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William Gilmore Simms' "The Brothers of the Coast" and the Use of the Pirate Figure.

Emmeline Gros

Let me start by saying that I am extremely glad to see the name of William Gilmore Simms appear twice on this panel on the topic of piracy. Admittedly, Simms's sea writing is far from canonical today and scholars often remember Simms for his writing about the South, for the South, and through the South. *William Gilmore Simms is indeed often remembered (if not neglected) as an "antebellum Southern writer" who "gave a comprehensive picture of his region in its historical and cultural diversity" and whose writings exhibit "a love of southern landscape, a respect for southern social institutions, and a firm belief in class stratification and enlightened upper-class rule". He is also remembered as a man of letters, "an influential spokesman for what he saw as the region's social and political concerns", as an ardent supporter of Confederacy and strong opponent to slavery or Uncle Tom's Cabin (Wimsatt, "William Gilmore Simms, 1806-1870").*¹

Fortunately for us, Simms has attracted new interest by a generation of scholars who have emphasized Simms' commitment to exploring non-typically "Southern" territories or figures. Todd Hagstette, for instance, reminds us that the Indian figure also constituted an essential part of Simms' interests. Quoting John Caldwell Guilds, Hagstette explains that Simms "wrote more about, thought more about, and almost certainly knew (and cared) more about the American Indian than any other man of Letters of the 19th Century" (Literary View, xxix). Charles Hudson contended that "Simms had experiences with Indians unmatched by any other man of letters of his time" (xxxviii). Noting William Gilmore Simms' special interest in Native Americans and their culture, Nakamura quotes Louise K. Barnett who observes that Native Americans, the other race, have been "figures for all generations of Americans to react to, first as curiosities and physical threats, later as objects of pity and guilt, and always

¹From ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SOUTHERN CULTURE edited by Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris Copyright (c) 1989 by the University of North Carolina Press. Used by permission of the publisher. www.uncpress.unc.edu. When he died, Harper's Weekly in its July 2nd, 1870 issue: "In the death of Mr. Simms, on the 11th of June, at Charleston, the country has lost one more of its time-honored band of authors, and the South the most consistent and devoted of her literary sons."1 Indeed, no mid-nineteenth-century writer and editor did more than William Gilmore Simms to frame white southern self-identity and nationalism, shape southern historical consciousness, or foster the South's participation and recognition in the broader American literary culture" (Qtd. in William Gilmore Simms: An Overview, by David Moltke-Hansen, Director of the Simms Initiatives). "Before his death, Simms saw his national reputation fall with the Confederacy he had vigorously supported and the slave regime that many in the North had come to despise."

as foreign phenomena to be assimilated somehow to prevailing white ideas of civilization and morality” (3).²

If, as Blum explains, “after the 1848-49 Gold Rush and the Civil War, [...]the nation’s arena for adventure and growth shifted to the West” (10), one may understand why popular fictions at the time focused on the “expanses of the land rather than of the sea” (Blum 10). This certainly contributed to make Simms’ maritime fiction fall into oblivion. Simms’ maritime fiction is indeed far from canonical today and is little known. Yet, it features important titles such as,

- “The Pirates and Palatines: A Legend of North Carolina” first published in *Magnolia* (1842)
- “The Pirate Hoard” serialized in *Graham’s Magazine* (1856)
- “The Lili and the Totem” (1850) and “The Cassique of Kiawah” (1859)
- His Collection of stories *Southward Ho!* (1854), including “The Pirates and Palatines” and “The Tale of Blackbeard”.
- **“The Brothers of the Coast” (1866)**, a recently-recovered manuscript that will constitute our topic of interest today.

In this unfinished tale in 9 chapters, Simms depicts the settlement of New Providence on the island of Nassau. On the island, the “protagonists range from commoners to pirates to merchants [tchent] to exiled nobles” (15) living together. The central plot, however, revolves around Edward Cavendish (nicknamed Steel Cap) who hopes here

²“All in all, Simms wrote more than a hundred literary pieces about Indians (poems, stories, essays and novels)” (Literary View xxix). Albert Keiser would even say that the treatment of the Indian by Simms was “the most balanced and most accurate in American Literature” (154-74). Quoting John Caldwell Guilds, Hagstette explains that Simms “wrote more about, thought more about, and almost certainly knew (and cared) more about the American Indian than any other man of Letters of the 19th Century” (Literary View, xxix). Charles Hudson contended that “Simms had experiences with Indians unmatched by any other man of letters of his time” (xxxviii). *An Early and Strong Sympathy: The Indian Writings of William Gilmore Simms*, William Gilmore Simms, South Caroliniana Library. Laura L. Mielke, in “Moving Encounters: Sympathy and the Indian Question in Antebellum Literature” (52), clearly acknowledges the importance granted to the Indian figure in Simms’ work: “in 1851, in a letter to ethnographer Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, Simms explains that ‘he has a personal and ethical interest in the subject matter (the Indian)’ (qtd. Page 52). Noting William Gilmore Simms’ special interest in Native Americans and their culture, Nakamura quotes Louise K. Barnett who observes that Native Americans, the other race, have been “figures for all generations of Americans to react to, first as curiosities and physical threats, later as objects of pity and guilt, and always as foreign phenomena to be assimilated somehow to prevailing white ideas of civilization and morality” (3). Simms, for instance, used the story of “Jocassée, A Cherokee Legend” (1836) as “representative of Southern history in his failed 1856 lecture tour;” thus, writes John D. Kerkering, “a personification that initially marked the absence of the Cherokee nation comes in Simms’ later writings, to mark the identity of a specific people, Southerners” (75). Such scholars emphasize Simms’ commitment to exploring non-typically “Southern” territories or figures, what Hagstette calls « the South’s non-English roots” in *Reading William Gilmore Simms: Essays of Introduction to the Author’s Canon*. In an essay collection titled *America and the sea* (1995), editor Haskell Springer explains that while “the vanished western frontier has been repeatedly so studied and invoked as to make it a hoary cliché, that other, and permanent, American frontier, the sea, hardly registers today in our cultural consciousness as setting, theme, metaphor, symbol, or powerful shaper of literary history” (ix). Springer, Haskell, ed. *America and the Sea: A Literary History*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995.

