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Electronic Media and the Arts

Thesis Advisor: Jennifer Browdy de Hernandez

Jolie Rouge: Women Pirates of the Caribbean

For my thesis, I want to illustrate a short graphic novel about Anne Bonny and Mary Read, real-life female pirates of the Caribbean. The storyboard would be an adaptation of a manuscript that Prof. Jenny Browdy de Hernandez is currently writing about the two pirates. Due to time constraints, I will illustrate only one or two scenes from the book.

The written portion of the thesis will be broken up into five chapters. I will write the first chapter in a more personal voice than the other chapters, using it as a chance to describe the academic and artistic processes that I went through to create the final artwork. This chapter may also briefly touch on the history of graphic novels, i.e. illustrated narratives that have somehow transcended the “low art” genre of comics.

The second chapter will look at the female consumers of piracy. I am intrigued by the resurgence of “pirate pop culture” we have seen over the past decade, especially the extent to which it appeals to women. A quick glance at a website selling pirate merchandise makes it clear that a huge demographic of pirate pop culture these days is women. Have women’s interests risen and fallen with the popularity of piracy itself throughout the years, or is it only this recent surge that has appealed to women? (And is there any way to measure the female demographic in the decades before you could buy pirate baby-doll Tees off the internet?) For that matter, how much of it is cultural revolution and how much is a fashion statement?

The third chapter will look at the representations of women pirates in pirate pop culture. For this, I wish to examine movies, books, and any other media that may contain women pirate characters. Going back several decades, I hope to trace an evolutionary path of the female pirate through images. For instance, how does the portrayal of “Anne of the Indies” in 1951 compare to the portrayal of Elizabeth Swann in *Pirates of the Caribbean*? Are there actually more cutthroat women pirates represented today, or fewer? How often did women get to be bloodthirsty pirates in older movies, and how often were they simply swashbuckling arm candy?



In the fourth chapter, I want to explore the often contradictory image of the Pirate Queen in contemporary pirate pop culture. We have finally seen her ascend from pirate wench to full-on pirate — she wears pants; she fights alongside the men; she’s tough and fearless; essentially, she is an undeniable badass. And yet, her costume, her anatomy, and her overall visual portrayal are frequently oversexualized. This phenomenon can be seen anywhere from fan art to Halloween costumes, but I would of course focus primarily on comics and illustrations. I have long pondered the dissonance between comic heroines who are written in a strong feminist voice and yet drawn as if they were stripper parodies of themselves. As I study this area I hope to contrast these images with my own portrayal of female pirates, and observe the ways in which I defy this archetype, and perhaps even the ways in which I still *adhere* to this archetype.

The fifth chapter, my conclusion, will tie back into the more personal voice of the first chapter. In it I will compare my original concept with the final result, and I will also discuss whether any of my research for the previous chapters surprised me, or contradicted any preconceived notions I might have had going in.