"The Sea Will Make a Man of Him?": Hypervirility, Effeminacy, and the Figure of the Queer Pirate in the Popular Imagination from the Early Eighteenth-Century to Hollywood

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Abstract:
The figure of Captain Jack Sparrow, charismatic rogue and best pirate ever, has captured the cinema audience like no other pirate before him, it seems. Ask anyone what they think about *Pirates of the Caribbean,* and their response will very likely be centred on Johnny Depp's flamboyant performance. Sparrow's insistence on status ("It's *Captain* Sparrow!"), on physical prowess, his skills in navigation and his having a bride in every port seem to mark him out as the typically virile pirate familiar to us from so many pirate movies of the twentieth century. Yet from the start, Sparrow's virility sits oddly with his other signature character traits: his failure as a leader, his preference of negotiation to open fight ("Why fight when you can negotiate? All one needs is the proper leverage."), his slightly drunken swagger and mannered gesticulation, his mixture of elaborate wordplay and slurry pronunciation, let his demonstrative virility look like an act. Indeed, his performance of pirate manliness forever hesitates – almost uncannily, always hilariously – between hypervirility and effeminacy. This essay traces the "queer" pirate figure to the eighteenth-century popular imagination and explores the fascination its ambiguous gender performance holds for audiences, then as now.

I.

1 The figure of Captain Jack Sparrow, charismatic rogue and best pirate ever, has captured the cinema audience like no other pirate before him, it seems. Ask anyone what they think about *Pirates of the Caribbean,* and their response will very likely be centred on Johnny Depp's flamboyant performance. Sparrow's insistence on status ("It's *Captain* Sparrow!"), on physical prowess, his skills in navigation and his having a bride in every port seem to mark him out as the typically virile pirate familiar to us from so many pirate movies of the twentieth century.[1] Yet from the start, Sparrow's virility sits oddly with his other signature character traits: his failure as a leader, his preference of negotiation to open fight ("Why fight when you can negotiate? All one needs is the proper leverage."), his slightly drunken swagger and mannered gesticulation, his mixture of elaborate wordplay and slurry pronunciation, let his demonstrative virility look like an act. Indeed, his performance of pirate manliness forever hesitates – almost

[1] James Robert Parish's reference guide, listing all theatrical feature films, television movies and sound serials featuring pirates from 1914-1991, focuses entirely on the "derring-do, courage and right of might"-appeal of the manly pirate-hero and manages to ignore all campier or downright queer filmic, theatrical, musical or operatic incarnations of this figure (1995: 1). Similarly, while his introduction meticulously (if quite superficially) lists the general literary heritage of piracy, mutiny and seafaring since Daniel Defoe's adventure novels, it omits such famous studies of all-male society on board a ship as Melville's *Billy Budd, Sailor* (1849). For a brilliant reading of the homosexual trajectories of the latter, see the chapter in Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990).

uncannily, always hilariously – between hypervirility and effeminacy.[2] Where does this ambiguous style of masculinity come from, and what (apart from the fascination this very ambiguity holds) is its particular appeal?

2 While Depp himself claims to have modelled Jack Sparrow on rock-star legend Keith Richards and, less prominently, on the womanizing cartoon-skunk Pepé Le Pew, drawing on their decadent outlaw image and over-the-top virility respectively, I propose to explore an alternative model: the pirate as an ambiguously gendered figure in the popular imagination from the early eighteenth century until its most recent Hollywood incarnation. At the very moment that the Golden Age of Piracy was over, the figure of the pirate entered the popular imagination as a fascinating anti-hero who habitually transgressed the limits set by society. In this essay I am concerned with exploring precisely these limits of what counted as normative and successful masculinity at that time. While sea-faring was widely believed to "make" a man – in terms of financial success, military career and, more generally, of character – apparently much could go wrong on board a ship. The sea will make a man of him? Not always, if we take into account the myriad of cross-dressed women, effeminate gentleman-captains, inhumanly brutal first mates or sodomitical sailors that abound in popular literature from street ballads and sensational rogue-biographies to Smollett's *Roderick Random* (1749) and beyond. Drawing predominantly on Captain Johnson's *General History of the Pirates* (1724), a collection of factual and fictional biographical accounts, this essay will show that much of the fascination the pirates held for the eighteenth-century audience rested on their – at times highly ambiguous – gender performances. Exploring the gender history of the pirate figure can tell us much about how Depp's performance in *Pirates of the Carribean* works, and that it is this gender ambiguity that holds the audience in a spell, now as much as then.

