

DIPLOMARBEIT

Titel der Diplomarbeit

„Contextualizing Selected British Nautical Novels:
Defoe's *Captain Singleton*, Smollett's *Roderick
Random* and Marryat's *Mr. Midshipman Easy*“

Verfasser

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angestrebter akademischer Grad

Magister der Philosophie (Mag.phil.)

Wien, 2009

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt:

A 190 344 313

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt:

Anglistik und Amerikanistik

Betreuerin ODER Betreuer:

Ao. Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Franz Wöhrer

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>vii</i>
1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 DANIEL DEFOE'S <i>CAPTAIN SINGLETON</i>	4
2.1 Historical background	4
2.2 <i>Captain Singleton</i> and history	6
2.2.1 Piracy as general historical theme	6
2.2.2 History as a theme in <i>Captain Singleton</i>	9
2.3 Social themes in <i>Captain Singleton</i>	18
2.3.1 "I'll be hang'd for a Pyrate, rather than starve here" – why sailors become pirates	19
2.3.2 "With Consent of all the Ship's Company" – <i>Captain Singleton</i> and pirate ship politics	24
2.4 The voyage in <i>Captain Singleton</i>	30
2.4.1 The factual dimension: aspects of a pirate's voyage	30
2.4.2 The moral dimension: aspects of Bob Singleton's development of character	35
3 TOBIAS SMOLLETT'S <i>RODERICK RANDOM</i>	39
3.1 Historical background	39
3.2 The Royal Navy as an institution and setting	40
3.2.1 Manning the Royal Navy	44
3.2.1.1 Impressment	48
3.3 Social themes in <i>Roderick Random</i>	52
3.3.1 Victualling and provisions as aspects of shipboard life	52
3.3.2 Authority	56

3.4	The maritime sphere in Roderick Random	62
4	FREDERICK MARRYAT'S <i>MR. MIDSHIPMAN EASY</i>	
4.1	Historical background	69
4.2	<i>Mr. Midshipman Easy</i> and its Mediterranean setting	70
4.3	The seamen in <i>Mr. Midshipman Easy</i>	74
4.4	The maritime sphere and the concept of initiation	81
5	CONCLUSION	89
6	BIBLIOGRAPHY	91
7	INDEX	94

Appendixes:

Abstract	A
Deutsche Zusammenfassung	B
Curriculum Vitae	C

Acknowledgements

I would like to use the opportunity to thank Prof. Franz Wöhrer not only for guiding me through the process of writing this thesis, but also his willingness to have a look at some chapters at short notice, which is something not to be taken for granted.

Furthermore, an “ahoy” goes to out to the following people: the boys on the docks: my friends; the wind in my sails, in more than one way: my family; and my first mate, my girlfriend Tamara. Without all of you, I would have been wrecked more than once.

1 INTRODUCTION

„The sea is our approach and bulwark; it has been the scene of our greatest triumphs and dangers, and we are accustomed in lyrical strains to claim it as our own”, Robert Louis Stevenson remarked in 1878 (qtd. in Klein 2). Indeed at that time, there was some right in the claim that Britain seemed to have formed some kind of patriotic pact with the ocean, since the command of it was one, if not the decisive factor that had enabled Britain to become an empire which ruled over great extents of territory and was uncontested in respect to naval matters. Even though, as Marshall (42) has stated, “[s]uch an empire was to require new ideological justifications beyond those appropriate to an empire of the seas”, it also true that “[c]oncepts of a territorial empire of rule over lands and peoples never, however, displaced earlier concepts of an empire of the seas based on trade and naval power, but rather were added to them” (Marshall 42-43). Already in 1674, in *Navigation and Commerce, their Origin and Progress*, John Evelyn had written: “whoever commands the ocean, commands the trade of the world, and whoever commands the trade of the world, commands the riches of the world , and whoever is master of that, commands the world itself” (qtd. in Rodger, *Command* ii). The period covered in this thesis, the almost 140 years from the early days of the eighteenth century to the year before Queen Victoria’s ascended the throne in 1837, was the period which saw Britain rise to ultimate naval mastery and indeed the command of the ocean respectively large parts of the globe; Nicholas Rodger’s definitive naval history of Britain between 1649 and 1815 is therefore titled “*The Command of the Ocean*” with good reason indeed. Victories over France, Britain’s relatively constant enemy during that time, were boasted national pride; especially the ones achieved in the Seven Years War (1756-1763) and, of course, the triumph over Napoleon’s France in 1815. The hero of Trafalgar, Admiral Horatio Nelson, next to Drake and Cook perhaps the most famous British naval figure, came to be seen as a symbol for supposed British values such as bravery and sense of duty. From today’s perspective, however, it is maybe more interesting to see how he was a hero who

[...] would rise above English and Scottish prejudices and become truly British. Although his signal to the fleet before the battle of Trafalgar [1805], ‘England expects every man to do his duty’, was scarcely tactful to the Scottish and Welsh sailors under him, he nevertheless became, in Byron’s words, ‘Britannia’s god of war’. (Speck 205).

If Nelson, as a naval hero, became a national icon, the Royal Navy as such provided a more than fertile ground in which his legend was sown. As essential part of Britain's bigger maritime story – in which piracy, as will be shown in the chapter on Defoe, also plays a prominent role – its ships and men, victories (but also failures) and famous campaigns were significant also in respect to the development of the notion of Britishness after the Act of Union with Scotland in 1707. At this point, since an attempt to outline the overall development of such a complex concept in a few paragraphs is certainly destined to fail, it is probably best to mention one of those authors who have, in my opinion, succeeded in telling the whole story in an excellent manner: Linda Colley and her book *Britons. Forging the Nation 1707 – 1837* (1992). Nevertheless, some aspects of the navy's role in this should be considered since, as I have already mentioned, the success of Britain on the high seas was something that the public became increasingly proud of; the importance of the maritime dimension went, as Marshall has pointed out,

[...] beyond the commercial and the military. It was also powerfully ideological. Confidence in their maritime prowess was crucial to British peoples' beliefs that they exercised an empire over the seas. This empire, at least from the 1730s, was characterized by a common commitment to values described by David Armitage as "Protestant, commercial, maritime and free". [These] developed into an identity aspired to by nearly all sections of British opinion and shared by Irish Protestants as well as by the white Anglophone population of the Atlantic colonies. (Marshall 45-46).

However, this relatively new notion of Britishness does certainly not mean that other, more local identities were lost; it is therefore not the case that "[...] the growing sense of Britishness in this period supplanted and obliterated other loyalties. It did not. Identities are not like hats. Human beings can and do put on several at a time" (Colley 6). This is certainly true, but to a considerable extent, the British navy did serve as a unifying factor, and added a significant piece to the overall ideological body of British identity. Smollett's *Roderick Random* is a highly interesting novel in this respect; the ending of the novel, with sees the Scotsman Roderick restored to the privileged life that should have been his right from the start, has been interpreted as "[...] a sign of his full acceptance into the United Kingdom" (Crawford 60). The navy also had a special advantage over, for example, the British army. Seen as defender of Britain's freedom,

[e]nthusiasm for the navy and for war at sea usually rested on unfavourable comparisons with the army and with war on continental Europe. A standing army, associated with Cromwell and James II, was conceived as a threat to English liberties in a way that the navy could never be. Regular soldiers were likely to be the tools of despotism, whereas sailors were free-born Englishmen. [...] The army fought on the Continent at the behest of Britain's Dutch or Hanoverian kings. The navy fought for truly British purposes of protecting and advancing trade. (Marshall 47)

It should be mentioned that, however, the navy was not only so important for people of that time because it helped to build and maintain Britain's empire, which was without a doubt a maritime one. It was at least equally important because people perceived the Royal Navy to be the protector in respect to the threat of an invasion of Britain, and, furthermore, it secured British interests in respect to continental affairs.

On this basis, there is reason to assume that the importance of naval matters for Britain also is reflected in the fiction of that period. If that is so, it is even more interesting because the eighteenth century saw a booming book trade and the medium of print fostered the formation of a political respectively national identity. Because of the importance of the maritime sphere for Britain as a whole, this thesis is concerned with *British* sea novels rather than *English* ones. The three novels that will be discussed in this thesis were written at different points in time within a time span which saw Great Britain rise to unchallenged dominance at sea. I have therefore chosen these three books, respectively the naval chapters in them, in order to be able to follow the course of the period. By doing so, I hope to find out how actual historical events and developments are reflected in, responded to and criticized in *Captain Singleton*, *Roderick Random* and *Mr. Midshipman Easy*. How is the maritime sphere represented and for which purpose is it used by Defoe, Smollett and Marryat? Which larger, general concerns do they express, and are they historically authentic when doing so? By trying to answer these questions, I hope to be able to shed some light on the context in which the three authors wrote both *in* and *about*. In the course of this, one enters the fascinating world of the wooden world of ships in the Age of Sail, a period which will probably always have a special place in Britain's history – the history of a nation that will always have a special relationship with the sea, even if Britannia no longer rules the waves.

2 DANIEL DEFOE'S *CAPTAIN SINGLETON*

2.1 Historical background¹

When the Stuart Charles II, son of Charles I who had been executed in 1649, accessed the English throne in 1660, it was the beginning of the Restoration. However, during the reign of the “merry monarch” Charles II and, from 1685 onwards, his brother James II (also James VII of Scotland), it turned out that old issues and earlier problems had persisted. Religious and political disputes and the conception of the monarchy were once more matters that had to be dealt with, as England saw itself faced with new versions of old debates.

When the Catholic James II followed his brother, these issues became even more pressing, mostly because of James' belief in absolute monarchy and the way in which he advocated his Catholicism. This resulted in the formation of a broad opposition of both Tories and Whigs against the monarch, eventually culminating in the so-called “Glorious Revolution”² in which James' Protestant daughter Mary and her husband William of Orange were offered the throne. James II fled to France, and was, having gathered his largely but not exclusively Catholic supporters, eventually defeated in the Battle of the Boyne which was fought in the east of Ireland in 1690 and died in France 1701. However, Jacobitism (after the Latin form for “James”) did not die with this defeat, as the (unsuccessful) Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745 demonstrate.

When Mary and William were installed on the throne, the Parliament passed the Bill of Rights, thereby laying down the principles of parliamentary supremacy and the inviolable Rule of Law. “The Bill of Rights clearly overrode the hereditary right which formed the basis of the restored constitution of 1660 and replaced it with the will of the nation expressed through Parliament” (Langford 401). This was indeed revolutionary in the age of Absolutism, and might well have spared Britain a bloody revolution like the one France would experience about a hundred years later. The Bill of Rights is

¹ This is a very brief summary of the basic events of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, in order to provide the reader with a basic historical framework for Defoe's *Captain Singleton*. In respect to this well-researched period of English history, see Morrissey (216-242), Schröder (29-34) and Langford (399-469).

