"O'er us, rovers free"
Performing Gender and National Identity in Jacksonian Pirate Melodrama

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On both sides of the Atlantic, the early nineteenth century saw the staging and/or publication of numerous melodramas that dramatized and popularized pirate stories often already in circulation. Frequently based on the adventures and exploits of historical pirates and their subsequent fictionalizations, melodramas such as Lemuel Sawyer's *Blackbeard* (1824) and Joseph Stevens Jones's *Captain Kyd* (1830) transformed historical accounts into stage versions that tapped into traditional forms such as the captivity play, nautical drama, or comedy in order to create hybrid melodramatic versions of sensational pirate lore. In addition, melodramatic plays about pirates both in Britain and the U.S. familiarized a broader audience with historical romances such as Walter Scott's *The Pirate* (1822) and James Fenimore Cooper's *The Red Rover* (1827). They also dramatized the so-called "Barbary crisis" in the Mediterranean, with hundreds of U.S.-American citizens captured and enslaved off the coasts of Morocco, Algiers, and Tunis until freed by ransom; fundraising efforts effectively used melodrama for its emotional impact, which would lead to bigger donations. Many of these Atlantic pirate melodramas[1] are characterized by a concern with national identity that is brought to the stage as morally and ideologically framed entertainment.

My essay selectively examines pirate melodrama in the Jacksonian era from a gender studies perspective, focusing especially on antebellum theatrical negotiations of masculinity (and to some extent femininity). Doing so,

1 I use the term "pirate melodrama" for a form of melodrama that, besides carrying a reference to pirates in the title, draws on historical source material and pirate folklore and mixes in genre elements from diverse theatrical genres such as nautical melodrama, historical plays, and comedy.

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it aims at presenting a little-explored, but highly popular subgenre of melodrama and asks in what ways constructions of gender as well as of piracy worked to consolidate notions of a U.S.-American identity on the popular stage, while at the same time putting normative constructions of nineteenth-century masculinity and femininity up for debate. Furthermore, I discuss the transatlantic exchange between British and American pirate plays with specific regard to questions of gender, genre, and nation. With this article, I hope to contribute to historical popular culture studies, which, also in the field of theater, takes seriously material that has been traditionally ignored; in preceding centuries mostly because of elitist bias and a lack of approaches that would have made these popular plays interesting for scholars; sometimes certainly also because of the lack of extant material. Before analyzing how two popular pirate melodramas—Sawyer's *Blackbeard* (1824) and Jones's *Captain Kyd* (1830)—perform and debate antebellum masculinity, the first part of this article contextualizes my analysis by briefly outlining the contemporaneous theatrical scene with regard to melodrama and its developments, and by situating the pirate as a popular figure on the melodramatic stage along with cultural constructions of Jacksonian masculinity.

Antebellum Melodrama and the Staging of Piracy

Many of the early-nineteenth-century popular plays that dramatized folk tales about historical pirates took the form of nautical melodrama, a melodramatic subgenre that emerged in a phase in which melodrama developed new forms and materials in the U.S. (Moody 237). This diversification was likely a result of more demanding audiences who could choose between an increasing number of theaters for entertainment, pleasure (on the stage and in the rowdy gallery), and moral as well as ideological orientation. This situation has led both contemporaneous and contemporary critics to speak of a "theatocracy" (D. Jones 60), in which popular taste largely determined what was seen on stage. James C. Burge summarizes the significance of melodrama in the early-nineteenth-century U.S. as follows:

> Melodrama's appeal […] was immense. The earliest ones […] featured the conflict between the vicious and venal aristocracy and the honesty, simplicity, and downright goodness of the common man […]. Melodrama also reaffirmed traditional moral beliefs, pointed toward rectitude in all things, and

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> was invariably providential in seeing virtue ultimately triumph over evil. But its most appealing aspect, at least to its audiences, rested in its emphasis on action […] [M]elodrama offered thrills, suspense, excitement, and spectacle. (122)

Critics have lately complicated this purely affirmative assumption (see below), but generally agree that melodrama was not "a secondary cultural formation devoted purely to idle entertainment but was rather of primary importance in the shaping of United States culture" and in "the articulation of an exceptional national character," as "stage melodrama played a vital role in translating the dynamics of novels for popular consumption" (Mullen 49). Curiously and continually, however, this articulation was undercut by its transatlantic frame of reference (Herget 20).

Despite its popularity, there is little to no scholarship regarding not only piracy plays in particular, but also nautical melodrama in the U.S. in general, flourishing between 1820 and the Civil War (in contrast to pirates on the British stage; see Allen; Burwick and Powell; Davis). This lack of scholarship is certainly unjustified considering the sheer quantity of pirates on stage. The appendix presents a list of pirate plays I have collected from the first seven volumes of George C. Odell's *Annals of the New York Stage* (1928-49), Arthur Herman Wilson's *History of the Philadelphia Theatre* (1935), and Reese D. James's *Old Drury of Philadelphia* (1932), the most important stage histories related to the centers of melodramatic theater in the period, as well as from occasional mention in secondary sources. As is the case with most popular plays of the era, the vast majority of the listed titles remains unpublished. This collection of titles from archival records for that period is necessarily incomplete; where known, I have added source texts in case of adaptations, U.S.-American premiere dates and venues, as well as information on publication.

In New York, melodrama in general and pirate melodrama in particular was mostly performed at the Bowery, which opened in 1826, but also at the Lafayette, the more respectable Park, Niblo's Garden, the Olympic, Chatham Garden, and The National; in Philadelphia (which was surpassed by New York as the leading theater city by the middle of the nineteenth century [Mordden 13]), the Chestnut Street Theatre and the competing Walnut Street Theatre, as well as the more working-class Arch Street Theatre, were the most important venues for the genre and its "passionate politics," as Ralph J. Poole and Ilka Saal aptly put it. In sum, theaters presented more than sixty pirate plays

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(about ninety percent of which were melodramatic), and very probably many more, between 1820 and 1861.