II.

3 The story of Britain as a naval power is a success story. Beyond the material impact of sea trade on the economic and cultural life at home, "it is a story of what binds and unites the nation, a story in which the country believes its best qualities are on display," as John Peck asserts in his study on *Maritime Fiction* (27). The naval supremacy of Britain was and to an extent still is a matter of national pride. The loud chanting of "Rule, Britannia" (1740) at international sports events, for example, illustrates that this connection between maritime

[2] Prompted by this oscillating performance, Heike Steinhoff, too, explores the "queer positionalities" of Jack Sparrow as well as offering a queer reading of the seemingly securely heterosexual couple Will Turner and Elizabeth Swann.

dominance and national pride is alive even today. In the eighteenth century, enlightenment values such as liberty, freedom of expression and unrestricted development of liberal thought were linked with maritime trading powers like Holland or England (see Brown). And indeed, naval historiography up to our days likes to stress the intimate connection between trade, maritime warfare, the circulation of capital and credit, and a progressive society: "The intellectual, artistic and technological achievements flowed [...] from the freedoms necessarily accompanying merchant power. Liberty, tolerance and wealth unlocked natural genius." (Padfield 184)

4 How much this naval success story contributed to the political process of "forging the nation" (Colley), becomes clear when we look at eighteenth-century statements such as the following by Lord Halifax from 1694, who asserted that, "[t]he first article of an Englishman's political creed must be, that he believeth in the sea." Half a century later, Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke characterized his country men as "amphibious animals," who "must occasionally come on shore: but the water is more properly our element, and in it [...] as we find our greatest security, so we find our greatest force." (*Idea of a Patriot King*, 1749) During the eighteenth century the navy became so important for the country that the future Duke of Wellington described it in 1808 "as the characteristic and constitutional force of Britain" (quoted in Peck 27-28).

5 In naval historiography as well as in biographies and fictional accounts, this story was being retold again and again over the course of the century. Invariably, the narrative follows the pattern of sailors as men taking control of and dominating their environment. Be it the triumph of superior naval strategy or the triumph of trade – the maritime story is always about successful commercial enterprise, about seeing an opportunity and seizing it. Encoded in these stories, in other words, is a distinctly middle-class ideology and identity that is increasingly regarded as an expression of the national character. Also inscribed in this "energetic, and money-making spirit" (Peck 4) is, I would argue, a specifically middle-class notion of manliness. Life on board a ship, already an exclusively male environment, fosters culturally masculine qualities such as aggression and risk-taking, and requires physical prowess. As Peck puts it, "Life at sea is [...] a life built upon the notions of manliness, in which strength is the only quality that really matters." (5) Stories about seafaring, both fictional and historical, can thus be seen as a cultural site where an idealized male identity is being constructed in terms of nation, class, and gender.[3]

[3] Add to this, race or ethnicity, but since I will not be dealing with either the slave trade or the seafarers' contacts with native people on Caribbean or Polynesian islands, they remain at the margins of my focus here.

6 I would like to articulate my mistrust of such an unequivocally positive story and argue that it never tells the whole story but rather a selected version of life at sea from a specific perspective and to specific purposes. I will *not* do this, however, by referring to the hard, even brutal reality of life on board a ship as in tension with idealized accounts into which that reality will inevitably erupt from time to time.[4] Such an approach fails to acknowledge that we cannot know what this reality actually was like, since all we have to go by are textual representations of it. I will therefore look at the way popular literature – and here I include early representatives of the novel along with street-ballads, pamphlets and sensational biographies – has taken up motifs and figures excluded from the idealized, "official" version of maritime life. This official version, or rather its tangible results in terms of naval supremacy as well as individual and national profit, went a long way to legitimize the maritime enterprise and through it, of colonial expansion and trade. It is rather in the popular "unofficial" stories about life on board of a ship that the concomitant anxieties about nation, class, and above all, about gender, reveal themselves – anxieties that have necessarily been excluded from the ideal of the success story described above. From the perspective of popular literature, as we will see, the hypervirile pirate and the effeminate gentleman-captain emerge as transgressive figures that push the limits of what counts as non-deviant masculinity in the eighteenth century (Turley 8). I will explore these limits through the topos of the *rite de passage*, the notion that the sea journey (at least in its official, middle-class version) will "make" a man, both in respect to fortune and to manliness.