² Sometimes also known as the „Bloodless Revolution“, it was hardly bloodless in Ireland and Scotland where it took battles to gain and maintain control.

therefore, in combination with the Act of Settlement of 1701³, also the important for why, after the death of James' other daughter Anne who had reigned from 1702-1714, a candidate who was only fifty-seventh in line genealogically (Morrissey 223), was made King of England: George, Prince Elector of Hanover.

The new type of monarchy also resulted in a change in England's relationships with other powers, and it is in this period that France (once more) became a relatively permanent enemy, whereas it saw, little surprising, a more pro-Dutch policy. The new combination of England, Wales and Scotland after the Act of Union (1707) saw itself involved in "[...] both Continental and colonial warfare as she had not been involved since the Elizabethan struggle with Spain [...]" (Langford 402), like, in parts of the first two decades of the eighteenth century, The War of Spanish Succession. However, one effect of English respectively British successes in this conflict was that the nation earned a new, powerful reputation. All in all, considering military successes and more or less unlimited trade, the England of "Good Queen Anne" was indeed on its way to future power.

The early eighteenth century also saw a further consolidation of the development of political parties. Tories and Whigs differed in their views on the relationship between the king and "his" people, with the Tories advocating a conservative standpoint and the Whigs a more liberal one. The Tories, who had generally supported the Stuart Monarchy, had seen themselves forced to comply with the Glorious Revolution. However, they became associated with Jacobitism again, and, having opposed the Hanoverian succession initialised by the Whigs, fell out of favour with the new king and had to wait for a major revival of their political power until the reign of George III towards the end of the century. In any case, a development had clearly set in which made "[...] eighteenth century politicians [ask] themselves not how to do away with the need for Parliament, or even how to crush it. Rather they had to consider how to manipulate it. The arts of management were to provide the key to the conduct of Georgian politics" (Langford 405).

³ The act provided that the next monarch must neither be a Catholic nor married to one.

2.2 *Captain Singleton* and history

2.2.1 Piracy as general historical theme

Generally speaking, a look at some of Daniel Defoe's other pieces of work reveals that he was highly interested in and fascinated by the world of piracy⁴. Certainly one must be aware of the fact that, to a certain degree, Defoe was meeting the demand of an English middle-class reading public eager to experience on paper the adventures the men on the pirate ships were experiencing in reality. Furthermore, the simple fact that the time when *Captain Singleton* was written was still within a period that can be seen as heyday of piracy⁵ and therefore a matter of concern for (of course not only) British society, could be sufficient explanation for Defoe's decision to create the character of Bob Singleton as pirate. However, this would do Defoe's ambition as a writer, or even "novelist", little justice, and an analysis of the novel neglecting Defoe's creative desire to process issues which he dealt with in many other instances as well, such as the concept of sin and redemption⁶, would hardly be a serious one – no matter how many other flaws and "weaknesses" critics might have pointed out so far.

Without a doubt, *Captain Singleton* is Defoe's major pirate novel, but it is not his first piece of work concerned with the topic. Some six months (but still in 1719) before *The Life, Adventures, and Pyracies of the Famous Captain Singleton*⁷ was published in the summer of 1720, an account of the life of one of the most famous pirates of the early eighteenth century, Captain Henry Avery⁸, was appeared in the form of two fictional letters by the pirate "himself", so to speak. Defoe's version of Avery's story, called *The*

⁴ One of the most frequently used sources for historians and literary historians is *The General History of Pyrates* by Captain Charles Johnson, first published in 1724.

⁵ Historically, piracy is of course a phenomenon that occurred (and still occurs) in many places in almost every historical period. However, the notion of piracy in the minds of most people of the Western world is usually connected with the image of pirates of the seventeenth and eighteenth century.

⁶ For Bob Singleton's "moral voyage", see chapter 2.4.2.

⁷ The full title on the title page of the book was *The Life, Adventures, and Pyracies of the Famous Captain Singleton: Containing an Account of his being set on Shore in the Island of Madagascar, his Settlement there, with a Description of the Place and Inhabitants: Of his Passage from thence, in a Paraguay, to the main Land of Africa, with the Account of the Customs and Manners of the People: His great Deliverances from the barbarous Natives and wild Beast: Of his meeting with an Englishman, a Citizen of London, among the Indians, the great Riches he acquired, and his Voyage home to England: As also Captain Singleton's Return to Sea, with an Account of his many Adventures and Pyracies with the famous Captain Avery and others.*

⁸ His last name is sometimes also spelled "Every" (Earle 116). Furthermore, Henry Avery seems to have used a number of aliases such as John Avery, which is also used by some authors such as Backscheider (478). For a short biography, see Konstam (130-31).

*King of Pirates*⁹, sold relatively well, and a second edition was published in the same year as *Captain Singleton* (Backscheider 478). Pointing out some important features of *The King of Pirates* should not only help to put the novel under discussion in a wider context, but might also show some aspects of Defoe's motivation to make it a pirate story in the first place. But what were, in this specific respect, Defoe's sources, respectively the literary context in which *Captain Singleton* is seen in this thesis?

A number of popular travel narratives and pirate stories were published already before Defoe wrote *The King of Pirates*, and he seems to have been familiar with many of them; in fact, by 1719, when *The King of Pirates* was published, Defoe had "[...] built up an extensive collection of travel literature, and without moving out of his library at Stoke Newington had all the facts he needed at his command" (Sutherland 143). Woodes Roger's *Cruising Voyage Around the World* (1712) and *The Bucaniers of America* (1684-85) by Alexander Esquemelin are just two prominent examples, but one should also mention the works of William Dampier¹⁰, the tales of James Mission¹¹ (and his pirate colony "Libertalia") or Robert Knox¹², whose story is even told in *Captain Singleton*. Furthermore, a considerable amount of pirate biographies was available at the time, frequently in the form of published trials. In respect to the latter, *The Grand Pyrate; or, the Life and Death of Capt. George Cusack, The great Sea-Robber* (1670) and *The Tryals of Major Stede Bonnet and Other Pyrates* (1719) were records which Defoe drew upon (Schonhorn 409). However, it seems obvious that an anonymous pamphlet called *The Life and Adventures of Captain John Avery, the Famous English Pirate, (rais'd from a Cabbin-Boy to a King) now in Possession of Madagascar*, published in 1709, was – besides the fact that Avery was a well-known figure of his days and various stories about him were told – Defoe's major source for *The King of Pirates*, which is also of interest here because it "[...] is small example of the autobiographical mimicry of a quasi-historical character which was Defoe's master strategy" (Richetti, *Narratives* 66). In his version of Avery's story and, more generally, the treatment of pirates in it, Defoe already uses elements that can also be found in *Captain Singleton*, for example the rather "un-heroic introspection which clashes

⁹ Its full title is *The King of Pirates: Being an account of the Famous Enterprizes of Captain Avery, the Mock King of Madagascar; with his Rambles and Piracies, wherein all the Sham Accounts formerly published of him are detected.*

¹⁰ 1651 (baptized) – 1715. Dampier was an English sea captain and buccaneer, but also author and scientific observer.

¹¹ Most probably a fictitious figure (Earle 129-130).

¹² 1641 – 1720. A captain in service of the British East India Company, Knox was taken captive on Sri Lanka (called Ceylon in English until 1972) in 1659 and only escaped over 20 years later.

immediately with the established popular legend surrounding a notorious pirate like Avery” (Richetti, *Narratives* 66). In other words, I would argue that in the *The King of Pirates*, Defoe developed some of the lines he would also follow in *Captain Singleton*, at least as far as the approach to more or less legendary and rather vague elements in a story are concerned. He tries to replace them with a (pseudo-) realistic and personal historical perspective, and endeavours “to impart an air of authenticity to his fictitious narratives” for example in the “[...] Preface, where he contrasts the extravagant and incredible accounts of Avery hitherto available with this reliable account of the Captain himself.”¹³ (Sutherland 143). In my opinion, this air of authenticity is also to be found in *Captain Singleton*, with the first-person-narrator being a decisive formal feature. Indeed, as Novak (*Master*, 580) points out, “[i]n some ways, [*The King of Pirates*] may be dismissed as a prelude to [...] *Captain Singleton*, published six months later, yet it has a peculiar interest for that very reason: it is like a proleptic sketch, as if Defoe were anticipating future fictions in the very process of writing.”

I would therefore argue that Defoe’s approach is adding a new dimension to an already existing literary context, i.e. literature in a wider sense concerned with piracy and adventures on the high seas. His motivation was to some degree certainly to give the reading public something to satisfy their appetite for narratives of this kind, but the mentioned peculiarities, especially of *Captain Singleton*, can be seen as a result of Defoe’s own interests and concerns. Perhaps the most prominent one is his interest in trade respectively, in this case, its exposure to dangers such as piracy. As his biography reveals, Defoe “[...] had sustained serious losses through the capture of ships in which he had an interest [and so] he had a feeling of involvement in the risks run by merchant vessels [...] in the more permanent risks they faced from the depredation of pirates.” (Sutherland 150). Despite various remarkable differences¹⁴, *The King of Pirates* is also important for *Captain Singleton* in terms of other significant features of Defoe’s pirate novel, such as the alienation from society, which both pirates experience¹⁵. Defoe seems to have had a rather detailed knowledge in respect to judicial matters concerning pirates, and besides the spiritual isolation – a theme that fascinated the author in many instances, most prominently perhaps in *Robinson Crusoe* – the “legal isolation” (Baer

¹³ It is interesting that Defoe, since he was not be sure Avery was really already dead, relativizes this claim to a certain extent (Sutherland 143).

¹⁴ These differences are clearly there. This chapter is briefly concerned with *The King of Pirates*’ role as potential precursor of *Captain Singleton*, and does not attempt to be a comparative study. For further reading, see Richetti (*Narratives* 63-93).

¹⁵ In respect to *Captain Singleton*, this will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2.4.2.

62) also made pirates generally so interesting for Defoe. After all, as I have pointed out before, they seemed to be highly attractive subjects, “[...] not only because they were in the news but also because their stories brought together so many of his favourite topics – travel, trade, crime, colonization¹⁶, the national security, and the isolation of the human soul” (Baer 56). One could say that in *Captain Singleton*, Defoe himself “contextualizes” themes that concerned him personally as well as his contemporaries, so in order to understand the novel fully, the context of some of its themes and motifs has to be considered. The following chapter aims to achieve this in respect to the way Defoe represents history in the book.

2.2.2 History as a theme in *Captain Singleton*

Captain Singleton is essentially a historical novel. As a fictional narrative which reconstructs history and aspires after authenticity, with both fictional and historical characters, Captain Avery for instance, I do not see a reason why it should not be classified as such.