to accomplish a new society: a democratic, egalitarian republic that will transform the pirates into law-abiding enlightened citizens.

As a general rule, Simms' literary interest for the sea is often linked to a more specific interest for the practice of piracy.

Source/s of inspiration:

For one thing, as a young child, Simms was enamored of the stories of pirates, having been raised on the lore of the Carolina coast (Crosby 85). Crosby explains that “ Simms’s admiration of the pirate romance is shown to have extended over twenty years of his writing history, and one can see his plea to Evert Augustus Duyckinck in a letter dated September 1865: “Is it possible to procure me a History of the Pyrates, the 2 vol. 8 vo. Edition? This, with all my books, has been destroyed. It gives me great material, which I have long desired to work up into a standard romance of Pirate life and practice” (Letters 4:519). As such, we see Simms’s desire to root the pirate romance within—or against—recorded cultural memory” (111).

The socio-political context of the time certainly prompted a search for new heroes and an increased/renewed interest in the ocean or seascapes. “Captain Johnson's General History of the Pirates, which stands beside it as the other most important source on piracy [...] has been seen [. . .] as a source for libertarians seeking heroes” (My emphasis, Pennell 61). Late 1840s: explosive number of seafaring narratives and novels that had been produced in the previous decade, largely by sailors themselves” (Blum The View from the Masthead 175). Crosby notes an “American public’s desire for sensational pirate tales in the early nineteenth century” (85), noting that “Texts such as John Howison’s The Florida Pirate (1821), Maturin Murray Ballou’s Fanny Campbell, the Female Pirate Captain, A Tale of the Revolution (1845) and Roderick the Rover: or, the Spirit of the Wave (1847) and early predecessors like Susanna Rowson’s Slaves in Algiers (1793) and Royall Tyler’s The Algerine Captive: or the Life and Adventures of Doctor Updike Underhill: Six Years a Prisoner among the Algerines (1797) all take pirate culture as their central motif. Pirate tales abounded in periodical culture of the time as well.

The historical context might also justify this literary output: In his essay “Refuge Upon The Sea” in Early American Literature, Daniel Williams acknowledges that while many think the late seventeenth to early eighteenth centuries were the pinnacle of pirate culture, in fact “three thousand acts of piracy [were] committed against American ships in the Caribbean [after] the end of the war of 1812” (74). » (85-86).

Simms' sea-writing into oblivion:

Given William Gilmore Simms' longstanding interest for piracy—most notably his admiration for Johnson's *A General History of Pirates* and given what Kathleen Crosby has identified as the “American public's desire for sensational pirate tales in the early nineteenth century” (85), it is quite shocking to read, in *The Companion to Southern Literature's* chapter on piracy, that [SLIDE] “one has to look long and hard to find [pirates'] trace in books by the most revered Southern writers [...] **even Charleston's prolific romancier William Gilmore Simms (1806-1870) seem[s] not to have cared much about pirates**” (Hunt “Pirate” 647).³

*Obviously enough, William Gilmore Simms did care about pirates. It is true, however, that critics did not care so much about the sea and piracy as focal points in Simms's sea-writing, even when the ocean was the explicit subject matter of his texts. These scholars seem to have preferred to map the South (or Simms' concerns about the South) onto the sea. Thus, if the reference to pirates in Simms's manuscripts is certainly highly entertaining for the reader, these scholars claim that the world of piracy may be used as one of these guises used by Simms to work through his regional, cultural, and national anxieties. Literature, to use Crosby's terms here, becomes the primary way for Simms to capture, reflect on, or even question events in Southern history that many writers at the time were trying to articulate.*⁴

*Kathleen Crosby, for instance, reads Simms' pirate tales as allegories of what happened in land or on land in Simms' life. Pirates and “the landlocked landscapes of Simms's “The Pirate Hoard” or the haunted seascape of “The Pirates and the Palatines” (109) become “metonymic representations of [Simms'] cultural anxieties: fears of expansion and concerns of the role of nation beyond the boundaries of its own nationography and changing models of manhood” (Jowitt Culture of Piracy 112).” (Crosby 85).*⁵

³“Although they are the subjects of many well-known British works from Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) to R. Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883) and J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1904), one has to look long and hard to find their trace in books by the most revered Southern writers” (*The Companion to Southern Literature*, “Piracy” 647).

⁴Such interpretation should not come as a surprise to us, knowing that “[b]efore his death, Simms saw his national reputation fall with the Confederacy he had vigorously supported and the slave regime that many in the North had come to despise.” « As a professional writer, Simms would utilize the genre of the pirate story to craft a particularly southern story, one that established piracy as inherent to both the land and the sea of the Carolinas and one that recognized the complex ideological and national networks that piracy simultaneously challenged and constructed in the early national and antebellum periods » (Crosby 86).