III.

7 The almost magical transformative powers of the sea journey are encapsulated in the phrase "the sea will make a man of him," a phrase that I would attach an emphatic question mark to for the purposes of this essay. That the notion of the sea as a space of *positive* transformation was already a familiar one in the early eighteenth century is illustrated by the sarcasm Ned Ward pours over it in his *London Spy* (1709): I could not forbear Reflecting on the Prudence of those Persons who send their Unlucky Children to Sea to Tame and Reform 'em, which, I am well satisfied, is like sending a Knave into *Scotland* to learn Honesty; a Fool into *Ireland* to learn Wit; or a Clown into *Holland* to learn Breeding; by any of which Measures, they that send 'em may be sure that instead of mending the ill Habits they have contracted, the first will return more Wild, the second more Knavish, the third more Foolish, and the fourth a greater Booby. (XIV, 324) Significantly, seafaring here functions as some kind of catalyst or

[4] See, for example, the chapter „Life on Board an Early-Eighteenth-Cetury Ship" in Hans Turly (1999), which proceeds largely along such ethnographic lines.

amplifier of characteristics already acquired on shore. As a kind of society apart, life on board a ship seems to provide an imaginative space for the negotiation of anxieties prevailing *within* society at large: what happens at sea is perceived as a reflection, as under a magnifying glass, of what happens on shore. Nevertheless, these anxieties were usually projected and through this displaced onto the figure of the sailor who returns profoundly changed into a radically other. Clearly, not every man who goes to sea will return as a "sea-made man" but rather as what Ward ridicules as "those *Maritime* kind of Monsters, who had little more to show they were Men, than that they Walk'd upright" (ibid.).

8 *The Metamorphos'd Beau: or, the Intrigues at Ludgate* (1700), an earlier short tale by Ward, provides an (ironical) illustration of such a transformation into the monstrous other. The story sets in with the narrator going down to the harbour "in pursuit of a Friend" who has a "considerable Post of Command" aboard the – tellingly named – *Royal Britannica,* just returned "after many brave and glorious Exploits perform'd in the Service of its Country." He finds his friend, he tells us, "but so Transmogrifie'd" that he can hardly believe his eyes: "Ye Gods! Cry'd I, What do I behold? Or are my Opticks deceiv'd?" The "Noble Figure" his friend used to cut, inspiring admiration in his men and love in the fair sex, has turned into a "weather-beaten," "frightful" brute, "so Tann'd his Hide, that he seems to be the offspring of an Ethiopian" (Ward, *Beau* 3). The friend himself cannot really see why the narrator is so upset by his being "metamorphos'd," since after all he has returned alive, "sound in Wind and Limbs" (if a bit lame), "full fraught with Vigour, and dare[s] attack a whole Fleet of Female Frigates" (4). Although his journey has been a successful one and he returns victoriously, considerably richer and full of heterosexual desire (as he protests himself), this is clearly not what counts for his friend on shore. Desperately crying out "Oh ye Powers! What a strange Metamorphose have ye Created, not to be parallell'd!", he counts up his friend's lost beauties in a kind of inversed Petrarchan *blazon* of powdered locks now "as Lank, as the Mane of an Old Hackney;" a "Charming Phiz" now disfigured by "most fearful scars;" eyes, once "fatal Luminaries" now turned dull and heavy; a once "fluid", "bewitching" tongue now "Seal'd with Silence;" his once elegant and "dextrous" attire now "as shattered as the Rigging of thy Ship;" and the odour of "Fragrant Perfumes" and "Odiferous Scents" now "usurpt by the more powerful Pitch, Tarr, and Oakum" (3-4).

9 This description sets up a dichotomous pattern of the effeminate gentleman-captain and the virile sailor-hero who carries his scars "as so many Badges of Honour, attain'd in the Service