It is exactly this striving for verisimilitude that has created some dispute among scholars. Schonhorn (407-419) has attacked the older standpoint which viewed *Captain Singleton* as a traditional buccaneering narrative. In his opinion, especially “the displacement of aggression in [Defoe’s] protagonists and a characteristic retreat from physical confrontation” (419) is so unlike the sources from which Defoe borrowed, that “what has been falsely presented and long maintained to be a traditional buccaneering narrative [has been] diluted beyond recognition” (419). One might agree with Schonhorn when he claims that *Captain Singleton* is not a “traditional buccaneering narrative”. It is, after all, an early version of a novel, and being such, gives the author the opportunity to “seriously [...] impose form and significance on his earlier narrative [*The King of Pirates*]” (Zimmerman 54). It might not be “traditional”, but I argue that it must nevertheless be counted among the pirate literature of the time – one may also call it, like Schonhorn, “buccaneering narratives” – and should be seen as part of the genre. It might not be conventional, but is hardly “diluted beyond recognition”; the basic subject matter alone somewhat contradicts this claim, and the way it is processed structurally, especially in the second part of the book, is at least reminiscent of what

¹⁶ For Defoe and colonization respectively imperialism, see J.A. Downie’s essay in Lund (78-96), Backscheider (439-40) and Novak (*Master* 638).

Schönhorn would probably consider “traditional”¹⁷. The narrator “jumps” from episode to episode, from one adventure to another, and the novel has actually been criticised because Bob Singleton “[...] is telling us his story [...] with little comprehension of it except as several blocks of narrative material” (Zimmerman 74). Like in *The King of Pirates*, Defoe wants to establish an air of historic authenticity in *Captain Singleton*, albeit in form of a novel. This gave him the opportunity to incorporate issues that he was interested in, like crime and sin, as well as appealing to a readership interested in adventure, exploration and piracy. It seems to me that Defoe tried to combine both novel and travel narrative in *Captain Singleton*; if he was really successful in this endeavour however, is subject to an ongoing dispute¹⁸.

The desire to be authentic is underlined by including various historical elements in the novel. That Defoe was, as far as Schönhorn is concerned, not realistic enough because he did, for example, not describe violent incidents in sufficient detail, does not make the novel less “realistic” or “diluted beyond recognition”. It is in my opinion rather a different placement of emphasis, Defoe’s very own mindset with which he approaches the topic. Personal interest went hand in hand with the economic background of the time, so the historical context, this time economic rather than cultural, is once more a factor that can by no means be neglected. Defoe is writing at a time when mercantilism was still a dominant school of thought in economics, and was very well aware of the fact that the foundation of a mercantile culture was maritime activity; “[...] it is this connection between the sea and the making of money that Defoe understands so well” (Peck 20). It is therefore not surprising that an author with a life-long interest in such topics as trade and money-making would put his emphasis, even if not exclusively, on this. After all, certain

“[...] themes – piracy, the value of money, exploitation – are all reflections on what was happening in Britain during the furor over the collapse of the South Sea Company’s manipulation of stock. [...] [T]he paradox of business as crime and crime as business was a driving force behind almost all of [Defoe’s] fiction. (Novak, *Innovator* 55)

The following analysis of certain historical events and themes that can be found in *Captain Singleton* will hopefully show that Defoe might not have been right in every

¹⁷ For examples, see the ones mentioned in the previous chapter.

¹⁸ For instance, Kumar criticises the lack of „psychological penetration“ (*Introduction* xiii).

detail, but was very aware of the role of history in his aim to be authentic. In other words, he was trying to put the actions in the novel in a historical context, and, as I will demonstrate, was at the end of the day successful in this attempt.

To begin with, his depicting of certain nations respectively nationalities goes hand in hand with historical facts. The two nations, besides Singleton's native England of course, that feature most prominently in the novel are the Portuguese and the Dutch. This is not very surprising when one considers the geographical setting of the bigger part of the second half of the novel – i.e. the most significant section in respect to piracy. However, it is the Portuguese that Defoe frequently attacks rather severely, as the following quotes from the text will illustrate. “[...] I learnt several material Things in this Voyage among the Portuguese: I learnt particularly to be an errant Thief and a bad Sailor; and I think I may say they are the best masters for Teaching both of these, of any nation in the world” (Defoe 5).

But this is just the start; Defoe's tirades against the Portuguese become more bitter on the next few pages. He calls them “[...] a Nation the most perfidious and the most debauch'd, the most insolent and cruel, of any that pretend to call themselves Christians, in the World” (Defoe 6). This is further elaborated and partly contrasted with a virtue that Defoe presents as distinctly English, namely bravery:

They were so brutishly wicked, so base and perfidious, not only to Strangers, but to one another; so meanly submissive when subjected; so insolent, or barbarous and tyrannical when superior, that I thought there was something in them that shock'd my very Nature. Add to this, that 'tis natural to an Englishman to hate a Coward, it all joined together to make the Devil and a Portuguese equally my Aversion. (Defoe 7)

Certainly Singleton's loathing of “[...] those Scoundrels the Portuguese, a Nation [he has] an original aversion to [...]” (Defoe 150) partly results from the treatment he has received from his Portuguese master (Defoe 7-9), but especially in this case the historical context plays a most significant role. It is true that by the time Defoe wrote *Captain Singleton*, the climax of the conflict especially between the Dutch, Portuguese and English and the Indian Ocean respectively in Asia was already in the past, and the

signing of the so-called “Methuen-Treaty”¹⁹ in 1703 even turned out to be “[...] an essential component of eighteenth-century Britain’s prosperity” (Rodger, *Command* 167). In fact, after being initially an ally of France, Portugal sided with Great Britain and its allies quite early in the War of the Spanish Succession²⁰. Nevertheless, Portugal was still Britain’s rival, albeit not in combat, but foremost in commerce. By the early eighteenth century²¹, the times when England had, together with other European nations, pursued a violent policy in Asian waters had developed into an “[...] era of more settled trade [...] in the region” (Earle 111), so the need for violence was essentially reduced. The conflict between the English (later British) East India Company and Portuguese India on the Indian subcontinent, however, was, or had been, a “hot topic”, but after the defeat of the Portuguese there it was only “[...] a matter of time before the whole country was subdued and the various native rulers brought under the company’s control [...]” (Dear 183). So, as hinted at above, the Portuguese were “[...] Britain’s commercial and political adversaries at that time” (Kumar, *Notes* 279).

Interestingly, the Dutch are not so harshly treated in the book, although they are portrayed as major force, at least in the East Indies. The pirates fear to alarm a factory²² of the Dutch at Java “[...] who are by far the strongest in the Indies” (Defoe 187). Possibly Defoe did not judge them to be as “cowardly” as the Portuguese, who had changed sides in the War of the Spanish Succession after successes of the Great Alliance²³. In addition to this, the Dutch East India Company²⁴ was no longer a competitor respectively no threat on the mainland of Asia from the early eighteenth century onwards (Dear 183). Still, the Dutch are for Defoe and many of his contemporaries a great trading rival – but one whose success seems to have been met with a good deal of respect (Backscheider 293). It would be hardly surprising if a personality like Defoe’s, with his life-long interest in trade and business, would have been impressed by economic aptitude and skill, especially in respect to a nation he seems to have respected in the first place. His perception of the Dutch might simply have been better than the one he had of the Portuguese, and perception does certainly

¹⁹ Named after the English politician John Methuen who negotiated it, the Methuen-Treaty was a commercial and military agreement that was cancelled in 1836. See Rodger (*Command* 167) and Kennedy (86) for a more detailed explanation of its effects.

²⁰ From 1701-14 (alternatively dated 1702-13; see Langford 402-03).

²¹ Singleton and his crew, coming from the „West Indies“ respectively the east coast of South America, pass by the Cape of Good Hope on the 12th of November 1706 (Defoe 168).

²² Meaning a licensed trading post.

²³ Especially the Battle of Vigo Bay, a naval battle fought in October 1702.

²⁴ Founded in 1602, it is often referred to as VOC, the *Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*.

also play a role in Defoe's work. It is part of the way in which nations act and behave in a historical context, similar to a character:

He tended to take his old stance as a casuist and gloss over theoretical issues, and, by writing about the European nations as if they were individuals, he transformed principles of diplomacy and international relations and the terms of treaties into the psychology of human beings with their inconsistencies, complexities, and deficiencies. Like people, the nations in his work reacted to circumstances, to historical experiences – shared and separate – and to perceptions. They could act from pride, anger, self-interest, or loyalty, and motive and circumstance took precedence over strict principle. [...] Defoe explained, if not excused, them by placing them in a world of conflicting ethical and practical imperatives. (Backscheider 293)

In respect to the Portuguese, Defoe might have principally disapproved of their changing sides, i.e. to relate this to the quote above, “their inconsistencies [...] and deficiencies”. However, he does not seem to be interested in “explaining”, let alone “excusing” them in the case of *Captain Singleton*. Another dimension should be considered as well when arguing that perception plays such an important role: a political and religious one. From a Whig point of view, especially the Dutch were a valuable ally in the war for Defoe, he even called them “the best Friends that ever England had” (qtd. in Backscheider 293), although he sometimes also criticised them – but never the alliance itself, which Defoe warned should not be broken. As a vehement opponent of the Jacobites, he stressed in 1712 that turning against the Dutch would have “[...] negative effects [...] on trade, mentions the ‘Protestant interest’ and the Hanoverian succession, and concludes, ‘the present Popular Cry against the Dutch is a sad Token of the Growth and Encrease of Jacobitism among Us’” (Backscheider 316). Interestingly, this might well tie in with the association of piracy with treason, and [...] the imputation of treason must have been strengthened by the suspicion that pirates were Jacobites. There are numerous accounts in which captives, under pain of pirate wrath, are forced to drink a health to the Pretender²⁵ [...]” (Baer 65). The connection is perhaps little surprising²⁶ when one considers the theme of “order”. Both pirates and Jacobites were, from Defoe's perspective a threat to the established order: one in respect to trade, the other politically. Both were a danger to stability, and this concerns Defoe. Even if

²⁵ James Francis Edward Stuart (1720-88), the son of James II, and from a Jacobite perspective James III (James VIII of Scotland). He was also referred to as “the Old Pretender”, mostly by his opponents.

²⁶ This is also reflected in some pirate ships' names such *King James* or *Queen Anne's Revenge* (Earle 170).

Jacobitism does not feature prominently in *Captain Singleton*, the issue is nevertheless of significance in an analysis of nationality (of the Dutch, in that case) in the novel²⁷.