⁵ In this reading:

Read in this light, one could thus argue that Simms had had enough of the Southern gentleman figure and was looking for a more masculine, more aggressive masculine type, one he could only trace in the pirate model. Indeed, at the end of the Civil War (and even before the Civil War, as early as the 1840s as a matter of fact), “the perception of the planter-cavalier [was] not quite up to the demands of a rapidly changing contemporary world” (Cobb). As Cobb remarks, the planter—the Southern hegemonic model of manhood—certainly had “admirable intentions,” yet those “were often neutralized by ineffectual behavior. The planter might be gracious hosts or gifted orators, but for all their talk of honor and pride, they were often of little use in a real crisis” (*Away Down South*). Such was indeed the view defended by Simms himself. “In disastrous periods,” Simms complained that planters “fold their arms, in stupid despair.” The indecisive planter was, “but a latter-day embodiment of

In their critical introduction to the manuscript, Nicholas G. Meriwether and David W. Newton offer a similar landlocked or Southern-bound interpretation of Simms' sea-writing. Simms, they remind us, is "wrestling with issues he and the defeated South faced in the aftermath of the Civil War economic and social collapse and the triumph of Northern-isms".⁶ Read in this light, the community of New Providence would thus actually serve the greater function as a metaphor for Southern issues troubling

Shakespeare's Hamlet, "whose native hue of resolution/Was sicklied o'er by the pale cast of thought" (Simms, qtd. in Cobb). Such comments implicated Simms in a cultural and social discourse that came to identify the Southern gentleman as the embodiment of ineffectual manhood. As a man of letters, however, Simms's own status as man and author was increasingly made problematic (Fennessy 63). Fennessy remarks that, during the nineteenth century, "women constituted an increasing percentage of American authors" and "Simms too felt that this was one of the many problems threatening the future of Southern letters" (63). As a matter of fact, "the literary profession did not offer much promise for men" of letters, since "in the Southern states, the outward-looking masculine ideals of honor and public reputation often came into conflict with the more introspective ideals of sensibility and imagination valued by literary men. A life of thought and intellectual labor also made it difficult for Southern writers to live up to the patriarchal ideals of mastery" (Fennessy 63-64). Fennessy adds that « Southern men who dedicated a large portion of their lives to writing often felt that their literary achievements were unappreciated by family, friends, and southerners generally » (64). In his Letters, Simms often complained that the struggling periodicals in his region were forced by a lack of solvent subscribers and worthy contributors to accept submissions "furnished by young Misses from their school exercises, and young Masters when they first begin to feel the startling sensations of the tender passions" (1:197, qtd. In Fennessy 60). At a time between 1830 and 1860 when Southern literature as American literature gradually became Southern literature as separatist literature, insisting on regional distinctiveness and positing that the idea of the South as a nation with a nation [...] gave even greater cultural weight to the author in the South". "At the same time that literature was gaining in cultural significance, notions of gender were becoming polarized, with sentiment and imagination increasingly gendered as feminine [...] Concerns over the place of literary men in the South were linked to concerns about mastery, which also necessarily reflected concerns about masculinity and the emotions it was proper for a white southern man to express" (Fennessy 64).

In this context, the pirate-figure would be offered as a remasculinized alternative in a world deprived of effective models of masculinity. Portrayals of pirates have often associated their aggression with unruly masculinity ill-suited to domestic spheres (The Culture of Piracy 1580-1630, 141, Claire Jowitt). Consequently, one could say that piracy constitutes the perfect outlet for reinvigorated masculinity. Indeed, pirates, Rediker explains, "constructed a social world where they had "the choice in themselves"" (Between the Devil 285). Pirates, Rediker continues, "constructed a culture of masterless men" (285) and used "the sea to distance themselves from the powers of the state", the church, the family, and disciplinary labor (Between the Devil 286). The symbols of piracy, like the adoption of the Jolly Roger as the pirates' truly national symbol, signified the rejection of any national allegiance marks. As Kuhn explains, "Some golden age pirates might have indeed 'no longer thought of themselves as English or Dutch or French but as pirates," and "as people without a nation." (qtd. in Life Under the Jolly Roger 59).

Read in this way, one could easily understand Simms' desire to embrace the pirate community, defined by Rediker as "the enemy of all nations", because himself felt that, as a Southerner, he was the enemy of the new nation. It might be no surprise that the pirate model was adopted by Simms at times when "between 1830 and 1860, Southern literature as American literature gradually became southern literature as separatist literature, insisting on regional distinctiveness and positing the idea of the South as a nation within a nation" (Fennessy 64).⁶As a matter of fact, the "empire" is never far in *The Brothers of the Coast*, suggesting that, indeed, Nassau, and the King's Tavern, can be read as crucial sites of conflict between formal articulations of power and alternative expressions of "being political that violate such neat containable models" (Drysdale online). (cf. Crosby page 109-110). As Drysdale recognizes, "the sea is also a space over which colonial and territorial lines are inscribed" (313). As such, "Oceanic fiction offers a lens through which we might examine how the nation produces itself in parts through its efforts to contain more seaborne models of community, intimacy, and belonging" (Drysdale 314). This paper, therefore, will reveal how *The Brothers of the Coast* traces the state's ability to appropriate the potential of discrepant forms of political community in order to reify its own authority on the insurgent space of the sea.