of your Country" (5).[5] About fifty years later, we find the same pattern in Tobias Smollett's *Roderick Random* (1748) in the descriptions of Captain Whiffle and Captain Oakhum, whose names echo Ward's "fragrant perfumes usurpt by the more powerful oakum", yet with a telling difference: in Ward's story, the ironic tone clearly indicates that the once effeminate beau has metamorphosed into something actually much more eligible, a vigorous and victorious naval commander who is characterized by his physical prowess and loyalty to the English nation, not to mention his unshaken heterosexuality. He embodies the successful version of the "the sea will make a man of him"-topos, as it were. By the time Smollett is writing his novel, the dichotomous pattern is obviously still available – the effeminate Captain Whiffle is explicitly described as "in everything the reverse of Oakhum" (Smollett 197) – but now *both* figures are rejected as two extremes of *negative* manliness at sea. Much has already been said about the perfumed and powdered Whiffle as the first authentic description of the effeminate sodomite in modern culture; I refer the reader to G.S. Rousseau's still relevant analysis of this figure's sartorial display in "The Pursuit of Homosexuality in the Eighteenth Century: 'Utterly Confused Category' and/or Rich Repository?" from 1985. Probably just as much has been written about the "real" life on board a ship and the inhuman violence of some captains, of which Captain Oakhum, "an arbitrary tyrant, whose command was almost intolerable" (Smollett 165), is an obvious example.[6] Both figures are of course exaggerated to the point of grotesque caricature, but this in turn only shows the extent to which this strange couple had turned into a familiar, indeed a stereotypical pattern by the middle of the century.

10 What I am interested in here is the way in which Smollett employs these two figures in order to demarcate the limits of normative masculinity in the eighteenth century, limits which coincide with the borders of human society, indeed of the human itself. Their respective liminal status is made clear, for example, when Oakhum's brutal reign is described as "inhuman" (Smollett 162, 190), while the effeminate Captain Whiffle even borders on the non-human: "he is more like a papoon than one of the human race" (199). Behind this spectacle of ape-like affectation lurks the spectre of simple, honest "Jack Tar" being changed into such a "maritime monster" (Ward, *London Spy* 324): Whiffle is "disguised," "transfigured," even

[5] However, the dichotomy does not extend to a reassuring national image of the successful English sailor-merchant, since the weatherbeaten visage of the friend is repeatedly likened to that of non-European 'savages', while the narrator, who had safely stayed behind in London, bears all the insignia of the effeminate which usually is associated with continental, especially French, styles of masculinity. On the figure of the fop in eighteenth-century popular culture, see Carter (1997 and, more general, 2001).

[6] Peck (2000), for example, focuses exclusively on the "lack of respect for the body" as "the most notable feature of Roderick Random", indeed, "the most distinctive feature of maritime fiction in general." (22-27). For an more detailed discussion of Smollett's representations of the human body in pain, see Aileen Douglas, Uneasy Sensations: Smollett and the Body (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

"transmogriphied" with affectations and whimsies (Smollett 199), thus recalling the metamorphosis of Ward's beau in reverse. However, I do not merely want to argue that these two figures function as mutually excluding opposites and that normative maritime masculinity, instead of being heightened and economically bolstered by the seafaring enterprise, is here anxiously represented as harbouring a dangerous potential to metamorphose into either of the two. I also would suggest that these stereotypical, extreme examples of what can go wrong at sea do not remain stable and apart, but rather tend to collapse into each other: In the popular imagination, anxieties about what might happen to the male body on board a ship seem to turn equally and, as I will argue, interchangeably, on both physical prowess and the conspicuous consumption that signals effeminacy and sodomy. This tendency to perceive of hypervirility and effeminacy as separated by a mere threshold can be traced in popular accounts of this most hypervirile of all sea-faring men, the pirate.

IV.

11 Although the Golden Age of Piracy had come to an end by the early eighteenth century, public interest in pirates remained high and even increased from the 1730s on. In sensationalized biographies, trial pamphlets or ballads, pirates function as the cultural other, marked by their violence, their often arbitrary cruelty, and an "over-the-top masculine performance when they wreak havock," as Hans Turley puts it (40). Because pirates left no records of their own (most were illiterate, none wanted to testify against himself), their stories were open to manipulation and imaginative embellishment by writers to suit their own purposes (Duncan 100). Thus the pirate of eighteenth century popular literature, as an increasingly fictionalized figure invested with cultural fantasies and anxieties, can in turn provide insights into how certain ideals of masculinity came to be understood as appropriate and “normal” at that time (Turley 1). As romanticized antiheroes outside of society, pirates are depicted as culturally, economically and sexually transgressive figures, and anxieties surrounding such transgressions *within* society are habitually projected and displaced onto them. The above quote from *The London Spy* (324), with its suggestion that life on board a ship functions as a microcosm of society as well as an amplifier of national characteristics, demonstrates this.