By studying this list, one can also project what must have been a much larger number of nautical plays, as piracy plays were only a subset of this genre, as was nautical and piratical melodrama. Many nautical plays were also called national and military drama by contemporaries, for they often presented accounts of naval battles during the War of Independence or the Barbary Wars, celebrating the U.S. Navy's foundation and successes. The pirate plays, however, are rarely grouped with these—though, as I am arguing, they should be: they, too, functioned to consolidate notions of a specific U.S.-American national identity in general and an ideal American masculinity in particular on stage.

They did so, however, in a decidedly transatlantic manner: As the table also shows, many of the plays performed were written by British authors or relied on sources from British literature such as Lord Byron's *Corsair*, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, or Walter Scott's *The Pirate*. In the case of Fitzball's *Red Rover*, an American source (James Fenimore Cooper's nautical romance) was adapted for the London theater and returned to U.S. stages in this and various other versions, though they curiously never were as popular in the U.S. as they were in Britain (Meserve, *Heralds* 227; Gordan).[2] In addition, many actors and actresses on America's stage were native Britons. Theatrical relations across the Atlantic in the 1830s and '40s can be characterized as quite paradoxical according to Walter J. Meserve, as they simultaneously propelled and halted the development of American drama:

> Following the lead of their literary and theatre colleagues across the Atlantic […], Americans provided entertainment that occasionally in Jacksonian America […] surpassed the melodrama of […] Europe in excitement and splendor. At the same time they made contemporary society in the new nation more aware of the need for an American dramatic literature. […] [T]he English came to America to act, write and return to England or to remain to promote dramatical art in their adopted country. […] [T]hey brought English plays and appealed to the aristocratic levels of American society. For the

2 Cooper's nautical romances were a favorite for successful stage adaptations. *The Water-Witch*, for instance, saw eighteen consecutive nights out of 37 in the 1829-30 season at the Bowery (Burge 165).

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> common man […], however, they offered little. […] [T]hey controlled the theatres, drove American actors out of the large cities and essentially discouraged American playwriting. […] The English clearly helped establish theatre in America; at the same time, they clearly delayed the development of a distinctive national literature. (227)

Many of these stagings made use of recently developed water spectacles, which relied on technical innovations such as water tanks, pumps, and fountains in the theaters: "Large sections of the floor could be raised or lowered at will, and sometimes [were] replaced with tanks of real water into which smaller tanks installed above the stage poured convincing cascades. […] Full-scale ships with all hands on deck rise from the ocean bed […] and go down in flames in [Edward Fitzball's] *The Red Rover*" (Smith 27-28). Indeed, the development of both stage technology and the genre of nautical melodrama went hand in hand. Spectacular battle scenes and storms at sea were often also at the center of the affective economy of melodrama, bundling built-up emotions into excitement and relief, and were thus particularly arresting for audiences; in some pirate plays, the same function was fulfilled by elongated scenes of abduction, usually of female captives, and of characters dying on stage for minutes, both of which often ended in tableaux in order to give the audience time to process both emotional and ideological contents.

In the United States, the development of nautical melodrama largely coincided with the nationalist phase in American literature that had flourished since the War of 1812 against Great Britain and focussed thematically on the praise of democratic life and the celebration of military action (Moody 28). Thrilling and spectacular sea battles became a cornerstone of the melodrama of naval triumph, centering on male republican heroes. Pirate melodrama, while not always featuring nautical spectacle, also emphasized sea battles, but in addition asked critical questions regarding the legitimacy of economic and political power, drawn out in dialogue and romantic plots which simultaneously negotiated gender roles, especially with regard to American masculinity. The young Republic's first theater historian, playwright William Dunlap, connected the idea of a specific national theater with the hope of it becoming more "manly" in 1821: "Inasmuch as we may hereafter deviate from the models left us by our ancestors, it will only be, as we hope, in a more severe and manly character, induced by our republican institutions […]" (qtd. in Downer 2).

During the heyday of theatrical Romanticism between 1820 and 1850—largely coinciding with the Jacksonian era—, the affirmation of

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faith regarding a democratic fight against socio-political tyranny and its glorification, cast in such terms of heroic masculinity, concurred with the establishment of theaters (such as Chatham Garden and the Bowery in New York) accessible to masses craving for spectacle, sensational action, and the romance of the distant and the remote (Moody 236). Thus, Mark Mullen has called theater the "mass medi[um] of the antebellum period" (36) with the larger theaters housing 2,000 to 3,000 spectators. Discussing race, gender, and class constructions during this period, Mullen asserts that

> we need to acknowledge that most people encountered the representational building blocks of these categories through theatre, not through novels or other kinds of print literature, […] [though] novels and theatre scratched on another's backs in an arrangement of reciprocal publicity that ensured the popularity of both. (37)

During the age of Jackson, a "flurry" (Meserve, *Heralds* 3) of playwriting in the U.S. both reflected and co-constructed the age's nativist attitudes while it also inquired into fledgling ideas of American masculinity that drew on Jacksonian values such as (WASP) freedom, anti-intellectualism, and the common sense of common men (Meserve, *Heralds* 5).

Piracy was one theme that lent itself to the requirements of melodrama as a genre and to the construction of a self-conscious "dream world inhabited by dream people and dream justice" (Booth 14) in the context of the Jacksonian era. Emotionalizing and moralizing prevalent ideas about gender, pirate melodrama represents one of the genres in which normative U.S. masculinity took center stage from the 1820s to the 1850s. Piracy as a subject drew attention to the legalistic and economic dimensions of such gender constructs, as it more often than not dramatized the emergent myth of the self-made man (see Kimmel 20-33), and thus epitomized an age in which the hero's "spectacular accomplishments onstage reinforced the believers in self-reliance [and] provided the 'self-made man' with a model […]; in melodrama the protagonist's heroism and frequent patriotic enthusiasm underlined the nationalism of the day" (Meserve, *Heralds* 7).

