roles historian ascribe to the period. Similarly, pirate women chose to and were required to leave traditional expectations of their gender in order to retain a free and prosperous life. Ulrich's work shows that pirate women are not as much of a social anomaly as previously thought. The concept of the 'deputy husband' provides examples of women using their husband's established power to elevate their own position. This is especially seen with Ching Shih, who obtained her pirate captain status after the death of her husband, and Grace O'Malley, who basically recruited men from her husbands' clan after their separation.⁷² Additionally, in every account of a female pirate, from Artemisia to Ching Shih, the woman is described as acting 'manly' and easily resulting to violence when crossed.

Moving away from the "Malestream" Narrative

The term "malestream" has been used by Jo Stanley to describe western society's tradition of focusing on cis-male history or, when other genders are explored, holds them to the male as a standard or 'norm'.⁷³ My thesis, by looking at female piracy through the

⁷²Duncombe, Laura Sook. *Pirate Women: The Princesses, Prostitutes, and Privateers Who Ruled the Seven Seas*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, Incorporated, 2017. 79, 175.

⁷³ Stanley, Jo "And after the cross-dressed cabin boys and whaling wives? Possible futures for women's maritime historiography". *Journal of Transport History*. Jan 1, 2002.

lenses of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, escapes the maelstrom of traditional pirate narratives to set a smooth course to understanding the queer realm of the sea.

The French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault proposes in his *History of Sexuality* that prior to the 18th century, people of Western society did not see sex and sexuality as the confined categories that we have today. He writes, “Toward the beginning of the eighteenth century, there emerged a political, economic, and technical incitement to talk about sex.” Thus, prior to this, it was accepted that sex and sexuality were more fluid. I claim that the sea, known for liberation and freedom, bypassed the changing sexuality norms of the 18th and 19th centuries, giving women pirates free range in their self-expression. In their biographies, we can see that their return to mainland society subjugates these women to the strict confines of female gender norms. When these women cannot successfully meet these social standards, they are left to the prison system. Foucault also states that this move toward “talking about” sexuality at the beginning of the eighteenth century, “tried to transform the sexual conduct of couples into a concerted economic and political behavior[s]...[which] would become anchorage points for the different varieties of racism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.”⁷⁴ From Foucault we can see that the changing perspectives of sex influenced Western society by setting up strict economic and political ideologies, and increasing the patriarchal hold over Western cultures. This includes cultural perceptions of gender and sexuality, in addition to race and ethnicity. Though the pirate women discussed above would not have been met with racism in their home cultures, the correlation between these social shifts and economic trends shows how much culture can affect seemingly

⁷⁴ Foucault, Michel, and Robert Hurley. *The History of Sexuality*. Camberwell, Vic.: Penguin, 2008. 27.

unchangeable aspects of life, such as the understanding of gender. As pirates, these women lived outside the traditional construction of economics, being a part of a private interest faction, making them even more of a threat to the growing capitalist system imposing such cultural changes.

Michel Foucault states that his reasons for writing *The History of Sexuality* was to “confront this every-day notion of sexuality, step away from it, monitor its familiar evidence and analyze” so that he could better understand how the twenty-first century West understood it.⁷⁵ In this same way, this paper does not seek to explain or identify the gender(s) or sexuality of these women who cross-dressed at sea, but analyzes the stories of these four women as examples of how and why women used dressing as a man to liberate themselves. Even if some of these women were what we would now describe as “homosexual or lesbian”, it is inaccurate to describe them as such since the modern categories of sexuality were not in existence during their time. On that same note, it cannot be assumed that these women would consider themselves to be what we today understand as “transgender”. Foucault’s analysis and explanation of sexuality throughout history allows me to not only examine the tradition of naming Bonny and Read as lesbian lovers, but if applied to gender as well, to conclude that these four women’s act of cross-dressing would not have been the transgression that modern society would now regard as shocking.