12 In what follows, I would like to argue that in part at least, these anxieties – or, perhaps, wishful fantasies? – articulate themselves through the intriguing gender-instability of the pirate figure as that trait which most clearly demarcated the limits of normative masculinity and simultaneously overstepped them. In order to describe this curious oscillation of the pirate figure between hypermasculinity and effeminacy, I would like use Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's

notion of gender identities as “threshold effects”. Such threshold effects, she argues, occur in "places where quantitative increments along one dimension can suddenly appear as qualitative differences somewhere else on the map entirely." (Sedgwick, “Gosh, Boy George” 16) Applied to the figure of the pirate, this means that the quantitative augmentation of manliness, namely his conspicuous display of fierceness and physical prowess, can suddenly become visible as a qualitative difference, as something else altogether: by taking the insignia of a traditional male gender identity to an excess, the hypervirile pirate crosses a threshold of manliness and becomes visible as – effeminate.

13 Before proceeding to illustrations of this phenomenon, which are surprisingly ample in the early eighteenth century, one word of caution is in order. I do not want to argue that we simply recognize the figure of the pirate as potentially sodomitical. It is of course possible, and to a degree instructive, to show how piracy served as a trope for sodomy in the eighteenth century, just as mutiny became a trope for sodomy in the nineteenth century.[7] While this undercurrent of homoerotic/homosexual desire is undeniably there, we should, however, be wary of reducing the pirate to a mere chiffre for sodomy.[8] The obvious danger lies in reinstating what Sedgwick has called "the homo/heterosexual definition of personal identity" – that is, the reductive interpretation of every aspect of personality in terms of homosexuality and heterosexuality – and in realigning it with deviant and normative notions of masculinity. This opposition has been irrevocably deconstructed by Sedgwick in favour of a "potentially unbroken continuum between homosocial and the homosexual" (Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 1). Hence I would like to keep the question of the pirate's sexuality unresolved and focus rather on the microstructures of this continuum of gender styles, in our case, the ways the pirate's gender can oscillate between hypervirility and effeminacy. In tracing this always only transitory threshold effect, I will draw on descriptions of piratical self-fashioning in *The General History of the Pirates* (1725).

14 The *General History*, probably written by Daniel Defoe and published under a pseudonym to give it the appeal of authenticity, focuses on the “Golden Age of Piracy” between 1695 and 1725. The biographical tales assembled in this publication intermingle fact and fiction, thus marking a starting point for the process which turned the pirate into both,

[7] For the seventeenth century, see B. R. Burgh, Sodomy and the Pirate Tradition (New York: NYUP, 1983); for the eighteenth century see Turley (1999); Eve Sedgwick's reading of Melville's *Billy Budd* in her *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) establishes the connection between mutiny and closeted homosexual desire.

[8] While uncovering male same-sex desire has been a genuine interest of early studies like Burgh's, later studies – which mostly follow Sedgwick's line of argument – offer more sophisticated accounts. A good example is Hans Turley’s study, which traces the analogies in cultural representations of the (virile) "piratical" and the (effeminate) "sodomitical subject." However, although he decribes the pirate's sexuality as "ambiguous", this model remains within the pattern of hyper-masculinity versus feminized sodomite as diametrical oppositions.

romanticized hero and abominable fiend in the popular imagination (Turley 3). The pirate figure's capacity for myth-making as well as his oscillating gender become obvious in the description of Captain Teach, which provides the *locus classicus* of the pirate as hyper-masculine:

> [...] our Heroe, Captain Teach, assumed the Cognomen of Black-beard, from that large Quantity of Hair, which, like a frightful Meteor, covered his whole Face [...] This Beard was black, which he suffered to grow of an extravagant Length; as to Breadth, it came up to his Eyes; he was accustomed to twist it with Ribbons, in small Tails, after the manner of our Ramilies Wiggs, and turn them about his Ears. (Defoe 87)