In what follows, I examine Sawyer's *Blackbeard* (1824) and Jones's *Captain Kyd* (1830), two highly popular pirate melodramas of the Jacksonian era, and explore in what ways gender constructions, particularly theatrical constructions of masculinity, and the evocation of piracy on stage worked together to negotiate essentialist Jacksonian notions of U.S. national identity and a model of democracy based on nativism, violence, and hyper-masculinity (see Kim-

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mel 33). Though I cannot but present brief readings, I hope to elucidate how the popular stage of melodrama and the popular figure of the pirate presented an opportunity to non-elite audiences to participate in the socio-cultural negotiation of hegemonic idea(l)s of American manhood.

Blackbeard on Stage: "How to Make Proper Use of Wealth"

In England, the notorious pirate captain Blackbeard appeared on stage as early as 1798. James Cartwright Cross's *Blackbeard; or the Captive Princess* (Royal Circus, April 1798, repeated for upward of 100 nights; Seitz 129) as well as a later version, *Black Beard: or, the Desperate Pirate and Captive Princess* (1820), display Orientalist conventions similar to the Barbary captivity plays of the time[3] and celebrated British naval triumph over villainous pirates, whose notoriety and folk heroism was in turn cemented by their spectacular and serial reappearance onstage. This was evident also in the period's material culture, such as in the cardboard toy theater set "Pollock's Characters and Scenes in *Blackbeard the Pirate, or, the Jolly Buccaneer*" (1851, which was based on another stage version) (Fig. 3). Enabling children to enact pirate plays at home with the help of a cardboard stage and players, the set demonstrates how pirate stories were transformed transmedially into children's games in the course of the century. Interestingly, all of these articulations of the Blackbeard story transfer Blackbeard's piracies from the Atlantic American seaboard to the Indian Ocean and mix his character with that of other pirates and corsairs.

Most U.S.-American versions (the earliest apparently appearing in Boston in 1811 as "The Nautical Spectacle, Blackbeard, the Pirate"; Seitz 129) relocate Blackbeard to the original sites of his plunders. Edward Teach, Blackbeard's

3 Barbary captivity plays dramatized the first international crisis the United States faced at the dawn of the nineteenth century, when hundreds of Americans were captured off the coasts of Morocco, Algiers, and Tunis by corsairs and were mostly driven into slavery until freed by American ransom money—dramatizations that again harked back to their earlier British counterparts about British tars captured during Britain's Barbary Wars. Apart from Susanna Haswell Rowson's famous *Slaves in Algiers* (1794), most of these dramatizations came to the fore in the 1820s. These include Jonathan S. Smith's 1823 *The Siege of Algiers; or, the Downfall of Hadgi-Ali-Bashaw, A Political, Historical, and Sentimental Tragi-Comedy*, or Mordecai M. Noah's 1820 *The Siege of Tripoli* (New York, Park Theatre, 1820; see Fisher 403). Pirate melodrama that borrowed from these captivity plays also adopted their Orientalist conventions.

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Figure 3. "Pollock's Characters and Scenes in Blackbeard the Pirate, or, the Jolly Buccaneer" (cardboard toy theater set, 1851).

historical name, turned pirate in the Bahamas, pillaged trading vessels off the Atlantic American coasts, and blockaded Charleston in 1718, but was a well-respected member of the colony at Bath, South Carolina. Attacked by the governor of Virginia, who did not like the pirate colony to the south, he died in battle near Ocracoke. The play's various stagings and relocations constitute a frame of national re-appropriation that, in the stage version by the Southerner Lemuel Sawyer (1777-1852),[4] is further supported by a temporal

4 Sawyer was a lawyer who served in the North Carolina assembly and as a member of the U.S. Congress (Meserve, *Entertainment* 267). In his *Auto-Biography* (1844), he discusses how the play was financed: "I vamped up a manuscript comedy that I had laying by me, called Blackbeard, and paid a visit to my wife in Washington in May, 1824. I concluded to publish a small edition of the comedy by subscription, and for that purpose consulted with Mr. Clay, the Speaker of the House. He encouraged me to take that step, and promised to head the list, and give it a motion through the House. I accordingly handed it to him to which he put his name, and by the aid of the boys who attended on the members in the hall the list circulated freely, and the second day after came out of the House with seventy names attached to it, which just paid the cost of publication; so that I had a clear gain in the sale of about four hundred copies, at thirty seven and a half cents each. It does not become me to boast of any merit or praise which rewarded

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framework which displaces the legendary figure of Blackbeard from its original historical setting to the 1820s, and thus amidst contemporaneous discussions of class and socio-political issues such as the pitfalls of a democratic voting system, alcoholism, and a distinctly U.S.-American outlaw masculinity. *Blackbeard. A Comedy, in Four Acts: Founded on Fact* (1824; staged for example at New York's Bowery Theater in 1833), despite being marked as a comedy, can be read as a melodrama for its emotional appeal and sentimental plot. The play is replete with topical issues of the 1820s: temperance, social mobility, freedom versus slavery, anti-intellectualism and the costs of illiteracy, as well as enlightenment political ideas; at the same time, it responds to the craving of American melodrama audiences for exotic romances (Mordden 10-11). First and foremost, however, the play explores the economic dimension of American masculinity and of antebellum gender relations.