*Simms at the time.*⁷ *Fennessy* suggests quite as much, when arguing that pirates, like Indians, paved the way to explore the emotional scenery of Southerners' imaginative worlds (*Fennessy* 80).⁸

The neglect of attention for Simms' treatment of the seascape is better understood, I believe, if put into the context of a symptom that Margaret Cohen (in an article published in PMLA) names "hydrophobia". For Cohen and her fellow oceanic studies fellows⁹, this hydrophobia or the reluctance to look at the sea would explain why scholars (like Hunt in the Companion to Southern Lit) have, quite simply and logically so, forgotten the sea. This symptom, she claims, is pervasive in American Literature. She explains that literary scholars—these armchairs sailors, as she calls them (657)—have kept their eyes "fixed on land" or "mapped the land onto the sea" (657) even when the ocean was the explicit subject matter of these texts.¹⁰ As a consequence, these have reduced the ocean in American literature to a mere metaphor for landlocked histories and practices. Somewhere along the way, Cohen explains, (SLIDE) *Moby-Dick*, for instance, stopped being about sailors and became a novel about factory laborers (657-58).¹¹ In doing so, these scholars have feared to acknowledge the sea as an independent space productive of unique models of community and belonging.¹²

⁷ "Simms's geographic spaces reverberate with hauntings that serve to mark moments of intellectual, personal, and historical disconnect, thereby voicing the disjunctive nature of antebellum southern spaces" (Crosby iii).

⁸ Not so surprising if we remember what Michael O'Brien said when arguing that Southerners live in more than their geographical places—they also conjectured worlds that imperfectly (or indirectly) reflected the social reality of the American South (21, qtd. In *Fennessy* 80).

⁹ "Oceanic Studies": a scholarly focus that shifts away from "methodologies and frameworks imported from existing discourses" toward one that "takes the sea as a proprioceptive point of inquiry." For a discussion of oceanic studies and maritime literature, see Hester Blum, *The View from the Masthead: Maritime Imagination and Antebellum Sea Narratives* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008) and Jason Berger, *Antebellum at Sea: Maritime Fantasies in Nineteenth-Century America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012) to start. Hester Blum, in the perspective of oceanic studies, suggests a focus on the sailors "as an alternative form of community to the hierarchical constructions of belonging that characterize the transatlantic colonial nation" (Drysdale 316-7). Sailors as a community may "represent the potential for transformation from below and the possibility of an epistemological reconfiguration of the nation—a dramatic restructuring of democratic governance" (318). "Acknowledging the sailor," she writes: "Allows us to perceive, analyze, and deploy aspects of the history, literature, and culture of the oceanic world that might otherwise be rendered obscure and abstract" (*The Prospect of Oceanic Studies* 671).

¹⁰ The syndrome is part of a pervasive twentieth-century attitude that the photographer and theorist Allan Sekula has called "forgetting the sea" (658).

¹¹ Cohen joins scholars like Paul Gilroy, Hester Blum, and Iain Chambers in recovering the sea as a crucial literary and historical context and building a new methodology that "takes the sea as its proprioceptive point of inquiry" (Blum 671). "Oceanic Studies," as Blum names it, would discard the nation as the basic unit of literary analysis in favor of the uncontainable currents of the sea—watery channels that link cultures and peoples and undermine the putatively discrete categories of nation and state. (Qtd. in <https://davidjdrysdale.wordpress.com/2013/12/05/the-insurgent-sea-piracy-and-the-nation-in-antebellum-american-literature/>)

¹² Daniel Defoe's *The Life and Strange, Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner* was read as the memoirs of a capitalist homo economicus or of a colonizer settling new territories; the ship's crew on the Pequod in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* offered an image of factory labor; and Joseph Conrad's portrait of an inexperienced commander in "The Secret Sharer" limned a narcissist ripe for a Freudian case study.

If we do not want to become hydrophobic or terracentric (to re-cast a term quoted by Marcus Rediker), [SLIDE] “ocean reading”, according to Cohen, “must resist artificially imposed borders and inscriptions” and discard the nation as a primary lens for critical analysis¹³ (qtd. in Drysdale 314). Instead, readers should envision the seaborne models of community—not as bounded, fixed, and permanent—but in terms of flows, fluids, in terms of movement (Adey 2006, 77).¹⁴ Herein lies the potential for transformation from below and for epistemological reconfiguration of the nation.¹⁵

Today, in the wake of the research led by these oceanic scholars, I will attempt to keep our eyes on the ocean. In this exercise (and instead of reading “The Brothers of the Coast” as a metaphor for the Southern issues troubling Simms at the time) I will approach Nassau and its community of pirates as an insurgent space (a term coined by this field of research), one which defies landlocked representational patterns. Read in this light, the sea, as we will show, evokes “the laboratory [laboreuteuri] of another modernity” (Chambers, in Drysdale 313).¹⁶

To keep our gaze fixed on the sea is certainly what Simms had in mind when he composed **the opening pages of his novel**. [SLIDE] From the opening paragraphs, readers must position themselves “above the seascapes and landscapes of the [...] islands [. . .],¹⁷ because the narrator incites the readers to “command the wings of any one of these great white sea birds” (34). He invites them to “pursu[e] [their] objects of vision, from [their] ideal height,” to “follow these thousand avenues of sea” (35) and to “board one of these vessels” (35).

As we read on, Simms is calling us to consider the islands of the Bahamas, the vessels beneath our eyes (remember we are the great white seabird), and Nassau on

¹³ Simms seeks to establish the sea “as a proprioceptive point of inquiry” (Blum 671).