This "extravagant" beard serves as a mark of both Blackbeard's fierce manliness and his transgressive nature. His beard is explicitly compared to a wig worn in military circles and connected to a military campaign, the battle of Ramillies in 1706, in which the British gained a decisive victory over the Franco-Bavarian troops in the War of the Spanish Succession. Yet this wig as a sign of normative masculinity and of military success is here transformed into a sign of transgressive masculinity and illegal warfare against one's own country and economy.[9] As Marcia Pointon has shown, the wig could function as a symbol of both successful *and* failed manliness in the eighteenth century, depending on whether its design and dimensions remained within the bounds of propriety or not. In keeping with the logic of the threshold effect, then, the wig has the capacity to signify cultural and, in particular, masculine authority; but when carried to an excess, as for example in the exaggerated hair-dos of the Italianized Maccaroni or the Frenchified Fop, it signifies disorderly sexuality and un-English decadence. Captain Teach's black beard is so prominent that it becomes his signature trait: he is best known as Captain Blackbeard. Yet the way in which it is foregrounded and made part of his self-conscious performance of manly fierceness, turns it into a rather instable signifier of masculinity, indeed even of humanity:

> In Time of Action, he wore a Sling over his Shoulders, with three Brace of Pistols, hanging in Holsters like Bandaliers; and stuck lighted Matches under his Hat, which appearing on each Side of his Face, his Eyes naturally looking fierce and wild, made him altogether such a Figure, that Imagination cannot form an Idea of a Fury, from Hell, to look more frightful. (Defoe 85; see fig. 1 and 2)

The pirate figure is demonized here: attention is drawn to his "naturally [...] fierce and wild" physical appearance, which is augmented by Blackbeard's tying long, slow-burning matches to his curls to emphasize his frightful appearance (Turley 3). The early modern one-sex model

[9] Pirates were legally defined as hostis suis generis, enemies of all mankind, and depicted as such in trial accounts: "A Pirat is in perpetual War with every Individual, and every State, Christian or Infidel […] They are worse than ravenous Beasts." (Tryal of Thomas Green 50).

identifies the highest degree of manliness as the highest degree of human-ness; according to this, Blackbeard's hypervirile performance should catapult him onto the top of the chain of being, close to the realm of angels. Instead, he crosses a threshold of the human and is propelled into the depths of the demonic.

Fig 1.

Fig. 2.

15 In an episode about Blackbeard's nuptials, his ferocious bestiality operates as an instable signifier in terms of sexuality. Defoe records how Blackbeard marries a young girl of fifteen and, "after he had lain all night with her," forces her to prostitute herself to "five or six of his brutal Companions" while he watches. Moreover, the narrator points out, such a "Behaviour in this [married] State" is less "extraordinary" with him as, in fact, "his custom" (Defoe 75-76). Again *quantity* – he has no less than fourteen wives, "whereof, about a dozen might be still living" (a tantalizing conditional that recalls the story of his literary cousin Bluebeard) – becomes visible as a different *quality*: marked as bestiality, his notorious heterosexuality slips over a threshold into sodomy.[10] Curiously enough, this episode is *not* given as an example of his "extravagant Wickedness […] aimed at making his Men believe he was a Devil incarnate" (88), but rather left uncommented and therefore open to diverse interpretations on the part of the readers. What, then, are we to make of this scene? In terms of heterosexual desire, it speaks of the connection between sexuality, voyeurism and violence which will resurface as a marker of (rather more than less) normative masculinity in eighteenth-century texts such as Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1749) or in gothic novels such as M.G. Lewis' *The Monk* (1795).[11] With a view to the dynamics of heterosexual and homosocial desire, it is quite obvious that this brutal ritual serves not so much to satisfy the first, but rather to cement the relationship between Blackbeard and his companions through the female body shared between them (on suchlike erotic triangles and homosocial desire, see Sedgwick's *Between Men*). Perhaps as a distant echo of the trial against the infamous Earl of Castlehaven in 1631, who engaged in sodomitical acts with the house staff and encouraged a servant to rape his wife in his presence (Herrup 1999), this episode projects a social anxiety onto the outlawed pirate: how close manliness can be to beastliness, and how easily normative male sexuality can slip over the threshold into the deviant.

16 Finally, I would like to turn to the role dress and its paraphernalia play in the performance of pirate masculinity. While the pirates' usual dress amounted to little more than dirty, salt-water ruined rags after months at sea, some pirates were best known for their sartorial elegance. One example is "Calico Jack" Rackham, remembered not only for sailing with the cross-dressed female pirates Anne Bonny and Mary Read (see Paravisini-Gebert), but also for his colourful clothes which earned him his nickname. Another example is Captain Roberts, who apparently took great care of his dress even and especially in battle: Roberts himself made a

[10] 'Sodomy' here does not refer to homosexual intercourse but, in the wider, early modern sense of the word, to the act of (enforced) adultery.