The way the Dutch sailors are treated when the pirates capture their richly laden vessel (Defoe 187-89) is certainly to be seen in respect to Singleton's moral development. However, there are no further comments concerning their character, or other rather personal statements similar to the ones made about the Portuguese, except that "[...] a Dutchman swims like a fish" (Defoe 187). The most probable explanation for the fact that the European in the episode in Sri Lanka (respectively Ceylon in the novel) is a Dutchman is that it was simply most likely (Defoe 225-237). The rather positive portrayal of the Dutch in comparison with the Portuguese is not even "stained" by mentioning a specific historical event that contemporaries of Defoe would still have been familiar with, although it was already almost a hundred years in the past when *Captain Singleton* was published. Even if it might have lost some of its prominence, "[f]or decades the memory of the Amboyna massacre of 1623 had rankled among patriots" (Kennedy 47). On Amboyna, a Dutch island in the Moluccas, a number of men, among them ten English merchants, were tortured and killed by the Dutch governor, although they had been protected by a flag of truce (Kemp 182). The massacre can be seen as "the culmination of a conflict of commercial interests between the English and the Dutch in the Spice Islands, from which the British East India Company now removed itself" (Kenyon 11). It must be because of Defoe's already mentioned perception of the Dutch that the literary processing of this event is reduced to mentioning the crew's reaction when they take a Dutch ship belonging to Amboyna:

[...] [B]etween these Islands we met with a Dutch Jonque, or Vessel going to Amboyna. We took her without much Trouble, and I had much ado to prevent our Men murdering all the Men, as soon as they heard them say, they belonged to Amboyna, the Reason I suppose any one will guess. (Defoe 191)

Defoe himself assumes that his readers would be familiar with Amboyna, and does not provide any further information. This would support the argument that the massacre was still something people in England, or perhaps at least what Defoe saw as his readership, would know what he was talking about. But why does he mention an event the pirates want to revenge almost hundred years later in the first place? The obvious explanation

²⁷ For more information on the connection of piracy and Jacobitism, see Earle. He points out that "[...] it is significant that [the pirates] should so defiantly identify with the enemies of the Hanoverian government which [...] was determined to drive them off the face of the earth" (Earle 170).

is his striving for authenticity, and this is not the only example of Defoe using historical elements in a seemingly casual way in his narrative.

The actual voyage of Captain Singleton will be discussed in another chapter²⁸. At this point, I am more concerned with the background of choosing certain basic locations, and, in order to support my claim that Captain Singleton is realistic enough to be part of the genre (as discussed earlier), I will concentrate on the actions in Asia²⁹. Defoe was acting within an existing historical context when he directed the Singleton and his pirate crew to Asia respectively the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. Therefore I doubt that he did so in order to avoid “[...] the expected details of those cruising adventures against the hated Spaniards which the sources constantly report [...]” (Schonhorn 414). To me, the placing of most of the action of the pirate narrative is rather a matter of taste respectively Defoe’s interests. Certainly, the Caribbean or the coasts of South America would have been options too; in fact, parts of the story are taking place there. However, I would argue that the Asian and Arabian environment seemed even more attractive to Defoe, especially in respect to trade. European trade in the region could look back on a relatively long tradition, and so could piracy. In fact, at the end of the seventeenth century a phenomenon by some called the “Arabian Sea fever” (Bohn 72) had set in, which probably made the region not only more attractive as the book’s setting, but perhaps also more authentic³⁰ and more “up to date” in the eyes Defoe’s contemporaries. It is little surprising that the long-distance trade routes of various European East India Companies, most of all the English/British and Dutch, attracted many pirates, and so-called “country ships”, ships mostly belonging to native ship owners who were often extremely wealthy, were a much sought-after prey as well – especially since they were believed to offer little resistance when being attacked (Earle 111-12). In respect to China and India, the period under discussion is within a time frame (albeit in its first half) labelled as “the Asian Century” by Berg, a long period “[...] of continuous trade between Britain, China and India. Chinese and Indian merchants responded to distant markets and built up or adapted their production base; European companies and merchants [...] built their consumer markets for these goods at home and abroad” (Berg 60). Therefore it seems fitting that Singleton decides to focus

²⁸ See chapter 2.4.1.

²⁹ The background of the pirates’ actions in the Caribbean and (South) American coast is basically not disputed. Therefore I will restrict myself to referring to Earle as a starting point for further reading (e.g. 157-180).

³⁰ One should keep in mind that this part of Captain Singleton takes part in the early years of the eighteenth century, over a decade before the publication of the book.

on “proper” commercial activity rather than piracy in an encounter with Chinese tradesmen.

[...] [The ship] had three Chinese merchants in her, and they told us they were going to meet a large Vessel of their Country [...] and they were going to the Philippine Islands, with Silks, Muslins, Callicoes, and such as are the Product of China, and some Gold; that their Business was to sell their Cargo, and buy Spices and European Goods. [...] This suited very well our Purpose; so I resolved now that we would leave off being Pyrates, and turn Merchants [...] (Defoe 199)

I would like to conclude this chapter with two further examples of Defoe’s attempt to embed his narrative in an authentic historical context³¹. I have already mentioned that the trade routes from Europe to the East and back were highly attractive to pirates³², and the general attractions “[...] multiplied when it was realised that ships in the Indian Ocean carried cargoes potentially far more profitable for pirates than those aboard vessels in the Caribbean and Atlantic” (Earle 112). Both the afore mentioned “country ships” and the ship belonging to European East India Companies were attacked, as the following passages from *Captain Singleton* will illustrate.

It is true, we were strong enough to have attacked an English East India Ship of the greatest Force, though some of them were said to carry fifty Guns [...] And as our Circumstances stood, we had rather have taken one outward bound East India Ship, with her ready Cash on board, perhaps to the Vallue of forty or fifty Thousand Pound, than three homeward-bound, though their Loading would at London be worth three times the Money; because we knew not whither to go to dispose of the Cargo [...] So that if we resolved to look for our own Country Ships, it should be those that were outward bound, not the London Ships homeward. (Defoe 172-73)

Neither the geographical setting nor this “attacking policy” is unrealistic. Quite to the contrary, Defoe was more than authentic in this respect. On their outward voyages, the European ships would carry silver and also gold coins respectively bars of immense value, “[...] often as much as £50,000 on a single ship, about £5 million in modern terms” (Earle 112). These ships were certainly a much bigger challenge than the “country ships”, but, although “[...] Blows must be looked for [...]” (Defoe 172), were

³¹ For more information on the geographical element, in the novel (especially in respect to Madagascar), see the chapter on Singleton’s voyage.

³² See Earle (113) for the background of pirate’s knowledge about the Indian Ocean and other regions of Asia.

not impossible to take. Nevertheless, native ships were the easier job, and it could well be that the pirates were faced with a different kind of “cargo” that they might have expected. In the area around the “[...] Mouth of the Gulph of Mocha, or the Red Sea”³³ (Defoe 174), it was not unlikely for pirates to capture a ship full of Muslim pilgrims travelling to Mecca.

[...] [N]ever was such a poor Prize chased by Pyrates that look’d for Booty; for we found nothing in [the ship], but poor, half-naked Turks going on a Pilgrimage to Mecca, to the Tomb of their Prophet Mahomet: the Jonk that carry’d them had no one thing worth taking away, but a little Rice, and some Coffee, which was all the poor Wretches had for their Subsistence; so we let them go, for indeed we knew not what to do with them. (Defoe 174)

“Turks” is in this case a rather elastic term that could mean a lot of things. For example, they could be from Surat³⁴, at that time a great trading emporium. Many of the pilgrims did not have to pay for the passage, which was often “[...] paid for as an act of charity and piety by the Mughal Emperor [...]” (Earle 112). The fact that the ship in the quotation above is very poor could, however, be a hint that it was not sponsored by the Emperor, since these ships often carried merchants who traded Indian goods in Arabia, and hence returned to Surat with jewels and cash. Another ship taken by the pirates not long after could in fact be one of those returning from Arabia, having dropped off the pilgrims there.

The ship was of Bengal, belonging to the Great Mogul’s Country³⁵ [...] She was in no Condition to resist us [...] There were five Indian Merchants on board, and some Armenian: It seems they had been at Mocha with Spices, Silks, Diamonds, Pearls, Callicoe, &c. such Goods as the Country afforded, and had little on board now but Money [...] which, by the Way, was just what we wanted [...] (Defoe 176)

The examples that have been discussed in this chapter show that Defoe was aware of the significance of incorporating real historical elements in his narrative to create an air of authenticity. In my opinion, he basically succeeded in this attempt. From this point of view, history itself can be seen as a theme in *Captain Singleton*, and it is used similar to the manner in which actual people and fictional characters are used – for the purpose of

³³ Mocha is located between the Gulf of Arden and the Red Sea and used to be an important centre of trade in the region.

³⁴ Surat is located on the northwest coast of India.

³⁵ Although Bengal is in the very north-east of today’s India respectively the west of Bangladesh, it was at that time part of the Mughal Empire, just like Surat.

general authenticity. It is true that Defoe's work differs from examples that can be considered as stereotypical for the pirate narrative, but because he puts his emphasis on, for example, the booty the pirates find on a ship rather than the more or less violent way in which it is taken, does not make Defoe's *Captain Singleton* less authentic in respect to the author's general approach: writing something both his readership and himself were interested in, as "trivial" as it may seem, and doing so in a form that allowed the author to impose a (potentially) deeper meaning on the narrative. History is especially important in respect to the first element. In what way Defoe tried to do the latter in *Captain Singleton* will be discussed later in this thesis.

2.3 Social themes in *Captain Singleton*

One of the most fascinating aspects of a pirate ship, or generally any ship, as an institution is the fact that it is a social unit. The crew of a pirate ship is a community which is, given the basic circumstances of a life at sea in those times, a very tight-knit, intense type of community. Faced with a number of potentially life-threatening challenges, the men (for the vast majority of pirates were male) of such a community had to find a way to function in it. How they did this were essentially the outlines of the life of a pirate in the so-called "Golden Age of Piracy" of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century³⁶. Various captains and crews certainly differed in their "style", but there are a number of distinctive features that seem to have been rather common. The following chapter will focus on these features, and I hope to show that Defoe was well aware of them, which is proof that he looked into the subject in a rather serious manner, and incorporated many of them when he wrote *Captain Singleton*.

³⁶ See Earle (181-209) for an overview of the prosecution of pirates and the end of the "Golden Age".