Blackbeard presents two entrepreneurial con men who trick their South Carolina peers into depositing money, which the ghost of Blackbeard, with the help of the devil, is supposed to reward a hundredfold. Rogers and his Irish-American accomplice Casey establish what in the *dramatis personae* is humorously called "the Blackbeard Company;" Casey appears as the pirate of yore, clad as a ghost, to proclaim Rogers his legitimate heir and to set up the financial scheme, which is (of course) a fraud. The audience witnesses how the villagers Frost, Muley, Roughy, and Turpis lose their money in a ritual with Blackbeard's ghost. A subplot concerns the intellectual Candid, who has lost community elections to Turpis because the latter has bribed his male electorate and, notably, also their wives with whiskey;[5] he is convinced that "[t]he bottle's the best electioneerer after all" (5), and one of the countrymen states: "I'm not drunk enough to vote yet" (11).[6] Candid's name is an ironic choice,

me in addition to the profit of the work. But I received enough of both to satisfy me—in fact, more than I deserved" (27).

5 Meserve calls the plot confusing and scattered; he summarizes that Sawyer "satirizes the skulduggery of political elections, the manner in which wealth attracts women, the folly of people who believe in tall tales, and the usury rates in North Carolina" (*Entertainment* 268).

6 The paternalistic thematization of alcoholism was a common theme on the stage at a time in which the temperance movement petitioned for stricter drinking laws; see Frick; Hughes; D. Jones. The connection of drinking and voting is also a recurrent theme in early American literature concerned with the democratic process and the class-based fear of the popular vote; see for example Hugh Henry Brackenridge's picaresque novel *Modern Chivalry*, or Robert Munford's play *The Candidates*. Thanks to Leopold Lip-

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as he is far too shy to propose to his love interest, Juliet Pembroke; he sends a letter instead, but receiving no answer, is ready to commit suicide, from which she saves him just in time.

What becomes immediately evident in terms of the construction of gender and national identity is that, compared to its British counterparts, Sawyer's play is de-eroticized; in Cross's version, Orra, Blackbeard's wife, Nancy, an escaped slave, and Ismene, the Persian princess who Blackbeard holds captive for ransom (Burwick and Powell 40) add much sexual tension, harking back to accounts of Blackbeard in the *General History*, in which he has fourteen wives. The Molièrian figure of Candid, in Sawyer's version, partly recalls a different version of Blackbeard, based on a popular ballad of the 1720s called "The Downfall of Piracy," which was supposedly written by a thirteen-year-old Benjamin Franklin: it took up British and American newspaper reports and describes Blackbeard as being afraid of women, thereby questioning his heterosexual prowess and manliness. This jokingly countered earlier representations of pirates as hypermasculine (see Karremann). Sawyer's U.S.-American version integrates the romantic subplot with more serious, if also at times comic, discussions of class and gender. The play revolves around "m[e]n of fortune" (30, 39), some of them of Irish descent (stock characters for a largely Irish-American Bowery audience), who take their chances to become rich and escape poverty as well as "the trouble of long and vulgar labour" (5). The phrase, in the slightly different version of "gentlemen of fortune," was often used to refer to pirates in early modern accounts of piracy—here, we deal with a version of the modern pirate as a financial trickster, anticipating Peter T. Leeson's quip that contemporary piracy mostly takes place at the stock exchange. Blackbeard's self-proclaimed heir indeed counts out shares and dividends at length for make-believe effect, in which he succeeds.

Juliet is advised by her mother not to follow her heart and respond to Candid's love letter: "by waiting a little you may meet with a better offer […] by better, I mean richer" (as Candid is rather poor); "besides, a little apparent neglect, so far from cooling his flame, will only add fuel to it; for an *object* always appears the more valuable, in proportion to the difficulties which oppose the *possession* of *it*" (17-18, my emphasis). The mother, while on the one hand affirming (young) women's object status as "possession," presents female agency in terms of the strategic use of these normative ideas for women's

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economic advantage, indicating, perhaps, a counter-model of a "self-made woman"—even though the female "self" in this construction must stay within heteronormative marriage plots and thus does not exist without men. Juliet's guardian Frost also opposes the union for financial reasons: "It is against my interest for her to marry yet: my commissions on her estate are some hundreds annually, besides the means of speculation her money affords. Too much for me to lose yet" (20). In contrast, Juliet, a wealthy heiress, does not deem Candid's poverty a problem, proclaiming in a melodramatic mode: "If he is poor, I have enough for him and me too" (20). Still, she follows her mother's advice of "cooling his flame," which almost kills her beloved. The fortunes of love and money are intertwined by the materialistic bent of U.S. society, made visible by the use of economic terminology and discourse throughout the play, from Blackbeard being cited, comically, as an "invisible hand" (22), evoking Adam Smith's theory of the regulating force of the market, to discussions of inflation and corrupt state agents.

The melodramatic mode, which in the play is manifest mostly in the ultimately triumphant romance plot, of course favors "true emotion"—if in conflict with material gain—which is embodied by Juliet and, a bit less so, by Candid. Candid despairs in view of a world "for ambitious, artful and profligate minions of fortune to domineer in. Men who can sacrifice every principle to their own selfishness, best succeed" (43), while *his* only success in accumulation consists of a "load of anguish, provocation, misery, unrequited love and undeserved indignity" (43). Only the two female figures—Juliet and Muley's wife—portray what could be called, oxymoronically, *reasonable feeling*. While the men of Blackbeard's Company believe in Rogers's scheme, Muley's wife claims that only "feeling is the naked truth: when I can handle, and hear [the coins] rattle, then I shall be more certain" (27)—the physical, tactile experience of wealth trumps speculation, for she turns out to be right. Juliet saves Candid's life by returning his love: "I am alive," he sighs with relief, "I am restored to manhood; I feel the heart's warm emotion and best blood returning in a flood" (64). In line with its transgression of a gendered reason vs. emotion dualism, the play ends with Candid's announcement of a new philanthropic society based on the "generosity of sentiment" (63) and the call to take office as a Congressman, vowing to promote Greek independence and "unity with South America" (63).[7]