Following the work of Foucault, *Gender Trouble* and “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” by Judith Butler argue that both sex and gender are constructed by social, cultural, historical, and political

⁷⁵ Foucault, Michel, and Robert Hurley. *The History of Sexuality*. Camberwell, Vic.: Penguin, 2008. 10-11.

external factors. Butler developed the theory of gender performativity, stating that not only is an individual's identity constructed by outside forces, but by one's own interpretation and outward actions and behaviors expressing their identity.⁷⁶ Butler believes that in modern academia "The very subject of woman is no longer understood in stable or abiding terms."⁷⁷ Thus, historians should account for the new perceptions of women's history to reexamine pirate women. When looking at discussions of women who practiced piracy or pirate activities, they have come to be designated with a non-female gender. Following Butler's analysis of gender, however, I argue that rather than defying female gender expectations, these women lived in an environment, which allowed them to express their personal identities in a different way. Though all the women discussed would identify as female (and most likely as a woman), what that meant to them was different than what contemporary land-based society would have believed, and indeed different than our own modern interpretation of female or women identity. Part of their performance as pirates may well have included dressing in typical male clothing, however, I argue that the performance was more about the personal identity and motives of the pirate woman rather than how she chose to outwardly present her gender. We should not assume that the label of 'woman' indicates a common identity, or that it denotes the same social expectations in different areas.⁷⁸ I agree with Butler's statement that gender is complex and is in a constant state of flux throughout time and space.⁷⁹ Pirate women did not think of themselves as taking on another gender, but rather

⁷⁶ Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge, 1990.

⁷⁷ *ibid.* 2-3.

⁷⁸ *ibid.* 4.

⁷⁹ *ibid.* 22.

defined the term ‘woman’ individually and personally so that they may still pursue illegal pirating activities.

Judith Butler also discusses the idea of the female or woman as an “Other” who is at the will of white cis-gendered men.⁸⁰ This includes a discussion of the fetishization of women and those that do not fit the western gender binary. Mainstream media has continuously used pirate women as a means of entertainment since the Golden Age of piracy if not before. From Charles Johnson’s ‘historical’ accounts of Anne Bonny and Mary read, to modern television and film, pirate women have been used to discuss at a safe distance all the women should not be, while providing the audience with an arousing account of adventure and forbidden romance.

Conclusion

How modern society traditionally views Golden Age piracy must be expand in order to incorporate the obvious spectrum of genders at sea, and to allow for more heavily feminist and queer theoretical frameworks for understanding the role of gender in maritime history. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich’s work on New England colonial women contemporary to Golden Age piracy shows that the flexibility of gender roles in this era allowed women to create identities that aided in their survival. The theories of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler allow modern scholars to reframe female piracy to account for the fluidity of gender and sexual identities throughout history. Previous historians have placed these women at the edge of this framework, but have yet to push these women into a central focus. Having given a focused and detailed examination and explanation of pirate women and their significance, this work demonstrates the changes in how gender is

⁸⁰ *ibid*, 25.

addressed in maritime studies. Much like the work of Jo Stanley, Sally O’Driscoll, and Laura Sook Duncombe, it demystifies the way that women have been portrayed in maritime history and pirate literature.

This year (2018), the Disney Parks have decided to reinvent their famous (or infamous) “Red Head” character in the Pirates of the Caribbean attraction. Since the opening of the original ride in 1967 in the Disneyland Park, the “Red Head” has been part of the auction scene, where one pirate is auctioning off captive women to the highest bidder. Deeming this to now be an inappropriate scene, Disney has decided to replace the scene in Disneyland Paris, Disneyland in California, and Walt Disney World in Florida. The new scene depicts the “Red Head” as a pirate herself, intimidating and commanding the male pirates around her. While some may deride this change to a beloved ‘traditional’ portrayal of women in relation to piracy, the historical record proves otherwise. Indeed, while female pirates are not plentiful at least from the surviving records, they were nonetheless present and warrant representation in historical narrative.⁸¹

⁸¹ Fresh Baked. *Secrets and History of Pirates of the Caribbean*. YouTube, 19 Feb. 2016, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=u2EdhUqyxFo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u2EdhUqyxFo;).; Mangum, Kathy. “New Pirates Set to Join the Crew of Pirates of the Caribbean at Disneyland Paris July 24.” *Disney Parks Blog*, 29 June 2017, disney parks.disney.go.com/blog/2017/06/new-pirates-set-to-join-the-crew-of-pirates-of-the-caribbean-at-disneyland-paris-july-24/.; Sposato, Sean, and Cristina Sanza. “Changes to Infamous Redhead Scene on Pirates of the Caribbean Begin as Walt Disney World Closes Ride for Refurbishment.” *Inside the Magic*, 26 Feb. 2018, www.insidethemagic.net/2018/02/changes-infamous-redhead-scene-pirates-caribbean-begin-walt-disney-world-closes-ride-refurbishment/.

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