2.3.1 “I’ll be hang’d for a Pyrate, rather than starve here” – why sailors become pirates

[...] I answer’d that I conceiv’d our Business was not to attempt our Escape in a Canoe, but as that there were other Vessels at Sea besides our Ship [...], our Business was to cruise along the Coast of the Island [...] and to seize upon the first we could get that was better than our own, and so from that to another, till perhaps we might at last get a good Ship to carry us whither ever we pleased to go. (Defoe 25)

This is how Bob Singleton starts his career as a pirate ideologically. Marooned on Madagascar together with his Portuguese ship mates, he acts out of necessity, which is, however, highly compatible with his general moral mindset and attitude, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter. This notion of being forced to turn to criminality, for piracy is basically robbery on sea, is further illustrated when the crew then discuss Singleton’s proposal. One sailor objects to it: [...] the English Dog has given Devilish Advice [...] we shall turn down-right Pyrates, the End of which is to be hanged.” (Defoe 25). But the force of circumstances prevails:

You may call us Pyrates, says another, if you will, and if we fall into bad Hands, we may be used like Pyrates; but I care not for that, I’ll be a Pyrate, or any thing, nay, I’ll be hanged for a Pyrate, rather than starve here; and therefore I think the Advice is very good; and so they cry’d all, Let us have a Canoe. [...] I [Singleton] did not know what might come hereafter; but as our Case was now, I should make no scruple to take the first Ship I came at, to get our Liberty. (Defoe 25)

The context of this initiation to the world of piracy is created by Defoe to set the scene for the first half of the book, in which Singleton and his comrades travel from the east coast of Africa to the west coast, and should therefore not be generalized in terms of a historical analysis. Nevertheless, its basic motivation is believable and the attempt itself not unrealistic, since trading routes of the European East India Companies would run close to Madagascar. However, to get one’s “liberty”, albeit meant in a different way, is probably *the* reason for joining a pirate crew voluntarily, as the following examples from the second half of the book, which is concerned with Singleton’s career as a pirate, will hopefully demonstrate.

In Captain Singleton, men become pirates in a number of ways, all of which are historically authentic. The episode on Madagascar might have been Bob Singleton's ideological beginning of a life as pirate, but they never actually take a ship but manage to reach the coast of the African continent and cross it by foot. His proper pirate career begins when, having spent or lost all his money, Singleton decides to go to sea again: "I next shipped myself, in an evil Hour to be sure, on a Voyage to Cadiz, in a ship called the [cruiser] [...] Here I fell into Company with some Masters of Mischief [...]" (Defoe 138). Although it is somewhat unclear, it seems probable that he had joined the merchant navy, and with the ship riding in harbour, is told about a planned mutiny on another ship riding close to his own. Parts of the crew decide to do the same on Singleton's ship and joins them "[...] with the least Hesitation" (139). However, their attempt is unsuccessful, so they join the other ship, on which the mutiny had been successful:

Accordingly to the Day appointed, his [Singleton's comrade Harris] Correspondent in the other Ship, whose Name was Wilmot, began the work and having seized the Captain's Mate and other Officers, secured the Ship and gave Signal to us; we were but eleven in our Ship, who were in the Conspiracy, nor could we get any more that we could trust, so that leaving the ship, we all took Boat and went off to join the other. Having thus left the Ship I was in, we were entertained with a great deal of Joy by Captain Wilmot and his new Gang; and being well prepared for all manner of Roguery, bold, desperate, I mean my self without the least Checks of Conscience [...] (Defoe, 139)

Although I can only assume that both ships, Singleton's and Wilmot's, were ships of the merchant navy, this assumption is not only based upon Singleton stating that "[the ship] was fitted out for Merchant Ship only [...]" (Defoe 140) but would also tie in with the historical context. Frequently, whole pirate crews were founded by and through a mutiny, just like in Captain Singleton. Some years before the novel was published, the make-up of pirate crews had undergone an interesting development. Numbers of pirates who had their roots in the West Indian privateering community were by and by declining, as former merchant seaman began to dominate the scene (Earle 166). This is hardly surprising, since "[l]ife for the common sailor in the merchant navy could be hell if he found himself on board a ship run by a captain who took a delight in bullying his men" (Cordingly 132). Many sailors were brutally used, severely injured or lost their life because of the treatment they received on ships of the merchant navy³⁷. This drove

³⁷ Cordingly (132-134) gives a number of examples of the barbaric behaviour of some captains.

many of the merchant navy seamen to becoming pirates, as a number of documents of the time illustrate. Certain officers were, as records of trials against pirates show, often blamed for leaving the crew no other choice: accused of starving his crew, it was said about one officer that “[...] it was such dogs as he that put men on pyrating” (Cordingly 134).

But not only brutal treatment, but also the general conditions of working on a merchant navy ship were reasons for many men to “go upon the account”, as piracy was also referred to³⁸. As we will see, there was not only a completely different socio-political system to be found on board of a pirate ship, but this also had the effect that food and drink were distributed equally and “[...] there seems little doubt that many who talked of pirate life in the leaking forecastles of merchant ships must have seen it as a veritable sailor heaven” (Earle 168). This was seen as sufficient reason for mutiny by many.

Other mutineers simply insisted that “it was not their business to starve”, and that if a captain was making it so, hanging could be little worse. It was an old joke among underfed, angry sailors that should mutiny fail, the weight of their bodies would not be enough to hang them. Sailors, as pirates, changed all this. Those who had long suffered short or rotten provisions in other maritime employments ate and drank in a “wanton and riotous Way”, which was indeed their custom. (Rediker, *Villains* 70-71)

This significant role of alcohol in the social life of pirates is hinted at in the book, but rather in Defoe’s typical way of focusing on the element of trade more than its social function. “[...] [Harris, one of the mutineers] and the Captain went on Shore by themselves, and having made such a Bargain as they found for their Turn, came away again in two Hours time, and bringing only a Butt of Wine, and five Casks of Brandy with them, we all went on board again” (Defoe 140). There are also several short mentions of Arrack, a spirit distilled from rum (Defoe 19, 217). Alcohol, especially punch, did also play a role in the meetings of the ships’ council, as I will show in the next chapter. Food and provision were, if the circumstances allowed it, also on a completely different level compared with what sailors got especially on merchant navy ships. There are several mentions of food in Captain Singleton, sometimes compared with what readers would be familiar with from their own lives in England: “[...] [we]

³⁸ Although there are examples, like the one of the already mentioned famous pirate Henry Avery (Cordingly 21), and life in the Royal Navy could certainly be a very hard one, a similar thing did not happen that often on board of a Royal Navy ship, since “[...] there were more men to share the heavy jobs, and a sadistic captain was likely to find himself court-martialed” (Cordingly 134). However, Rediker (*Villains* 43-44) paints a somewhat different picture.

made our selves amends by feeding heartily on the fresh Beef [...] which was excellent and fat, every Way as tender, and as well relished as in England, and thought to be much better to us who had not tasted any in England for so long a Time” (Defoe 171).

Social issues are obviously not Defoe’s concern in *Captain Singleton*, and if there are any comments on social themes (like the background of a mutiny), they are rather the exception than the rule. There are no details on why Wilmot and the others decide to mutiny, and no information about how they do it – once more an instance of the already mentioned avoidance of brutal details, the reason for which I regard to be Defoe’s different emphasis. However, the maltreatment at the hands of a brutal captain as motivation to join the pirates is clearly mentioned when they meet the crew of an English East India ship.

We presently found their Business, and that they desired to go with us [...] The Fellow that came up to me, told me how they had been used by their Captain, how he had starved the Men and treated them like Dogs; and that if the rest of the Men knew they should be admitted, he was satisfied two Thirds of them would leave the Ship. (Defoe 170).

This is not unusual. Very often, pirates found willing new members among the crew of a ship they had just taken. When Singleton and his crew take a Portuguese ship, they find several seamen of various European nationalities on board. “[...] I took Possession of the Portuguese Man of War [...]; about Thirty of their Seamen took Service with us, some of which were French, some Genoeses, and we set the rest on Shore the next Day [...]” (Defoe 153). Although a smaller number of seamen join them when the pirates capture an Indian ship, the basic mechanism is the same.

[...] [T]hree English Seamen came along with us, and the Dutch Pilot would have done so too; but the two Armenian Merchants entreated us not to take him; for that he being their Pilot, there was none of the Men knew how to guide the Ship: So, at their Request, we refused him; but we made them promise he should not be used ill for being willing to go with us. (Defoe 176)

At least until the 1720s, when a tendency towards more forced recruitment set in (Earle 173), this voluntary way of joining a pirate crew seems to have been the most common one. After having successfully taken a ship, the seamen of the captured vessel were asked by “[t]he pirate quartermaster, who had led the boarding party [...], who among

them would serve under the death's head and black colo[u]rs, and frequently [...] several stepped forward to join up" (Rediker, *Villains* 48).

Out of all the Prizes we took [...], we took their Powder and Bullet, their small Arms and Cutlasses; and as for their Men, we always took the Surgeon and the Carpenter, as Persons who were of particular Use to us upon many Occasions; nor were they always unwilling to go with us, tho' for their own Security, in Case of Accidents, they might easily pretend they were carried away by Force [...]. (Defoe 142)

Defoe must have gotten this information from the large number of sources he probably had at his disposal. Records show that "[...] some men, as it happened, wanted to volunteer without actually volunteering – in other words, they wanted to go with the pirates, but at the same time they wanted to pretend that they were forced so that they would have an alibi should they ever be captured" (Rediker, *Villains* 48). In Captain Singleton, the prominent figure of the Quaker William is such a case.

I found William [...] not very averse to go along with us, and yet resolved to do it so, that it might be apparent he was taken away by Force; and to this Purpose he comes to me, Friend, says he [...] I desire thou wilt oblige the Master of the Sloop which I am on board, to certify under his Hand that I was taken away by Force, and against my Will; and this he said with so much Satisfaction in his Face, that I could not but understand him. [...] So I drew up [a] Certificate my self,, wherein I wrote that he was taken away by main Force, as a Prisoner, by a Pyrate Ship; that they carried away his Chest and Instruments first [William is a surgeon], and then bound his Hands behind him, and forced him into their Boat; and this was signed by the Master and all his Men. (Defoe 143)

It is little surprising that this was especially granted to men who had skills a pirate crew, or basically any crew sailing the high seas needed. William is a surgeon, and among other "artists", [meaning] skilled men desperately needed aboard the ship such as carpenters, coopers, sailmakers [...] or perhaps a tailor [...]" (Earle 167), surgeons were on top of the pirates' list when it came to recruiting new members. Although pirates usually "[...] preferred volunteers, vigorous and enthusiastic ones at that, who would create social cohesion within the group, stronger self-defence, and ultimately greater success in plundering on the high seas" (Rediker, *Villains* 48), it was these occupational groups that were sometimes also forced to join the crew, as the passage from *Captain Singleton* quoted above reveals: "[...] and as for their Men, we always took the Surgeon

and the Carpenter, as Persons who were of particular Use to us upon many Occasions [...]” (Defoe 142).

Summing up all the motives and ways of recruiting new members for a pirate crew in the time relevant in respect to *Captain Singleton*, i.e. until about 1720 when the book was published, it becomes clear that, although some were certainly forced to, most new pirates joined in voluntarily.

Not only brutal treatment and bad living conditions on board of navy merchant ships or also ships of the Royal Navy created a desire to leave such a life behind and turned sailors into pirates, but also unemployment after wars. After the Treaty of Utrecht was signed in 1713, “[...] the English navy shrank from 53,000 to 13,000 men (Cordingly qtd. in Streng 5), which made an immense number of seamen redundant.