7 Pagination is erroneous after page 59, returning again to 56; I have used the original page numbers for documentation.

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All in all, even this brief glimpse at Sawyer's adaptation of the Blackbeard story reveals how famous pirates are conjured to ask about the historical involvement in and profit from piracy, especially regarding the New England colonies. The American Republic constitutes only a potential step forward in the human history of freedom in the play: potential because this freedom is threatened by greed. Candid repeats enlightenment formulas of freedom such as "[m]an is a free agent, and to deny him the power of disposing of himself as he pleases under any circumstances, would be subjecting him to so despicable a slavery, that better were he never born" (63). He gives elongated speeches about the nature of freedom and the role of what we would term today the public intellectual, and he thus comments on the main plot philosophically, questioning a dominant masculinity that is defined by economic success more than anything else (though women like Skinflint's wife also appear as economic agents: she "was saving to buy some negro women" [35] before her husband loses their money). Let me close with a quote from his speech about the pursuit of happiness in Act III:

> [The world's] apathy and indifference to the *heroic exertions* of human nature to *rise from the degradation of slavery* to the rank and attributes which *ennoble our race* and *approximate us to God*, inspire me with the worst possible opinion of a large majority of the present race […]. [W]hen I was made, *the Almighty*, by his fiat, *bade me seek my happiness*. Happiness was the condition which was annexed to the tenure of my life. (43-44, my emphasis)

Candid is drawn to develop and perform a version of masculinity here which presents an interesting mix of Puritan, revolutionary, and Jacksonian ideas: hard work ("exertions"), racial superiority (white America has heroically risen from colonial "slavery"), and American exceptionalism—not as a blessing bestowed by God but harking back to the Puritan sense of the errand into the wilderness as an ambiguous duty. Thus, a philosophical-political basis of masculine identity, distilled from three defining periods of American nation-building, seems to be set against the greedy materialism of a piratical type of American manliness. If we read Candid as a less normatively gendered version of Blackbeard, suggested also by the black costume he wears in the final scene, the melodrama lightly suggests a fusion of the two in which wealth, reason, and emotion are no longer at odds with each other.

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Captain Kyd; or, the Wizard of the Sea

Jones's 1830 melodramatic stage version of the story of Captain Kidd, which follows Washington Irving's folk account of "Kidd the Pirate" from *Tales of a Traveller* (1824), was produced at Boston's National Theatre to great success, and periodically revived there as well as in New York at the Park Theater (after the rival Bowery's manager T.S. Hamblin took over the management in 1848; see Burge 158) and Purdy's National Theatre until 1856. Jones's play was so successful it was rewritten by Joseph Holt Ingraham as a popular novel nine years later (Burwick and Powell 150), the novel in turn being followed by stage adaptations of its own (for example by Louisa Medina). One of Jones's most popular works, the play took up a folktale at a moment when nativism and nationalism were on the rise and "a tidal wave of patriotism had engulfed America" (Burwick and Powell 150) at the dawn of the Jacksonian age; middle- and working-class audiences looked for "that which was inherently native grown" (Burwick and Powell 162)—a common focus of American playwrights at the time to attract larger audiences (McConachie and Friedman 12).

Jones, a Boston dramatist, actor, and theater manager of The National Theatre, who also worked as a house playwright for the Bowery (Bank, "Bowery" 117), was one of the most prolific dramatists of his day, authoring an estimated 60 to 150 plays until 1843, when he started practicing medicine (Bordman 387; Meserve, *Heralds* 95), among them also the Barbary captivity piece *The Usurper: or, Americans in Tripoli* (c1835; see Fisher 245). Hamblin hired him away from Boston, where he had been successful among working-class audiences (McConachie 25). His extremely popular work is characterized by patriotic enthusiasm and spectacular melodrama, for instance *Moll Pitcher; or, the Pirate Priest* (1843), which presented Moll Pitcher as a feminist avenger who triumphs over a piratical priest (declaring that "[m]an is a betrayer; I live to protect woman," qtd. in Meserve, *Heralds* 101; she was apparently scorned by the critics).[8] Jones drew on folk figures such as Kidd and Pitcher, participating in the stage creation of what Henry Steele Commager called "a usable past" foundational for the construction of U.S. national identity. According to Frederick Burwick and Manushag N. Powell, Jones "represented Kidd as far more

8 Meserve cites the *Daily Mirror*'s scathing review (*Heralds* 100). The play revolves around Maladine, priest and arch-villain, on whom Moll swears vengeance for having seduced her, with virtue naturally thwarting his villainy.

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shrewd and cunning than biographical accounts indicate" (50). The play features seven songs written by one J. Friedman, among them a popular ballad reaching back to the turn of the eighteenth century. He reframes Kidd's figure to discuss social upward and downward mobility via "Kyd" and his counterpart, the peasant son Mark, who eventually becomes Captain Fitzroy of the British Navy.

Captain William Kidd was a notorious pirate and occasionally licensed privateer in the 1690s. Of Scottish birth, he roamed the Caribbean and Indian Oceans and settled in New York, where he married a wealthy widow and became—like Blackbeard—a well-established member of society, collaborating with governor Richard Coote, Earl of Bellomont, in a scheme to attack pirate ships but keep their bounty for themselves rather than handing it over. This led him as far as the Red Sea, where he plundered pilgrims returning from Mecca as well as traders—actions that eventually threatened the East India Company so much that he—rather than Bellomont—was sentenced, in a biased trial, to be hanged at Wapping in 1701 (Rogozinski 179-80). The Ballad "Captain Kidd's Farewell," issued on the day of his execution and claiming to cite his confession at the gallows, is included in parts and with alterations both in Jones's (where it is called "My Name Is Captain Kidd") and other stage versions.[9]