¹⁴ Hester Blum, “The Prospect of Oceanic Studies,” *PMLA* 125 (2010): 671. The rewards to be reaped are numerous, including: “One shift, for example, is to emphasize the fascination with high-risk yet potentially productive spaces at the edge of the dynamic present, where knowledge is expanding but incomplete: one of the defining chronotopes (to use Mikhail Bakhtin’s term) of Western modernity” (Cohen 660).

¹⁵ This recent body of scholarship seeks to “shift away from “methodologies and frameworks imported from existing discourses”. Alex Farquarson, Martin Clark, *Aquatopia: The Imaginary of the Ocean Deep*, Nottingham Contemporary, 2013. For Rediker, in a terracentric view, “Seascapes, however, are not seascapes at all, but depictions of the exterior surface of the ocean seen from dry land or an oceangoing vessel; their element is not aquatic, but terrestrial and aerial.” (in Farquarson 6). Such scholars have remained, to re-cast a term used by Marcus Rediker, “terracentric”, a word that serves to describe how a “land-based worldview renders the ocean, as an historical arena, obscure.” (Farquarson 6).

¹⁶ The sea, according to Iain Chambers, evokes “the laboratory of another modernity” where the seaborne models of community should be envisioned as “an insurgent space,” one that “violates and defies representational schemas through its liquidity, atemporality, and sheer uncontainability” (Drysdale 313). As a metaphor for a trans-national body politic, the hydra evokes the uncontainableness of an emerging working-class consciousness that cut across divisions of race and culture and threatened the structure of Euroamerican imperial power by defying the rigid hierarchies and spatial organizations upon which it depended. Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, (2000), p.4.

¹⁷ It is a description that moves the narrative from grounded space to imaginative space, one in which we can belie the constrictions that biologically define us and intellectually interrogate other ways of being” (Crosby 109-110).

their “own terms” (Blum 671).¹⁸ This site becomes a *free space* par excellence and the origins of the pirates indicate the transnational and cross-racial makeup of the New Providence settlement. [SLIDE] Simms introduces a multiethnic and multinational crew, “a medley” to quote the narrator: “there were a few groups of English and French, some Irish, and occasionally a family of Portuguese or Spanish. [. . .] The dashing English buccaneer, the French corsair, the Spanish or Portuguese picaroon, the Dutch filibustier were in the ascendant” (38).

Presented as a “reunion of discordant elements” (81), these men and women have very little regard, if any, for international boundaries and demarcations.¹⁹ [SLIDE] We read that these are “Men of broken fortunes and attainted blood, from Europe, [who] were here united to maintain a monotonous existence, glad to find repose from the strifes of European society or politics, and escape from the dangers which they had incurred in the civil wars of their several countries [. . .] this or that banished noble, the son of a lord or earl or duke, and possibly his lordship himself, only too happy, if let alone when identified” (37-38).²⁰

If the sea (to use Drysdale’s expression) “renders (artificially discrete) categories such as “nation” obsolete,²¹ we understand that these pirates’ loyalty lays not with any particular nation but with one another as self-identified “common enemies of all mankind” (Rediker, *Villains of All Nations* 26). Nassau appears here as a place of lawlessness. In this society, “a wild abiding place”, there is no understanding of the codes and conventions of civil society: “there was no law in this island. There was no municipality. The population lived mostly in violation of the law” (37).²² This community appears as what Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker call “hydrarchy,” an alternative model of social order and democratic governance that transcends categories of race and nation (Drysdale 316)²³.

¹⁸To keep the gaze and the eyes fixed on the sea = to become fixed on this “theater where the vast forces of nature not only rule human history but are profoundly shaped by it as well” (Cohen 658). Blum, “The Prospect of Oceanic Studies,” *PMLA* 125 (2010): 671.

¹⁹ It is what Linebaugh and Rediker identify as the figure of the hydra, which suggests a “decidedly non-national, often extraterritorial population that had little regard for international boundaries and demarcations” (in Drysdale 317).

²⁰This multinational, multiethnic crew is truly a non-national extraterritorial population.

²¹Crucially, this community of sailors represents the possibility of an epistemological reconfiguration of the very idea of “nation” (Drysdale 318). Drysdale continues : « this fluid matrix interrupts and interrogates the facile evolutions of a linear mapping, disciplined by the landlocked desires of unilateral progress and a homogeneous modernity » (qtd. In *Maritime Criticism* 681).

²² Example here of “Piracy as seen as a threatening example of democracy [that could] run amok, its threat located not simply in its violence or economic cost but also in radical politics that Melville described as “riotocracy”—a government “neither Grecian, nor Roman, nor American . . . which gloried in having no law but lawlessness” (The Encantadas 149).” (site Drysdale)

²³Rüdiger Haude calls it “the unlimited, unpredictable space, the negation of everything ‘national.’” Particularly important to this reconfiguration is Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker’s book *The Many-Headed Hydra*. This hydra evokes the uncontrollable nature of an emerging working-class consciousness that cut across divisions of

In this place divested of authority and where disorder has replaced nationhood, even **the borders of gender, it seems, can be transgressed and reframed.** The community of pirates is a highly fluid space of heterogeneity, one that generates new possibilities for females, beyond the limitations established by European models. Gender models appear to be turned upside down in Nassau. Levasseur, the French merchant, traffics with pirates for his own profits. Yet, it is in his wife's home—turned into a social and culture center—that economic and cultural transactions prevail.²⁴ Piracy affords “a liminal space, one where the borders of gender, conventionality, can be transgressed” (Crosby 98).

