

# Representation of Pirate Lives in the Selective Narratives of Eighteenth Century

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## Abstract

Since the "Golden Age of Piracy," roughly from 1690 to 1730, pirates have played an important role in the cultural imagination. The English word 'Pirate' is derived from Latin 'Pirata' (sea-robber). Overtime it came to be used as anyone who is operational in brigandry on land or sea. Pirates were described as 'hostis humani generis' (enemies of mankind).

**Keywords:** Pirate, Buccaneer, Privateer, Corsair, Hierarchy, Egalitarian Society, Libertalia

## History of the Pirates -

Pirates had earned many names among nations. The English word 'pirate' is derived from the Latin word Pirata refers to anyone who engages in robbery or brigandry on land or sea. Piracy or pirating is dated back to the times of Marius und Sylla where certain pirates broke out from Cecilia, a country of Asia Minor, situated in the east coast of the Mediterranean.

Pirates were mostly men in their twenties and they came from a maritime background. Almost all pirates had been working in a seafaring occupation for several years before turning to piracy. They were unmarried and they came from the lowest strata of the society. Though there were exceptions among them as some were men of thirties or forties as well as teenagers and few of them were could be called gentlemen.

In the third century, pirate living in the western Peninsula, constantly raiding the Adriatic Sea causing conflicts with the Roman republic till 229 B.C. During first century B.C pirates from the Anatolian coast treating commerce of the Roman Empire in the eastern Mediterranean.

In 75 B.C on a voyage, Julius Caesar was taken captive by the Cecilian pirates in the hope of receiving a great sum of value. At times the notoriety of the pirates had become so evident that the historians have called as the 'golden age of piracy'.

Though it is difficult to trace the exact timeline of the golden age of piracy. To some, the golden age lasting from Elizabethan age to the Eighteenth century; to others it lasted from 1714 to 1726, encompassing great Atlantic to Indian Ocean piracy when the most notorious pirates such as captain Blackbeard and Bartholomew Robert's were active.

## Different name, same identity -

Pirates through times were called by many names such as Buccaneer, privateer, boot-loaders, corsairs. Privateer's share operational similarities with pirates such as invading commercial cargo at sea. They are privately owned vessels licensed by the state to set out with specific intention of seizing enemy property on the high sea. On accession if a privateer exceeded the terms of its commission and turned to piracy at that time it became morally and legally a pirate and was no longer considered a privateer.

Buccaneer, synonymous with the term pirate, also share certain similarities with them. Though they originally soldier, seamen and hunters dedicated to attack vessels on sea as well as on land. The very first buccaneer company grew from the bands of French settlers on Tortuga, forced to turn to armed defence in response to Spanish attempts to extirpate them.

In the second quarter of the Seventeenth century years later the English settlement of Jamaica in 1655 colonial governments especially the English and French recognised the usefulness of the buccaneers in order to attack on Spanish vessels as well as to safeguard their colonies against their enemies. With the help of the settlement policies, French government of Tortuga and the English government of Jamaica, regularly issued 'Letters of Marque' to all those buccaneer companies making them legitimate belligerents in the war against Spain. Oftentimes when no legitimate commission issued 'Letters of Marque' to them, they used forged or expired documents to continue their expeditions, as one of them wrote- "*this commission me had purchased - for this we were resolved to seek our fortunes*".

### **Portrayal of pirates in literature -**

During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth century, pirates were described as hostis humani generis or enemies of mankind. Portraying them as savage beasts disjointed from humanity. At that time laws passed that allowed those who captured pirates and if the captors cannot wait for the judge, justice may be done upon them by the captors which resulting the pirates had to lose the right of a trial as their image lose its humanity. With the rise of the newspaper and coffee houses the discussion of piracy is apparent in variety of written sources published. The public sphere contained all these published materials and drawn conclusions on the popular images of pirates through such published documents.

Defoe's 1719 novel Robinson Crusoe tells the story of a pirate attack and how the protagonist Robinson Crusoe taken captive by the pirates and remained a slave for two years until he manages to escape with the help a young morisco boy named Xury. Thus, Defoe had shown the then issues regarding piracy or the pirate. Defoe's portrayal of pirates as enemies of trade and essentially social order allowed for later writers to use pirate as a symbol of radical economic individualism.

According to W.R. Owens, public campaigns were done to raise funds to ransom captives were often on a large scale - an indication of the widespread public concern about the issue".

Another notable text which reflects the lives of the pirates, in Jonathan Swift's 1726 satirical adventurous novel. In the third part of this novel, Swift used pirate attacks to make an economic criticism about the Dutch. In this third part, the protagonist and his men were being pursued and ultimately captured by the Japanese pirates and their Dutch advisers. By placing Dutch to the Japanese pirates Swift politically condemns the Dutch while also offering a criticism of the privileged economic relations the Dutch had with the Japanese in the early Eighteenth century.

### **Depiction of Pirate society -**

Pirate society often being portrayed as an alternative to the society of the civilised. The structure of the society was egalitarian; they have introduced voting system to choose their captain or leader when it comes to important matters. The society believes in a community where each one of them having equal rights and having equal rights to express their opinion when it comes to crucial matters. They believe every man is born free and have equal rights to support him as to the air he respired. They called their society 'Libertalia: where all are equal regardless of race or nationality and the slavery was abolished. They invite men who have been victims in the hands of the bourgeois or men from the lower strata of the society.

This egalitarian image of the pirate society had shifted as numerous publications on pirate history or fictional stories related to pirate communities and their lives described differently. One of the modern approaches had been done by Patrick Pingle in 1953 - *Jolly Roger: The Story of the Great Age of Piracy*, which emanates the social and professional background of pirates and their social and government structure of their ships and characters. Pingle asserts that pirates were conservative and imitative and they lack discipline which in a way contrasting the prior image of pirates and their communities in their earlier centuries.

B.B. Burg asserts that pirates hired a style of command which contrary to the egalitarian representations of their lives. It can be viewed that those who were turning to piracy were from a dissenting community and had fallen victims in the hands of the hierarchy.

Numerous opinions, published materials and with the dominant views of the public sphere the image of the pirates varied significantly. To conclude, it can be said that there are various opinions about the pirates whether they were the 'hostis humani generis' or heroes to certain peoples of the then society but to a general view of the pirates they have been portrayed as traitors and ultimately be condemned by the society with being given an opportunity of a trial.

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