Jones's melodrama starts in England, with an archery contest among young royalty around Robert of Lester, initially played by the famous actor Junius Brutus Booth (father of Edwin and John Wilkes). Robert shows cowardice and jealousy and is rebuked by Mark Meredith, a poor fisherman's son, and by his love interest, Kate Bellomont. When Elpsy the Witch reveals Lester's true origins as the illegitimate son of the Danish buccaneer Hurtel (sometimes spelled Hurtil) of the Red Hand and herself, and it becomes clear that the real Lord of Lester is Mark, Robert feels betrayed, experiences a crisis of identity, and joins a group of pirates. He reinvents himself as "Captain Kyd, King of the Sea" and sails for America, while Mark becomes Captain Fitzroy of the Navy. In Act II, set in New York five years later, we enter a tavern filled with drunken Dutchmen, one of them, Horsebean Hemlock, telling yarns about Kyd's villainies. Both Elpsy, now "the Witch of Hell Gate" (the outlet where ships crossed into the harbor of New York), and Kate have also moved to New York, and Kyd tries in vain to persuade Kate to marry

9 The ballad's lyrics became harsher over time, representing Kidd increasingly as monstrous and Satanic, "curs[ing] God and his own family" (Rogozinski 56).

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him. He seeks out Elpsy in the "[e]xtravagant scenic spectacle" (McConachie 31) of the Witch's Hut for a love charm—an exemplary scene in which stage directions are, as so often in a genre geared towards affective and associative effect, more important than dialogue:

> Interior of the Witch's Hut, composed of rocks, trees, old boots, &c., […] an invisible transparency of the pirates boarding the Ger Falcon. […] Another transparency of a pirate hanging on a gibbet, both to be lighted up at the end of the act. […] A skull with a thigh bone fastened to it for a ladle. Skeletons and skulls around the stage. Cotton batting, wet with fluid, to light for incantation. The trap to be masked in with a crocodile; a serpent to twist around Elpsy's waist; another for her head, and two others for her arms. (25)

After a wild storm, the act ends with the two illuminated transparencies, showing the sinking pirate ship and the pirate swinging from the gibbet. Kyd scuds through the storm, winning a battle against Mark's ship but losing his own, and returns with a treasure to bury at Hell's Gate. Fitzroy captures him, but Kate saves his life for the sake of their common past, at least temporarily.

Captain Kyd, like *Blackbeard*, triangulates gender, national identity, and class, thematizing the subjection of the lower by the upper classes by using the genre of the historical play in melodramatic rendition. Act I, set in England in 1694, shows a clear separation between aristocracy and peasantry, while the moment the play is transferred to New York, class relations become confusing and less clear-cut. The noble-born heroine eventually unites with Mark/Fitzroy, who is described as a self-made man (despite turning out to be a nobleman by birth eventually); when he goes to sea to cross the Atlantic towards America, he exclaims:

> This day shall end my servitude to poverty! Have I not a soul, a mind? May I not, in spite of nature, yet become the builder of my own name? I dare to love, and love high […] I will win a name that shall hide the one I wear […] I will work out for myself bright fortunes, or I will not live on the earth where I must be inferior to my fellow-men. (11-12)

Robert/Kyd serves as a contrasting foil in this respect; he, too, swears to reinvent himself as "the Sea King" (16) and a feared pirate, though his motivation is revenge rather than rebellion against constraints of class. The revenge motif is central to what Bruce McConachie calls "apocalyptic melodrama" (17) of the antebellum period, ending in eventual destruction; here, "[m]ale deeds are paramount: persecuting heroines, unveiling virtue, and striking back to

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avenge a history of wrongs" (29). In *Captain Kyd*, villain and avenger, nobility and gentility are exchanged in the cradle; a dominant thread of the action revolves around untangling their descent, leaving the audience in doubt as to the moral character of the avenger for quite some time.

Captain Kyd is even more spectacular than *Blackbeard*, excessively filled with wild battle scenes and artificial special effects like wind, rain, thunder, and lightning (27), starkly recalling Peter Brooks's definition of melodrama as a mode of excess. Again, a specific American concept of masculinity—the pursuit of happiness through self-determination—is at the center of the play, thematized through the contrast between legal and illegal socio-economic ascent. The melodrama's morale and ideology instruct its audience to endorse the former and oppose the latter, though Kyd is the more spectacular figure due to costume (he is clad in crimson and often holds a black flag with skull and crossbones; see the description of costumes, 3) and his preceding legendary status (see the title), evoking Winfried Herget's argument that the centrality of the villain as a figure of identification introduces much more moral ambivalence to melodrama than is usually assumed (20-21). The representation of femininity, in contrast, remains unchanged by the transatlantic journey, but is much less conventional than *Blackbeard*'s from the start: women are introduced as skillful hunters—the audience's first encounter with an outspoken and courageous Kate (in addition to ten other "archeresses" [4] in Amazon-like garb) takes place when she kills a hawk in the archery contest (5-6)—and as a powerful, fearful witch. There are references to women's cross-dressing (e.g. 30), one of the most popular forms of gender play that frequently occurred in nautical and pirate melodrama, and the play even allows for homosocial desire onstage when Edwin, one of Fitzroy's crew, swears he would give his life to protect his beloved master: "Heaven preserve him through all dangers! I will not leave his side; the blow that reaches his heart must first pierce mine. Rupert, do I not love thee?" (31).

Confused and mistaken identities, propelling the play's plot, are indicative of the negotiation of heritage and legitimacy regarding American conceptions of heroic republican masculinity and their transatlantic voyages, echoing the historical Kidd's and many other pirates' transformation once they left British shores. The pirate song at the end of Act I celebrates the pirates' departure to America as an act of freedom, waving the black flag "o'er us, rovers free" (16) and is taken up as an epithet to Act II by a quote from the folk song "The Ballad of Captain Kyd," which represents the pirates' transoceanic mobility as a break of rule, melodramatically and metaphorically enacted as a question-

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ing of the legitimacy of prevailing antebellum class and gender (if not racial) conventions:[10] "My name is Captain Kyd, as I sailed, as I sailed, / My name is Captain Kyd, / And so wickedly I did, / All laws I did forbid, as I sailed" (17).