If this a-national group clearly expresses a desire to live outside the parameters of social and gender conventions, it is also, Simms suggests, **a space that cannot and should not be possessed or contained, one in which even “names” cannot be pinned down.**²⁵ [SLIDE] As a matter of fact, the elusion/absence of names, “the play of image over substance, appearance versus reality, is a constant theme in the text, highlighted by the prominence of masks, (nick)names, roles, and identities” (Meriwether 26). As you can read on the slide behind me, Steel Cap remarks that “there is a mystery in all these several names which we cannot yet fathom” (60). (Chapter 2: “Steel Cap can't be his real name. It's a shy! » which prompts the response, “And who's got a real name among all these people here?” (42).)

Severed from race and nation, these men, we can argue, are also severed from historical record/fashioning. They resist the very categories of identity and social construction (based on heritage, family prestige, or social class). Tellingly enough, in Nassau, pirates might as well be regarded as counterfeit gentlemen who

race and culture and threatened the structure of Euroamerican imperial power by defying the rigid hierarchies and spatial organizations upon which it depended.

²⁴“The liminality of the island generates new possibilities for females, beyond the limitations established by European models” (Crosby 113). For instance, the waitress at the tavern, Cicily, an orphan of seventeen, is described as “one of those naturally gifted creatures who grow superior to their circumstances, who grow superior to that which is called education; who gather by absorption; who hear nothing without sifting and solving it, as by a sense of natural chemistry” (45). Appropriately, it will be Cicily who will note the Danes' attempt to steal Steel Cap's keys so as to pillage his home, and it is she that will run “in the most direct route to the somber dwelling known as the castle of the mysterious Steel Cap” to warn him (51)” (Crosby 112-113). Simms's Bahamian pirate sphere illustrates a domestic piracy where pirates and their mates revert to traditional modes of male-female relationships, where the domestic is aligned with home and hearth, and female agency seemingly aligns with male agency, a representative space uncommon in Simms's oeuvre (Drysdale). In a similar manner, Barney Britton is a landlord who has lost a leg in battle. Yet, and as Crosby notes, “Barney's loss of power is juxtaposed with his wife's seeming potency: she ‘was quite as shrewd and a shade or two more shrewdish’ says the narrator (45)” (113). Here the woman wields as much financial prowess as the man.

²⁵After all, in the words of William Boelhower, the sea itself “leaves no traces, and has no place, names, towns, or dwelling spaces: it cannot be possessed” (92). It is “fundamentally a space of dispersion, conjunction, distribution, contingency, heterogeneity, and of intersecting and stratified lines and images—in short, a field of strategic possibilities in which the Ocean order holds all together in a common but highly fluid space” (92–93, qtd. in Crosby 87).

have chosen artificially constructed identities over the models and forms provided by national models of belonging (Drysdale 333).²⁶

Nassau is indeed a “fluid matrix” in which pirates can step in and out of conventional labels.²⁷ [SLIDE] At these parties, “there were bold privateers, not calling themselves pirates, who bore commissions of the state, which might be forged, or be bought with money, from varied secretaries and governors, if not of the Crown itself!” (81). Here, we read, “It was well understood that these persons were pirates but, here, at the house of Madame Le Vasseur, they were received as gentlemen, and by the way, they were much more tenacious of their behavior as gentlemen, though just from the high seas” (82).

Simms here deploys an insurgent strategy: the fluidity or liquidity of the seascape is matched onto the liquidity and fluidity of identities. This community, like the sea itself, will not be contained or disciplined by the artificially imposed borders of identities and names (Drysdale 316).²⁸ This uncontainability compels the reader to engage in a reading practice which highlights uncertainty at the expense of stability and interrogates any facile delineation of who is who on the island: outlaw/gentleman; powerful/powerless; master/mastered; hegemonic/non-hegemonic.²⁹ Simms here opens an alternative social order, one that privileges heterogeneity, fluidity, ambiguity and doubt in place of the comforting, familiar frameworks of place, nation, and identity.³⁰

Admittedly, one could argue that the narrative also reveals the exiled British nobleman, Steel Cap’s attempt **to marshal this community into a new nation-state ideological form**.³¹ In this sense also, the seascape becomes the laboratory of another modernity.³²

²⁶ In Nassau, assessing pirates in terms of law versus lawlessness is an elusive enterprise.

²⁷ We read that during Madame Le Vasseur’s evenings, Mr. LeVasseur “found his markets and his profits from the pirates, but he was no pirate himself” (79).

²⁸ Simms clearly calls for a reading of this community as a nation turned upside down, one marked by fluidity, movement, and non-linear hierarchy. Crosby, “‘The Brothers of the Coast’ proffers a new place of settlement, one established by a coterie of individuals who co-exist on a plane of alternative social order, embodying a new world counter-construction of government” (112).

The ship and communities of sailors, pirates... must be read as a site in which one could find “the world turned upside down” (Rediker 2004, 61). The ship is where we find the structures of landed power contested and subverted “a place to which and in which the ideas and practices of revolutionaries... escaped, reformed, circulated, and persisted” (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000, 144-145).

²⁹ “a fluid matrix” which “interrupts and interrogates the facile evaluations of a linear mapping disciplined by the landlocked desires of unilateral progress and homogeneous modernity” (Chambers, “Maritime Criticism” 681).

³⁰ Nassau can certainly be read as “a space where national boundaries and landed aristocracies become effaced, where former politicians, banished nobles, and lost souls can recreate themselves” (Crosby 111).