Piracy was a highly attractive alternative, and not even the prospect of an untimely death on the gallows kept seamen from joining pirate crews. One should, however, also not underestimate a general desire for adventure and, of course, the opportunity to become rich and wealthy – what pirates “earned” was theirs to keep, which must have been a major force of motivation for often desperate and disillusioned people.

Last but certainly not least, one has to consider the political respectively ideological reasons. Pirate ships offered a social system which was extremely different from the one sailors were part of on merchant navy or Royal Navy ships. Joining a pirate ship was also a form of social protest, as the next chapter will show.

2.3.2 “With Consent of all the Ship’s Company” – *Captain Singleton* and pirate ship politics

Sailors and seamen of the later phase of the Golden Age of Piracy, who were usually from the bottom of the social hierarchy, were well aware of the existence of alternative social orders in respect to naval life³⁹, and the vast majority of those turning to piracy and “[...] risked their lives to sail under the Jolly Roger were motivated by more than greed. They sought to live in a new social order, under different governing assumptions” (Rediker, *Villains* 60). The pirates had their own code, and were living life on (and off) board according to what was often called the pirates’ “Articles of

³⁹ Earlier models are explained in Rediker (*Villains* 64).

Regulation”. These regulated various aspects of pirate life: the distribution of food and booty, various bans and rules (for example, women were not allowed on board of a pirate ship, or the instruction to keep one’s weapons clean) and also the regulations of punishment for those who had violated and broken these rules. “No one knows how well these rules were observed, but drawing them up was as much an integral part of the pirate life of this period as making a black flag and ‘declaring war against the whole world’” (Earle 174).

A number of these fascinating historical documents have survived; Cordingly, quoting from *The General History of Pirates* by Captain Johnson (99-100), offers a starting point for further reading. However, a few elements of these “pirate constitutions” are relevant in respect to Captain Singleton and will be mentioned in the course of the following analysis.

One thing that features rather prominently in the novel is the issue of decision making. Comparing pirate ships with merchant or Royal Navy ships shows that the contrast could hardly be starker. Pirate communities were organized democratically, with a strong emphasis on equality. “Interestingly, these pirates’ ideals resembled those of the French Revolution: liberty, equality and fraternity” (Streng 77); every man had a vote.

This new social order, articulated in the organization of the pirate ship, was conceived and deliberately constructed by the pirates themselves. Its hallmark was a rough, improvised, but effective egalitarianism that placed authority in the collective hands of the crew, which is to say that the core values of the broader culture of the common sailor were institutionalized aboard the pirate ships. It was a world turned upside down as [can be seen] in examining how pirates made decisions, how they designed and selected their leaders, and how they organized the distribution of plunder, food, and discipline – how, in short, they created and perpetuated their culture. They [...] had created a “new government of ship”. (Rediker, *Villains* 61)

The following passage⁴⁰ is taken from the articles adopted by the crew of Bartholomew Roberts, as represented in the *General History of Pyrates*⁴¹.

Every man has a vote in affairs of moment; has equal title to the fresh provisions, or strong liquors, at any time seized, and may use them at pleasure,

⁴⁰ Both this and the passage on page 28 are taken from Cordingly (99), where some more examples of articles can be found. See also Konstam (186-87).

⁴¹ The passages in italics are comments by Captain Johnson.

unless a scarcity (*no uncommon thing among them*) makes it necessary, for the good of all, to vote a retrenchment.

This democratic principle is found in Captain Singleton on a number of occasions. Marooned on Madagascar and therefore having left the order of the ship, the process of decision making is soon organized according to these principles. Singleton and the Portuguese sailors constitute basic principles:

[...] [T]he first thing we did was to give everyone his Hand, that we would not separate from one another upon any Occasion whatsoever, but that we would live and die together; that we would no Food, but that we would distribute it in publick; and that we would be in all things guided by the Majority, and not insist upon our own Resolutions in any thing, if the Majority were against it; that we would appoint a Captain among us to be our Governour or Leader during Pleasure; that while he was in office, we would obey him without Reserve [...]; and that everyone should take Turn, but the Captain was not to act in any particular thing without Advice of the rest, and by the Majority. (Defoe 20-21)

Once more, Defoe is in accordance with historical fact. The captain was indeed usually appointed by the crew. However, the elected captain had little privileges, and was rather “[...] the creature of his crew, or, as Captain Charles Johnson put it, ‘They permit him to be Captain, on Condition, that they may be Captain over him’” (Rediker, *Villains* 65). The exception was when the pirates were engaged in a fight respectively chased a ship or were chased themselves. However, this was the only thing in which the captain had something like absolute power. In respect to other ranks, “[...] [t]he pirates had no use for the ranks of lieutenant and midshipman, but they did elect men to do the jobs carried out by warrant officers and petty officers on merchant ships and naval vessels” (Cordingly 98). Majority decisions like the ones laid down in actual pirate constitutions are frequently reflected in Captain Singleton, sometimes with the notion that this way of making decisions could potentially be a tiresome one: “[...] we concluded at last without him [William]. We were however pretty long in resolving, and hanker’d about the Rio de la Plata a long time [...]” (Defoe 155). Another example will illustrate this further: “[w]e lay here about these several simple Disputes almost five Months [...]” (Defoe 185). When a number of Dutch sailors are captured, the pirate ship’s company need some time to find a solution: “[w]e had a long Consultation here, what we should do with the Men” (Defoe 187).

The destination of a cruise was also discussed and decided by the whole pirate crew: “We ply’d about here in the Latitude of [22 Degrees] South for near a Month, and nothing offer’d; and here we began to consult what we should do next, for we had come to no Resolution yet. Indeed my Design was always for the Cape de Bona Speranza, and so to the East Indies” (Defoe 154). The latter part of this passage hints at something that should be considered in the whole concept of this kind of proto-democratic decision making, namely the fact that there were always people on the ship who had more respect than others and functioned as opinion leaders. I would argue that these people were often the captains respectively the boatswains and quartermasters⁴², who had a highly important function on board of most pirate ships. After all, these were the men elected by their crew on the basis of that the pirates were “[d]emanding someone both bold of temper and skilled in navigation [...]. They wanted leadership by example, not leadership by ascribed status and hierarchy. They therefore gave the captain few privileges [...].” (Rediker, *Villains* 65). Bob Singleton is such a person of authority, albeit of limited authority, the men are “[...] pleased with [his] forward, enterprising Temper [...].” (Defoe 184). His and William’s advices are frequently followed, like in the following passage: “[w]ith theses Arguments I prevailed on them, and we all resolved to steer away S.E. for the Cape of Good Hope, and in Consequence of this Resolution, we concluded to keep the Sloop [...].” (Defoe 167-68). Most of the time, Singleton manages to “[...] easily [convince] them of the Reasonableness of [his] Scheme [...].” (Defoe 172). Bob Singleton is already portrayed as born leader in the first half of the book when he crosses the African continent by foot, and this continues when he turns to piracy. The main protagonist is given a little more authority than most captains would probably have had, but I do believe that this is so because Defoe wanted to show Singleton, and to a lesser extent some other characters like William and Captain Wilmot, in a rather prominent, to a certain extent exposed position in order to make his moral development clearer. Otherwise, Defoe might not have wanted to mention discussions and majority votes each time a decision had to be made in the course of the novel for stylistic reasons. Furthermore, “[...] the ancient maritime custom [that made] the crew sovereign [...] had lapsed by 1700 [...]” (Rediker, *Villains* 68), and might not have been in its full effect of the 1720s at the time Defoe set *Captain Singleton*. Nevertheless, the main elements are certainly in the novel.

⁴² See Earle (173) respectively Rediker (*Villains* 66) for their roles in ship life. Important functions were the prevention of misuse of authority, leading the boarding parties and taking charge of the prize.

The second passage I would like to quote from Captain Robert's articles is the following:

Every man to be called fairly in turn, by list, on board of prizes because, (over and above their proper share) they were on these occasions allowed a shift of clothes: but if they defrauded the company to the value of a dollar in plate, jewels, or money, marooning was their punishment. *This was a barbarous custom of putting the offender on shore, on some desolate or uninhabited cape or island, with a gun, a few shot, a bottle of water, and a bottle of powder, to subsist with or starve.* If the robbery was only betwixt one another, they contented themselves with slitting the ears and nose of him that was guilty, and set him on shore, not in an uninhabited place, but somewhere, where he was sure to encounter hardships.

First of all, although concerned with men being picked for boarding prizes "fairly in turn", the first part of this quote hints at the fact that everybody should have an equal share of almost everything. Although, as Rediker points out (*Villains*, 70), there could be conflicts between newcomers to the crew and older pirates, in *Captain Singleton* newly integrated members are given not only some form of compensation, but are also allowed the same shares⁴³ as older members:

For when we came to Madagascar, Captain Wilmot, with Consent of all the Ship's Company, ordered that these Men should have as much Money given them out of the Stock, as was due to them for their Pay in the Ship they had left; and after that, we allowed them Twenty Pieces of Eight⁴⁴ a Man Bounty Money: And thus we entered them upon Shares, as we were all, and brave stout Fellows they were, being Eighteen in Number [...]. (Defoe 170-71)

Besides the mentioned principles of equality and fairness, the reason for treating the newcomers that way could also be to raise their motivation and make them feel that they now were part of an often multi-national⁴⁵ community that cared for its members, but also had codes for punishing those who violated the community's rules and regulations. One characteristic form of punishment in naval life⁴⁶ was marooning⁴⁷ someone,

⁴³ For more information on how the plunder was divided, with the captain receiving more than the rest as one of his few privileges, see Cordingley (97). Rediker (*Villains* 70) also provides an overview showing a "[...] pay system [representing] a radical departure from the practices in the merchant service, the Royal Navy, and privateering."

⁴⁴ A Spanish dollar made of silver. Pieces of Eight were the closest thing to a global currency at that time.

⁴⁵ For some figures concerning the time span between 1715 and 1725, see Konstam (9).

⁴⁶ Earle (173) provides a brief overview of which offences were punished how.

⁴⁷ In pirate communities, offences such as stealing from others or deserting the ship in battle were often punished with marooning.

meaning “to put ashore a sailor and leave him there. The action implies being left in some relatively inaccessible place” (Dear 353). This somehow conceals the full extent of what “being marooned” really meant. The romantic image that many modern people might have of being stranded on a deserted tropical island has nothing to do with its reality, which “[...] could and sometimes did mean a slow death from starvation or exposure” (Cordingly 136). Although pirates can be seen as the chief executioners of marooning, they were not the only ones to do it. Singleton and parts of his crew are marooned on Madagascar early in the novel, after they had themselves planned to maroon the captain of their ship in the course of a mutiny.