Pirate melodramas were significant in this way as they asked what would come after "forbidding" old laws and cross-Atlantic relocations. Like many others, both Blackbeard and Kyd represent piratical heroes not in opposition to established society, economic relations, and political power (in New York and South Carolina, respectively), but by emphasizing freedom and the myth of the self-made man.

Conclusion

The Bowery labeled itself "the cradle of American drama" (qtd. in Odell, Vol. 7, 488), de-emphasizing the fact that in the antebellum era many plays, including nautical melodramas, still were of British origin, existed in British and American versions (Davis 686), or dramatized both English and American popular fiction, from Sir Walter Scott to James Fenimore Cooper.[11] Many U.S. playwrights, Meserve observes, "took advantage of the scarcity of plays in America and tried to fill this acknowledged void by adapting the latest popular English or American fiction and by promoting nationalism with dramatized events from American history" (*Heralds* 145). What I have presented in this essay is a glimpse into two popular plays, their transatlantic voyages, and negotiations of gender via class and economic discourse. Following Jacky Bratton's notion of "the contending discourses of melodrama" (38), I read the plays as negotiating different versions of masculinity (and, to a lesser extent, femininity) in a period of immigration, industrial growth, and socioeconomic transformation primarily by means of contrast (the Blackbeard Company and Candid; Robert and Mark), humor, and irony. These spectacular plays, despite their formulaic nature (brave hero, heroine's chastity attacked by villain, stock side characters) performed "America" in the sense that the very concept of an American nation is a "performed trope" (Gainor 9; see also Bank, *Culture*),

10 Sawyer's Southern background and the general racism of the day are reflected by the play's black slave side characters, represented as fools serving for pure entertainment.

11 I follow Jim Davis's claim here that "[m]elodrama evolved and changed throughout the nineteenth century and as a genre, demonstrates continual slippage and refashioning" (688).

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representing itself to itself as well as to others as an onstage "foundational fiction," to use Doris Sommer's term, in which patriotic and heterosexual romance discourses are intertwined to engender productive citizens.

Antebellum theater "was not simply a place where audiences passively absorbed […] problematic representations of national virtue, but rather an arena where the question of national character was subject to […] contestation" (Mullen 42). As the two examples discussed above show, patterns of identification in melodrama leave space for ambivalence and uncertainty in a time of national identity crisis (Kelleter and Mayer 12) and a crisis of masculinity vis-à-vis an increasing "feminization of American culture" towards the mid-century (Douglass). (Male) villains constitute the central figures and driving forces of both and are responsible for the culminating spectacle scene, including the works of fire and water (Herget 20-24). Yet it is this appeal to senses and sensibilities that was used to create affective unity within the framework of a "folk" patriotism (replete with the usual exclusions of racial and social Others) and the nation-state, following Douglass A. Jones:

> The aesthetics of melodrama work in such a way as to create a space where subjects with different ideologies—e.g. liberalism/socialism; rule of the majority/rule of propertied elite; paternalism/working-class solidarity—can exist in a sort of sentimental harmony […]. Shared sentimentality […] was the mechanism by which hierarchies, such as those reflected in ticket prices and seating location as well as ideological differences, would be collapsed. (66-67)

Despite the search for both a specific American theater and a specific American masculinity, American nautical and piratical plays in general, like their transatlantic counterparts, served as "national celebrations of victory" (Glenn 150), entertainment, and reinforcement of patriotic fervor. Clearly, then, the construction of a specifically American masculinity in stage melodrama needs to be understood transatlantically as well as in terms of the cultural translation of gender constructs by melodramatic means across a fast-changing populace, including ever-new waves of immigrants.

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Appendix: Pirate Plays Staged in the U.S., 1820-1860

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	TITLE	AUTHOR	YEAR	GENRE	US PREMIERE	BASIS	PUBLICATION
1	*The Corsair*		1802	pantomime	Chestnut (Philadelphia)		
2	*Black Beard*		1812	pantomime	Chestnut (Philadelphia)		
3	*The Bold Buccaneers; or, The Discovery of Robinson Crusoe*		1817	melodrama	Park (NY), Sep. 11, 1817	Defoe	
4	*The Bride of Abydos*	William Dimmond	1818	nautical melodrama	Bowery, 1823?		New York: Longworth
5	*The Corsair*	Edwin Clifford Holland	1818	melodrama	Charleston, 1818	Byron	Charleston: A.E. Millar
6	*The Pirate*		1822	drama	Alexandria, June 26, 1822	Scott	
7	*The Sea Devil, or The Cornwall Pirate*		1823	melodrama	Lafayette (NY)		

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	TITLE	AUTHOR	YEAR	GENRE	US PREMIERE	BASIS	PUBLICATION
8	*Blackbeard*	Lemuel Sawyer	1824	comedy		Blackbeard	
9	*The Freebooters*		1827	opera			
10	*The Buccaneers, A Romance of Our Own Country*	Terentius Phlogobombus (Samuel Benjamin Helbert Judah)	1827	melodrama/ satire			
11	*Red Rover, or, The Outlaw of the Ocean*	Samuel Henry Chapman	1827?	drama	Lafayette, Park (NY), 1827/28/29 seasons	J.F. Cooper	Philadelphia: F. Turner
12	*The Red Rover or, The Mutiny of the Dolphin*	Edward Fitz-Ball	1827/28	nautical drama	Lafayette, Park (NY)	J.F. Cooper	London: John Cumberland
13	*The Castle of the Lake, or The Pirates of Tripoli*		1828	Barbary play	Circus (NY)?		