³¹ According to this reading, if Simms’ vision of New Providence is that of a society divorced from history and traditions, one could argue that Simms could not distance his vision from and nation-state building. “While the sea itself may offer a model for an insurgent epistemological shift away from categories of the nation-state, it nevertheless remains a space that is always subject to inscription and organization by nation and capital. Oceanic fiction, through the “Brothers of the Coast”, may offer a lens through which we might examine how the nation produces itself in part through its efforts to contain more seaborne models of community, intimacy, and belonging” (Drysdale 314). Such reading, promoting »The Brothers of the Coast « as a product of hydrophobia itself, would make sense, since it has been recognized that pirates could be used as flexible figures to articulate

Steel Cap's ideology, however, is clearly doomed from the beginning. **Geraldine, Steel Cap's companion (one of these shrewd women), reveals the discrepancies between the utopian language of citizenship proposed by Steel Cap and the reality of political subjectivity.** Steel Cap's utopia is presented as "a sort of madness" (54)ⁱ and Steel Cap's naïve dreams of homogeneity (versus fluidity) as **anachronistic and abnormal** in this setting. [SLIDE] **"Steel Cap's castle is a mausoleum of lost nobility (where aging mirrors mock him and Geraldine with a faded reflection of their former status),** which is described in a telling passage:

A lute in a corner, a few books upon tables, indicated, or would seem to indicate, unwonted taste for such a region; and yet the *anomalies* are not infrequent which require us to recognize the assassin in the sentimentalist, the midnight burglar occasionally in the guitar or flute player" (52).³³

Steel Cap may indeed dream that he will be able to [SLIDE] bring the people of the island together "under an authority" and hopes that he "shall subdue these Brothers of the Coast to meekness, to that gentleness and simplicity of the heart, which shall bend their hard and iron nature" into "an empire of unmixed freedom" (59-60). Simms, however, reminds us that the pirate is a true natural (*or prejuridical man*), one existing before politics.³⁴ The descriptions of pirates further emphasize this reality, as the narrator regularly chooses to identify these pirates with other figures who stand just beyond the limits of political culture, most notably animals.

SLIDE: The opening paragraphs, for instance, "mak[e] pirates appear no different than sharks or eagles" (Meriwether 19). Pirates are repeatedly compared to "birds of prey" (37), as 'will those great sea birds whom we behold, to take their flight, seeking other prey, by the dawn of another morning" (37).³⁵ The

discourses about the nation. One could argue that there is even a crucial link between pirate fiction and nation building. Read in this way, "pirate literature helps construct its community of readers in part through his censure of such violations of national boundaries and interpersonal intimacies" (Drysdale site).

³² New Providence is "a settlement on the cusp of emerging into a society". Driving the plot are the heretical doctrines of Steel Cap, former pirate, and Caraccioli, his friend, a priest, who both dream of accomplishing "a democratic, egalitarian republic that will transform the pirates into law-abiding enlightened citizens", turning Nassau into "an independent socialist utopia" (15). One could argue that Simms was reaching the end of his career and was simply (?) trying "to recoup his fortunes [...] by writing tales and romances". For this reason, and "recalling the success with the subject of piracy in *The Cassique of Kiawah*, [this is why] he wrote over 170 pages of a pirate romance still in manuscript, "The Brothers of the Coast" (Wimsatt 219).

³³ If we accept the definition that "Politics is the art of associating (consociandi) men for the purpose of establishing, cultivating, and conserving social life among them" (Athusius 12), Simms implies that the pirate will never be disciplined into this "necro citizenship" to recast the term proposed by Russ Castronovo. Necro citizenship (as opposed to Republic citizenship) "idealizes a body politic characterized by passivity as well as homogeneity and historical amnesia" (Drysdale 329). Geraldine reminds him that his dreams "would emancipate [man] from all the restraints of law and the teaching of all the ages and peoples for a thousand years" (54).

³⁴Johannes Althusius, *The Politics of Johannes Althusius*, trans. With intro. By Frederick Caurey (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).

³⁵Episode of the parrot, page 54. Reductive parallel between the pirates who populated the seas and their animal counterparts, the predators that form a natural part of any ecosystem" (*The Devil* 19).

narrator also repeatedly compares one of the pirates, Dane, to an animal, making him say “I am a strong fellow myself—strong as a horse” (72). He is a true natural man, one existing before politics. The narrator notes that “Supper was announced! Enough of suppers! People will eat! They are the same animals all over the world, and we do not find that they change their habits much when they run beyond the seas, or that there is much novelty in any of the performances, whatever the company, at the discussion of the creature confronts” (88).

Familiar with pirates’ novels,³⁶ Simms was also obviously familiar with “the pleasures of individual freedom, defined over and against state control [which] became unleashed in the seafaring adventures that became popular in the 1830s and 1840s, specifically in depictions of smuggling and piracy, and other kind of illicit trade” (Celikkol 43).³⁷ In *The Culture of Piracy*, Claire Jowitt had demonstrated to what extent the often marginal and unruly figure of the pirate could be flexible figures served to comment on and reinforce English nationalism, international relations, and contemporary politics. Pirate literature could thus become an imaginative space through which authors contested and sometimes disciplined radical forms of community that challenged and violated the discourse of the American nation-state. Simms in *The Brothers of the Coast*, I believe, refuses to discipline the pirate. By contrast and asking us to consider the seascape on its own terms, he “urges the reader to focus on the “ragged edges” of the sea—on those figures who speak, write, and act in and from the margins of officially historical discourse”. In doing so, Simms “offers an insurgent practice reading that intervenes against the totalizing, fixing, bounding narratives of being an American in the nineteenth century” (Drysdale 335).