[F]ive were ordered to be set on Shore on the Island, and left there, of which I was one. [...] Then I begg'd I might have my Clothes on Shore with me. He [Singleton's master on the Portuguese ship] told me he was afraid I should have little Need of Clothes, for he did not see how we could long subsist on the Island, and that he had been told that the Inhabitants were Cannibals or Men-eaters [...] Two days after this we were all carried on Shore together; the rest of my Fellow-Criminals hearing I had a Gun, and some Powder and Shot, solicited for Liberty to carry the like with them, which was also granted them; and thus we were set on Shore to shift for ourselves. (Defoe 11, 13)

Marooning is in this case the alternative to being executed, with at least a small chance to survive. Nevertheless, the rest of the crew see the punishment as too severe and would rather have their comrades put before a judge (probably resulting in their execution) than leaving them on Madagascar. However, Defoe obviously wants order preserved on board and most of the crew are pacified when the captain explains his motives:

[...] [T]hat he wished heartily that it had been anywhere else that they had been set on Shore, where they might have been in less Hazard from the Savages; that if he had designed they should be destroyed, he could as well have them executed on board [...] ; that he wished it had been in some other Part of the World, where he might have delivered them up to the Civil Justice [...] but that it was better their Lives were put in Hazard, than his Life, and the Safety of the Ship [...]. (Defoe 16)

This is also interesting in respect to the ship as sphere, from which disorder and conflict must be banned. The same desire is behind the fact that duels were forbidden on board

and had to be settled on shore⁴⁸. Despite the captain's justification, a number of seamen decide to join the company of the marooned voluntarily, "[...] because if there was any way to save their Lives, it was by adding to their Numbers, and making them strong enough to assist one another [...], till perhaps they might one time or other find Means to make their Escape [...]" (Defoe 17). Eventually, this turns out to be successful, albeit in a way that none of the men would have thought. Nevertheless, when he is marooned, it is a caesura in Singleton's life, as he says himself: "I was now to enter upon a Part of independent Life, a thing I was indeed very ill prepared to manage; for I was perfectly loose and dissolute in my Behaviour [...] and now perfectly unfit to be trusted with Liberty [...]" (Defoe 11).

This new "liberty", interestingly gained through punishment, eventually results in a career as pirate. The circumstances of this career, both external and personal, will be the subject of the next chapter.

2.4 The voyage in *Captain Singleton*

2.4.1 The factual dimension: aspects of a pirate's voyage

The pirates' home was their ship, and many pirates of the Golden Age were covering incredible distances with it. Singleton and his crew, for example, travel from Spain to the "West Indies", where they spent about two years. They then sail along the east coast of South America before setting sails for the "East Indies" via the Cape of Good Hope. It takes them about a month to get there, followed by a period spent around Madagascar, the east coast of Africa and the Gulf of Persia. Via the Maldives and Cape Comorin, they go to Sri Lanka (Ceylon in the text) and travel further on to the so-called Spice Islands, which used to be under Dutch control in that time, and the Philippines. After a trip to Taiwan (Formosa), the pirates decide to avoid the risk of being captured and sail a long way southwards before turning west, thereby sailing along the south coast of

⁴⁸ See also page 31.

Australia. They end up in Java and later reach Sri Lanka again, before Singleton and William leave the crew in India, and eventually return to England. All this is told in a very matter-of-fact style. Although this is certainly an enormous and extraordinary voyage, long cruises into waters that promised rich booty were common, and often involved ocean crossing. Indeed, “[o]ne of the most impressive aspects of the early-eighteenth-century pirates is the enormous voyages which they made in search of plunder” (Cordingly 159). The following pages will look at some specific aspects of pirate voyages in Captain Singleton and put them in a historical context.

The specifics of the social order on board of a pirate ship have already been mentioned. These sometimes led to the splitting up of pirate parties, which was sometimes permanent.

As we lay here some time, I found our people mightily divided in their Notions; some were for going this Way, and some that, till at last I began to foresee they would part Company, and perhaps we should not have Men enough to keep together, the Man the Great Ship [...] However, warm Heads are not easily cooled; the Captain [Wilmot] was so eager, that he quitted our Company, and with most part of his Crewe, went over to Captain Avery [...]. (Defoe 183-84)

As Rediker (*Villains* 81) states, “[t]he social organization constructed by pirates was flexible, but it could not accommodate severe, sustained conflict. Those who had experienced the claustrophobic and authoritarian world of the merchant ship cherished the freedom to separate.” Once more, Defoe is dealing with the theme of social order, albeit without really commenting on it through the first person narrator, Singleton; perhaps little surprising when one considers the general lack of psychological deepness Bob Singleton “suffers” from. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see that conflicts of all sorts are solved by taking the conflict off the ship. In the passage quoted above, this is done by simply letting some pirates join another crew, but the same mechanism is applied when it comes to conflicts between single member of the crew who resolved to duel. Such duels between pirates were only allowed on shore and were strictly forbidden on board. “The antagonists were to fight a duel with pistols, but if both missed their first shots, they would then seize swords, and the first to draw blood would be declared the victor. By taking such conflicts off the ship (and symbolically off the sea), pirates promoted harmony in the crowded quarters belowdecks” (Rediker, *Villains* 75). The intense social microcosm of a pirate ship could be vulnerable, and pirates were

as aware of it as Defoe seems to have been. In the course of his conflict with Captain Wilmot, most of the pirates decide to stay with Singleton. “[...] [T]hey assured me that they would go with me [...] wherever I would carry them; and as for Captain Wilmot, they would have nothing to do with him. This came to his Ears, and put him into a great rage; so that he threaten’d, if I came on Shore, he would cut my throat” (Defoe 184-85).

But crews did not only split because of conflicts. When a ship was taken which the pirates regarded as fit for their purpose, it was adopted and, if the number of pirates allowed it, manned in order to be used as an additional pirate ship.

“[H]aving taken a Spanish Sloop on the Coast of Cartagena, my Friend made a Motion to me, that we should desire Captain Wilmot to put us in the Sloop, with a Proportion of Arms and Ammunition, and let us try what we could do; she being much fitter for our Business than the great Ship, and a better Sailer. This he consented to, and we appointed our Rendezvous at Tobago, making an Agreement, that whatever was taken by either of our Ships, should be shared among the Ship’s Company of both [...]. (Defoe 141)

By placing the pirates in a sloop, Defoe is once more acting according to fact, since “[...] many of the pirates in the West Indies used the single-masted sloops built in Bermuda and Jamaica which had a well-deserved reputation for speed” (Cordingly 158). Speed was indeed one of the three main qualities a pirate ship should possess, the other two being sea-worthiness and good armament (Cordingly 158). The fact that the pirates arrange a meeting place and usually also an approximate time, shows the process of splitting up was indeed a dynamic one, in which the community itself, however, was not dissolved, as the arrangement in respect to potential booty in the quote above illustrates. Of course, the downside of splitting up was that also the pirates’ power in combat was weakened.

Here we came to a Resolution, to go for [...] the East Indies: But Captain Harris [...] being now Captain of the Brigantine, alledged that his Ship was too small for so long a Voyage, but that [...] he would take the Hazard of another Cruise, and he would follow us in the first Ship he could take: So we appointed our Rendezvous to be at Madagascar, which was done by my Recommendation of the Place [...]. Accordingly he went away in an evil Hour, for instead of taking a Ship to follow us, he was taken, as I heard afterwards, by an English Man of War, and being laid in Irons, died of meer Grief and Anger before he came to England: His Lieutenant [...] was afterwards executed in England for a Pyrate [...]. (Defoe 145)

However, in the vast majority of cases the pirates in Captain Singleton succeed in taking ships, and it is therefore of some interest to look at the way in which this is done. Although this is not the right place to discuss concrete naval manoeuvres, something I would also lack the competence to do seriously, some basic aspects of attacking ships and the treatment of their crews will be pointed out.

These days, everybody associates a white skull on a black flag with pirates. In Defoe's time, it was basically just the same. The "Jolly Roger", a term for pirate flags that became widely used after Johnson's *General History of the Pyrates* was published for the first time in 1724, could have several designs, usually depicting a skeleton, a skull, bones or Death himself, sometimes holding an hourglass⁴⁹. However, some pirates also used flags that were just plain black or sometimes red ones, the "[...] bloody flag, as they called it, indicating that they would neither take nor give quarter. It would be a fight to the death" (Rediker, *Villains* 83)⁵⁰. Since pirates could not expect mercy once they were in the hands of government officials, this is little surprising. In most cases however, hoisting the pirate flag was supposed to frighten the pirates' victims early on in order to avoid conflict and potential loss of men as far as possible. This is also the "Maxim" of Singleton's crew: "[t]hat while we were sure the Wealth we sought was o be had without fighting, we had no Occasion to put our selves to the Necessity of fighting for that which would come upon easy Terms" (Defoe 190). The purpose of the above described symbols, often forming a "triad of interlocking symbols – death, violence, limited time' [was] to underline the message that the pirates expected immediate surrender or the consequences would be fatal" (Cordingly 116). Reputation certainly played an important role. In the Golden Age of Piracy,

Pirates no longer had any hesitation in proclaiming their identity and it was under the 'Banner of King Death' that they sailed into action. This could be very violent on occasion but was usually a fairly leisurely process, since few merchant ships dared challenge the firepower and manpower of a pirate ship. A hail or a single shot across the bows was normally sufficient to bring about surrender. (Earle 174)

Like in reality, this also works in the novel: "[...] but as they came nearer to us, we let them soon see what we were, for we hoisted a black Flag with two cross Daggers in it

⁴⁹ Bohn (84) has several pictures of pirates flags, including those of such famous pirates as Edward England, „Blackbeard“ Edward Teach and the already mentioned Henry Avery.

⁵⁰ See also Cordingly (117).

[...], which let them see what they were to expect. We soon found the Effect of this [...]" (Defoe 186).

In *Captain Singleton*, violence on board of a captured respectively defeated ship is, as has been said earlier, "[...] not presented in detail but rather mentioned on the side. This adds to the biographical character of the text, since it emphasises the idea of a realistic account of pirating by listing the number of dead during attacks or measures of interrogation, rather than to centre upon the descriptions" (Streng 26). In the novel, violent behaviour in respect to other crews is rare, but once again authentic. Despite the episode concerned with the Dutch seamen from Amboyna which has been discussed earlier, one of the more noticeable cases is the pirates' fight with a Portuguese Man of War, in which the boarding party shows little mercy: "[o]ur Second Lieutenant, with about Thirty Men, entered in an Instant over the Forecastle, followed with the Boatswain, and cutting into Pieces about Twenty Five Men that they found upon Deck, and then throwing some Grenadoes into the Steerage, they entered there also [...]" (Defoe 152). One should not forget that this is a battle with a Man of War that had chased the pirates. When taking merchant ships, violence was in most cases used a specific, targeted means to an end: namely to make their captives tell them where the desired booty was hidden. Although some pirates did behave extremely violently and sadistically indeed⁵¹, this was the more common method. Due to their reputation and the horror that must have filled the minds of many a victim of pirates, often not even this was necessary. It was rather common for pirates to take out of the ship what they wanted and needed for themselves and for the ship – sometimes they "[...] simply asked their captives what was on board and then ordered them to deliver up whatever it was that they wanted" (Earle 177) – and then to simply leave again. Singleton and his crew behave like this on a number of occasions, as the following two quotes will show: "The third Japanese [Japanese] was the best Prize to us, for he came with Money, and a great deal of Gold uncoin'd [...]: We eased him of his Gold, and did him no other Harm, and having no Intention to stay long [...], we stood away for China" (Defoe 196-97).