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	TITLE	AUTHOR	YEAR	GENRE	US PREMIERE	BASIS	PUBLICATION
14	*The Battle of New Orleans*		1828		Lafayette (NY)	Lafitte	
15	*Captain Kyd; or, The Wizard of the Sea*	Joseph S. Jones	1830	drama	National (Boston), 1830	Kidd	
16	*The Water Witch*	C.W. Taylor	1830		Park (NY), March 21, 1820	J.F. Cooper	
17	*The Demon Ship, or, The Pirate of the Ocean*		1831	melodrama	Bowery (NY), April 25, 1831		
18	*The Water Witch*	James S. Wallace	1832			J.F. Cooper	
19	*The Rover's Bride, or, The Bittern's Swamp*		1832?	melodrama	Bowery (NY)		

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	TITLE	AUTHOR	YEAR	GENRE	US PREMIERE	BASIS	PUBLICATION
20	*Il Pirata*	Charles Nodier, Charles Maturin	1833	opera	Bowery (NY)	Bellini	
21	*The French Buccaneers*		1833	melodrama	Bowery (NY)		
22	*Black Beard, or, The Crew of the Revenge*	Rice	1833		Bowery (NY)?	Blackbeard	
23	*The Arab Chief and the Pirate of the East*		1834	Barbary play			
24	*Wizard Skiff, or The Tongueless Pirate Boy*		1834	melodrama	Philadelphia, Dec. 20, 1834		
25	*The Barnegat Pirates*					Kidd	
26	*The Spanish Pirates; or, A Union of the Flags*	H.J. Conway	1835				

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	TITLE	AUTHOR	YEAR	GENRE	US PREMIERE	BASIS	PUBLICATION
27	*Lafitte, Pirate of the Gulf*	Louisa Medina	1836	nautical drama	Bowery (NY)	Lafitte, Ingraham	
28	*LaFitte: The Pirate of the Gulf*	James Rees	1837	nautical drama	Franklin (New Orleans)	Lafitte, Ingraham	
29	*La Fitte*	Charlotte Barnes Conner	1837	nautical drama	New Orleans	Lafitte, Ingraham	
30	*The Pirate Boy*	Jonas B. Philips	1837	melodramatic opera	National (Boston)	Bellini, Marryat	
31	*La Fitte*	James Gates Percival				Lafitte	
32	*Koeuba, or The Pirate of the Capes*	Edward Fitzball	1837				
33	*The Pirate's Oath*		1838		Franklin (New Orleans)		
34	*The Black Schooner, or The Pirate Slaver Armistad*	"a popular author"	1839	nautical melodrama	Bowery (NY)	Amistad case	

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	TITLE	AUTHOR	YEAR	GENRE	US PREMIERE	BASIS	PUBLICATION
35	*Zampa, the Red Corsair*	William Mitchell	184?	melodrama	Olympic (NY)		
36	*The Pirate's Signal, or, The Bridge of Death*			nautical melodrama	Bowery (NY)		
37	*The Pirate of Hurlgate*				Chatham Garden (NY)	Kidd?	
38	*The Pirate's Doom*		1840		Bowery (NY)		
39	*Moll Pitcher, or, The Pirate Priest*	J.S. Jones	1841		Bowery (NY), 1843	Moll Pitcher	
40	*The Pirate's Legacy; or, The Wreckers' Fate*	Charles H. Saunders	1843	melodrama	Bowery (NY), Dec.		

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	TITLE	AUTHOR	YEAR	GENRE	US PREMIERE	BASIS	PUBLICATION
41	*The Pirate's Cave*		1844		Bowery (NY)		
42	*Murrell the Land Pirate*	Burke	1845				
43	*The Land Pirate; or, Yankee in Mississippi*	Nathaniel Bannister					
44	*Murrell, the Western Land Pirate*	Nathaniel Bannister	183?				
45	*Captain Kyd, or, The Witch of Hell Gate*		1846		Bowery (NY)	Kidd	
46	*Theodosia, the Pirate's Prisoner*	William Henry Rhodes	1846	tragedy			New York: Edward Walker

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	TITLE	AUTHOR	YEAR	GENRE	US PREMIERE	BASIS	PUBLICATION
47	*The Pirate's Revenge*				Greenwich		
48	*Corsair's Revenge*		1839/40		Walnut, Philadelphia		
49	*Black Beard, the Black Cruiser*		1847		Bowery (NY)	Blackbeard	
50	*Gonzalvo; or, The Corsair's Doom*	Charles Williams	1848	tragic opera			Philadelphia: Collins
51	*The Pirate's Isle*		1849	ballet			
52	*The Corsair's Bride*		1850/51		National (NY)		
53	*The Freebooter*		1850/51?		National (NY)		

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	TITLE	AUTHOR	YEAR	GENRE	US PREMIERE	BASIS	PUBLICATION
54	*Bertram; or, The Sicilian Pirate*	Charles Maturin	1850/51?		National (NY)		
55	*Pirate of the Isles*	N.H. Belden Clarke	1851/52?	romantic drama	Bowery (NY)		French's Standard Drama 333, 1870?
56	*The Pirate Doctor*		1853		St. Charles (NY)		
57	*The Pirates of the Mississippi*		1855/56		Bowery (NY)		
58	*The Pirate's Bride*		1855/56	variety	Odeon (NY)		
59	*Conrad the Corsair*		1856/57	burlesque	Bowery (NY)	Byron	
60	*Ban Oussel Dhu*		1858		Bowery (NY)	Grace O'Malley	

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	TITLE	AUTHOR	YEAR	GENRE	US PREMIERE	BASIS	PUBLICATION
61	*Our Mess, or, The Pirate Hungers of the Gulf*	John F. Poole	1859?		Bowery (NY)	Ned Buntline	
62	*The Privateer and the Pirate, or, Our Country's Flag*	John F. Poole			Bowery (NY)		
63	*The Female Buccaneer, or The Traitor's Doom*				Bowery (NY)	Ned Buntline	
64	*The Pirate Husband or The Ensanguined Shirt*			parody			

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