[11] For a reading of these and other texts in terms of the genderd economies of the gaze, see my study on the anxieties of masculinity in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century novel, *Männlichkeit und Körper* (2008).

gallant Figure, at the Time of the Engagement, being dressed in a rich crimson Damask Waistcoat and Breeches, a red Feather in his Hat, a Gold Chain round his Neck, with a Diamond Cross hanging to it, a Sword in his Hand, and two Pair of Pistols hanging at the End of a Silk Sling, slung over his Shoulders (according to the Fashion of the Pyrates;). (Defoe 243) This rather foppish way of dress might seem at odds with the aggressively masculine embodiment maintained by other pirates. The immediate context of this quote, however, modifies this effeminacy. Roberts is actually an example of active courage, and while "the greatest Part of his Men were drunk, passively couragious, unfit for Service," he himself gives "his Orders with Boldness, and Spirit" until he is hit by a lethal bullet, and dies (ibid.). His dressing up for battle can be seen as an echo of Blackbeard's ferocious performance as "a Figure from Hell" – we recall the lighted matches stuck under his hat – while at the same time, and quite in keeping with the logic of gender as a threshold effect, his dress matches the description of the effeminate Captain Whiffle in *Roderick Random* almost verbatim:

> […] our new commander came on board […] dressed in this manner: a white hat, garnished with a red feather, from whence his hair flowed upon shoulders, in ringlets tied behind with a ribbon. His coat, consisting of pink-coloured silk, lined with white, […] a white sattin waistcoat embroidered with gold [..] a broch set with garnets, that glittered in the breast of his shirt, […] crimson velvet breeches […] shoes of blue Meroquin, studded with diamond buckles […] A steel-hilted sword, inlaid with gold, and decked with a knot of ribbon which fell down in a rich tossle [sic]. (Smollett 198)

With his dress an orgy in pink, crimson and white, and flashing diamonds, Whiffle is a copy of the elegant Roberts, down to the red feather in his hat. Yet while in the figure of the effeminate beau dress and gender reinforce each other, Captain Robert's performance brings together the ferocious hyper-virility of a Blackbeard and the effeminate habitus of a Whiffle. Thus he embodies in his person the two limits of maritime masculinity, usually evoked as opposites, but actually separated by only a threshold.

17 A scene from the biography "Of Captain Martel," in which pirates posture as effeminate beaus, demonstrates again the sartorial closeness of hypervirility and effeminacy. In one of the letters added to the second volume of the *General History*, one Captain Evans describes how his ship fell victim to Martel's crew and how the pirates raided his personal cabin. This is what he sees when they return: Notwithstanding the melancholy Situation I was in, I could not refrain laughing when I saw the Fellows who went on board the *Greyhound*, return to their own Ship; for they had, in rummaging my Cabin, met with a Leather Powder Bag and Puff, with which they had powder'd themselves from Head to Foot, walk'd the Decks with their Hats under their Arms, minced their Oaths, and affected all the Airs of a Beau, with an Aukwardness [that] would have forced a Smile from a Cynick. (quoted in Turley 88-89) These powdered pirates

parody the habitus of a/the kind of masculinity represented by the effeminate gentleman-captain or, more generally, the beau. What makes this scene so hilarious is that the pirate still shows under the "aukward" performance: their oaths are minced, their gestures affected, while underneath they are still rugged, dirty, essentially *virile* men. A scene that here still forces a smile even from a "cynick," will be represented as abhorrent behaviour in Smollett's Captain Whiffle only twenty-four years later. Interestingly, the powder is found in the cabin of a merchant sea-captain, who apparently uses it as well, yet certainly does *not* perceive of himself as effeminate. I would suggest that the powdered pirates appear as effeminate in a way the powdered captain does not, because their over-the-top masculinity is already ambiguous and in this scene easily tips into its "opposite", or, more accurately: it crosses the threshold from the hyper-virile into the effeminate. The pirates' parody of the beau is in fact a mask of effeminacy that reveals another mask: that of hypervirility.

18 It is precisely in his performance of pirate manliness as a meeting of these seeming opposites, I would argue, that the figure of Captain Jack Sparrow in *Pirates of the Caribbean* resembles the pirates of the *General History*. His insistence on status, on physical prowess, his aptitude with sword and navigation, his fierceness, and his having a bride in every port (or rather, several in one) seem to mark him out as the typically hypervirile pirate. With his dark, wild mass of hair and his kohl-blackened eyes he even recalls the demonic portrait of the infamous Blackbeard (see figures 1-4). Yet it is clear from the start that this is nothing *but* a performance: Sparrow loves an audience, puts himself and his fierceness on display, makes sure he goes through the motions he believes one expects of a pirate – we are watching Johnny Depp playing a pirate playing a pirate, as it were.