³⁶“In September of 1865, after Sherman’s army had destroyed Woodlands, including Simms’ library, ‘which numbered some 10,700 volumes’ (Letters IV, 501), Simms wrote Duyckinck asking if he could procure [him] a History of the Pyrates ... [which], with all my books, has been destroyed ... It gives me great material, which I have long desired to work up into a standard romance of Pirate life and practice” (Letters IV, 519). Because he requested the volume specifically for work on a new romance entitled “The Brothers of the Coast,” it is reasonable to assume that he drew from the “History of Pyrates” for his colorful and lively description of the pirates in *Cassique*” (56-57).

³⁷The pirate “signified the triumph of rebellion, the end of discipline and antiauthoritarian hedonism” (Celikkol 43). Pirate literature offered American writers and readers an imaginative space through which they contested and sometimes disciplined radical forms of community that challenged and violated the emerging discourse of the American nation-state. In *The Culture of Piracy*, Claire Jowitt has already demonstrated to what extent the often marginal and unruly figure of the pirate can be flexible figures served to comment on English nationalism, international relations, and contemporary politics. She considers the ways in which piracy can, sometimes in surprising and resourceful ways, overlap and connect with, rather than simply challenge, some of the foundations underpinning Renaissance orthodoxies-absolutism, patriarchy, hierarchy of birth, and the superiority of Europeans and the Christian religion over other peoples and belief systems.

Notes

Pirates themselves are known for their defiance of rigid, self-contained models:

a Marxist history of piracy. Historian Marcus Rediker portrays a Manichaean world of pirates versus navies, each waging war against the other across the West Indies. Yet even more potent for him than images of pirates at war were those of the pirate communities that flourished in the myriad islands of the Caribbean. He writes of a so-called pirate democracy, an inverse of the rigid class structures prevailing in their native countries, where pirates formed their own social and even legal contracts and reveled in the freedom of being cut off from their homelands. "Pirates," says Rediker, "constructed that world in defiant contradistinction to the ways of the world they left behind, in particular to its salient figures of power, the merchant captain and the royal official, and to the system of authority those figures represented and enforced."²¹ It is a theme to which Rediker returns repeatedly. More recently, he wrote of a "dialectic of violence between the pirates and the nation-state" in which "pirates had to be exterminated for a new trade to flourish."²² Without

The figure of the hydra suggests a decidedly nonnational, often extraterritorial population that had little regard for international boundaries and demarcations. As a metaphor for a transnational body politic, the hydra evokes the uncontainable nature of an emerging working-class consciousness that cut across divisions of race and culture and threatened the structure of Euroamerican imperial power by defying the rigid hierarchies and spatial organizations upon which it depended. By confining together groups of disaffected and marginalized sailors, indentured servants, and slaves, transoceanic trade offered a breeding ground for a nascent proletarian consciousness.⁹

⁸ Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), p. 4. Donald E. Pease has already linked Linebaugh and Rediker's work to Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1855) (see Pease, "The Extraterritoriality of the Literature for Our Planet," *ESQ* 50 [2004], 177–221).

⁹ See Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, pp. 168–69. Paul A. Gilje critiques Linebaugh and Rediker's understanding of sailor society as a nascent class-consciousness: "Sailors were not a proletariat in the making, nor were they a peculiar

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ⁱ Geraldine, Edward Cavendish's companion voices it in these words:

“you dream dreams which will sink your vessel. You would change the world would you, with your philosophies. You think man may become a perfect creature under your wise administration. You would emancipate him from all the restraints of law and the teaching of all the ages and peoples for a thousand years. You ascribe all his vices and misfortunes to the vice of authority, the tyranny of rules, wicked counsellors and stupid laws. And you would persuade the lawless men who gather here, to become virtuous under your wiser maxims. You would convert these thousand islands into a commonwealth, and realize every fancy or your Platos and Sidneys [...] Such followers you find here will sooner turn you into a pirate, than you turn them into saintly citizens” (54-55)

Geraldine, in this passage, reveals the discrepancies between the utopian language of citizenship proposed by Steel Cap and the reality of political subjectivity. Steel Cap's utopia is a “a sort of madness” (54) and Steel Cap compared to an infantile or naïve citizen. This infantile citizen, in the words of Lauren Berlant, “is potentially a subversive figure whose “stubborn naiveté gives her/him enormous power to unsettle, expose, and reframe the machinery of social life” (29).

Soon, however, from infantile citizen, Steel Cap lapses into what Russ Castronovo calls “necro citizenship”, one that “idealizes a body politic characterized by passivity as well as homogeneity and historical amnesia” (Drysdale 329). Geraldine reminds him that his dreams “would emancipate [man] from all the restraints of law and the teaching of all the ages and peoples for a thousand years” (54). Soon, however, Steel Cap's ideal is presented, in this setting, as anachronistic and abnormal: Cap's castle is a mausoleum of lost nobility, where aging mirrors mock him and Geraldine with a faded reflection of their former status, which is described in a telling passage:

A lute in a corner, a few books upon tables, indicated, or would seem to indicate, unwonted taste for such a region; and yet the anomalies are not infrequent which require us to recognize the assassin in the sentimentalist, the midnight burglar occasionally in the guitar or flute player” (52) qtd page 23-24.

Steel Cap's philosophy, based on “socialistic views of morals and religion” (59), depends on the reasoning that there is “absurdity [in the] assumption of equality,” since Steel Cap argues that ‘I see no such equality among men, as the argument assumes. I see nothing but inequalities everywhere [. ..] there is no classing them.