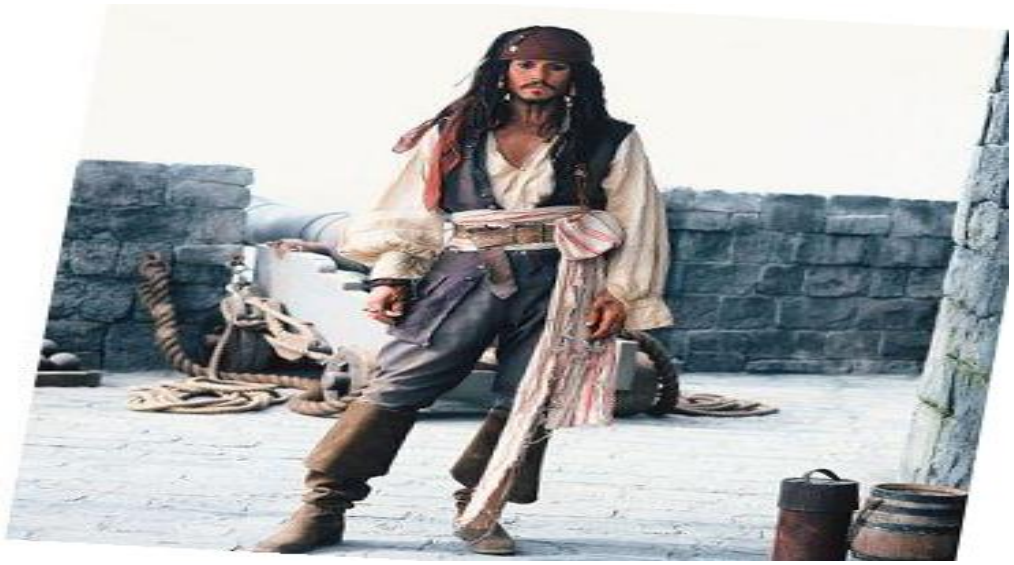

Fig. 3.

Fig. 4.

V.

19 An awareness of the history of pirate manliness I have outlined in this essay makes it nearly impossible to read the figure of the virile pirate, omni-present in twentieth century pirate movies, unequivocally straight. (The performances of Errol Flynn as gallant gentleman-rouge are a case in point, I think.) What is more, from the perspective of this "unofficial" history, an alternative tradition of queer pirates becomes visible: take, for example, Dustin Hoffman's performance in *Hook* (1991, dir. Steven Spielberg), where his exaggerated wig and his sartorial display seem an echo to both Captain Teach sporting his black beard Ramillies-wig style and "Calico Jack" Rackham. Another outstanding example is John Belushi's queer "Captain Ned" from *Saturday Night Live* (season 4, 1978/79), who takes young Miles Cowperthwaite (played by *Monty Python*-member Michael Palin) on board the fittingly named *Raging Queen* because Miles' godfather believes "that a term of service at sea would make a man" (SNLtranscripts 4:18). In this sketch, too, the topos of "the sea will make a man of him" is parodied through the homosexual goings-on on board and below deck, while the sheer over-use of the word field "manliness" empties it of all meaning: "Captain Ned, I learned from my shipmates, was a very manly, virile, manful person, and a firm believer in strict discipline, corporal punishment, and nude apartment wrestling." (ibid.)

20 In a similar vein, Johnny Depp's incredibly camped-up performance of the hypervirile pirate exposes this figure as the cliché it became from the early days of the eighteenth century on, without, however, reducing it to the gay stock-figure Hollywood cinema has come to rely on increasingly as an audience magnet.[12] Instead, Depp manages to let this iridescent figure continually, if ever only for a moment, cross the threshold between hypervirility and effeminacy, demonstrating that masculinity and its various limits only ever exist in performance, today as in the early days of the eighteenth century.

[12] Interestingly, the German dubbing of this movie makes sure to identify Sparrow as an unambiguously gay figure by giving him a voice that emphasizes his queerness to an extent that even turns his body language into an unmistakable message. Apparently the German audience cannot be trusted with ambiguities.

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