⁵¹ Especially captains of captured ships were in real danger, since the pirates frequently asked the crew how they had been treated by the captain and other officers. If the answers were negative, things could turn out very bad for the captain: a number were even executed (Earle 175, Rediker, *Villains* 87). This acting as a "floating mob [...]" with its own distinctive sense of popular justice" (Rediker, *Villains* 176) reflects "[...] the radical, 'world-turned-upside-down' nature of the golden age of piracy" (Earle 176). However, not every pirate crew needed such a "reason" for torturing and killing. See Cordingley (125-136).

The same Evening we chased another Jonk with two Masts [...]. When we came on board, we found them upon the same Errand, but only that they were People of some better Fashion than the other; and here we got some Plunder, some Turkish Stores, a few Diamonds in the Ear-drops of five or six Persons, some fine Persian Carpets [...] and some Money, so we let them go also. (Defoe 174)

On voyages of such immense length, the pirates, or in fact any ship's crew, had to make sure that not only the basic seaworthiness was preserved, but also that the ship was fast enough to chase and catch the pirates' prey.

[W]e laid the Ship a-ground upon a hard Sand [...] and shor'd her up on each Side. At low Water, she lay almost dry, so we mended her Bottom, and stopt the Leak which was occasioned by straining some of the Rudder Irons with the Shock which the Ship had against the Rock. Having done this, we also took Occasion to clean her Bottom, which, having been at Sea so long, was very foul. (Defoe 193)

As Cordingly (95-96) notes, this had to happen every few months and involved a lot of work. The ship had to be run ashore, and besides ridding the ship of seaweed, which built up quickly in relatively warm waters and could affect speed drastically, other jobs such as "caulking and replacing rotten planks, and then applying a mixture tallow, oil, and brimstone as a form of antifouling" had to be done. Some pirate voyages involved a more or less longer stay in a "pirate haven" such as Madagascar⁵², and when Singleton is cooperating with the Captain Avery, building fortifications and settling down is discussed as well (Defoe 182). However, although Singleton is not averse to the idea, they do not reach a solution, and after all, Singleton does not seem to be ready for settling down yet anyway. A real desire to find a home only develops later in the novel.

2.4.2 The moral dimension: aspects of Bob Singleton's development of character

Although clearly in the shadow of Defoe's most famous novel *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), and probably lacking its depth, much has been said about *Captain Singleton* in respect to the protagonist and his general development as character. On the following pages, I will concentrate on putting his career as a pirate in a context which is historical, but maybe also a context of general human values at the same time.

⁵² See Konstam (136-37), Cordingly (140-57) and Earle (130-31) for details.

I have already mentioned that Singleton sees his marooning on Madagascar as some kind of caesura, giving him his “liberty”, which he is “[...] perfectly unfit to be trusted with” (Defoe 11). He is “unfit” because he has, for most of his young life, been a “marginalised and isolated individual” (Richetti, *Life of Defoe* 225); indeed, Singleton, fictionally looking back on his life, frequently points out that he lacked any moral standards right from the start:

[...] I had no Sense of Virtue and Religion upon me. I had never heard much of either [...]; nay, I was preparing, and growing up apace, to be as wicked as any Body could be, or perhaps ever was. Fate certainly thus directed my Beginning, knowing that I had Work which I had to do in the World, which nothing but one hardened against all Sense of Honesty or Religion, could go thro’ [...]. (Defoe 6-7)

This “[...] State of Original Wickedness [...]” (Defoe 7) is the “perfect” basis for a career as pirate, especially since it implies a lack of patriotism or even a basic sense of belonging to a nation, i.e. in Singleton’s case England. When he returns to the land he was born in after his journey through Africa on foot, there is nothing to keep him there: “I had neither Friend, Relation, nor Acquaintance in England, tho’ it was my Native Country, I had consequently no Person to trust with what I had, or to counsel me to secure or save it [...]”. Singleton loses all his money and goes to sea again, soon becoming a pirate.

This initial position makes him an ideal candidate for piracy. At the time when Defoe wrote *Captain Singleton*, pirates were often perceived (and in the *General History of Pyrates* actually defined) as “*hostis humani generis* [which] suggested the extent to which a pirate was thought beyond the pale of civilized society [...]”. The revolutionary “political” system on board of pirate ships was not thinkable on shore; the two spheres differed extremely, and, quite obviously, pirates were also a thorn in the side of the “civilized society” because they were a threat to the nation’s wealth. “If the pirate’s renunciation of national allegiance and common humanity established his notoriety, the special circumstances under which he acted further blackened his reputation” (Baer 63-64). Pirates were seen, and saw themselves, as “enemies of all nations”, they were “waging war against all mankind” (Baer 61). Singleton complies, so to speak, with the requirements for a career as a pirate perfectly: “[...] it was not one Farthing Matter to me, I told them, whether we went or stayed, I had no home, and all the world was alike

to me [...]” (Defoe 35). With this mindset, it is no wonder that Singleton and his crew have not the least scruples to attack English ships as well as those of any other nation, indeed “Captain Wilmot was [...] more cruel when he took any English Vessel, that they might not have Advice of him in England [...]” (Defoe 142). In reality, the pirates’ self-conception as avengers of ordinary mistreated seamen should they come upon a captain who had treated his men badly, seems to have gone off especially on English vessels. However, this policy was seldom applied when it came to slave ships. In the encounter with the slave ship, Defoe is once again authentic. Rebellions on slave ships did happen indeed, when “[t]he peculiar war that was slave trade would [...] be waged openly on the ship” (Rediker, *Slave Ship* 291-300); however, it is also true that pirates [...] captured large numbers of slavers, but they certainly did not free all the slaves on board and welcome them as brothers. Most were sold as booty, while the female slaves were often abused and raped [...]” (Earle 172). In an episode which would have been an ideal for bringing in morality, Defoe does so only to a very limited extent – but he is sticking to the reality of the time.

Singleton’s voyage is for the biggest part of the novel similar to “[...] a point moving in space. He has no essential distinguishing characteristics [...]” (Bakhtin qtd. in Richetti, *Life of Defoe* 225). This “point” is given some direction mostly through the Quaker William, who by and by manages to develop a moral consciousness in Singleton. Religious principles, presented and explained to him by William, who is his “[...] Privy-Counsellour and Companion upon all Occasions [...]” (Defoe 168) eventually help Singleton to alter his identity – an identity the he as initial moral and ideological tabula rasa had originally acquired outside of society by becoming a pirate. This alternation of identity is the most important requirement for his final wish to be forgiven and enables him, formerly a restless figure, to settle down. However, because of the theme of sin and redemption that Defoe was fascinated by, he is not allowed to enjoy the “liberty” he first became aware of when marooned on Madagascar unhindered: he has to cover his newly (and painfully) acquired new spiritual identity with the creation of a fake personality. He is not allowed to be himself in public (Defoe 277) and can only speak English with William and his sister (whom Singleton also marries). The fact that he has his first notion of liberty through punishment (the marooning) could therefore be interpreted in terms of foreshadowing as well as in symbolic terms – the path he then takes leads him to a better life in the end, but he is not allowed to live it to its full extent.

The renunciation of piracy goes hand in hand with the gradual implementation of order, meaning the moral and religious principles represented by William which Singleton takes up by and by, even though the Quaker William sometimes appears to be rather hypocritical.

In the end, Defoe lets the pirate Singleton return to human society; his days of “war against all mankind” are clearly over, as quotes such as the following show:

I should purchase something like a refuge for my self, and a Centre, to which I should tend in my future Actions; for really a Man that has a Subsistence, and no Residence, no Place that has a Magnetick Influence upon his Affections, is in one of the most odd uneasy Conditions in the World [...] (Defoe 276)

Comparing this with his statements earlier in the book makes the course of Singleton’s moral voyage – for such an extreme development can indeed be labelled “a voyage” – clear. His “[...] quest for anchorage, a search for fulfilment which can only be found in human society” (Hammond 88) is over, although he is not allowed to enjoy it fully.

His [Singleton’s] narrative is not only a physical journey, in the sense that the novel is an exciting adventure story in Africa and on the high seas, but an emotional journey (from loneliness towards dependence) and a mental journey (from innocence towards wisdom). It is also a symbolic journey dramatising the human adventure with all its vicissitudes of happiness, fear and pain. On each of these levels *Captain Singleton* merits careful study as an experiment in narrative form and a prototype of the odyssey novels of Melville and Conrad. (Hammond 86)

3 TOBIAS SMOLLETT'S *RODERICK RANDOM*

3.1 Historical background

From 1714 to 1727, with George I on the throne, Britain had a king who did little to court the nation's favour. The king being ignorant of the English language and seemingly not interested in Cabinet meetings, government came to rest largely in the hands of parliament, respectively the ruling Whigs. The unsuccessful Jacobite rising of 1715 under James Francis Edward Stuart, the so-called "Old Pretender", had strengthened Whig support for [George I], and the king's preference for the Whigs helped to give them a monopoly of power for the next 50 years" (Widdowson 57). Britain was about to enjoy a phase of relative stability, something that was still rather unexpected in the 1720s, which were "[...] troubled years, not least in the most basic terms of human health and survival" (Langford 414). People feared that the plague would swap from southern France to Britain, which was one of the reasons why

[t]he sense of sickness which pervaded the period was more than physiological. The greed, fraudulence, and hysteria which had characterized the South Sea Bubble⁵³ were denounced both in the press and from the pulpit as the ruling vices of the years which followed. Luxury and lavish living were seen as the causes, moral decay and dissolution as the consequences. (Langford 415)

This is also reflected in Smollett's work. However, despite some cases of extensive corruption, the decades to follow were politically relatively stable. These decades are inseparably connected with Britain's first (and, from 1721-1742, longest serving) Prime Minister, Robert Walpole, who massively "[...] contributed to the political – or perhaps more accurately government – stability England would enjoy through the middle of the eighteenth century" (Morrissey 225). Walpole, who had remained Prime Minister after the succession of George II in 1727, favoured a policy of peace with Britain's European neighbours, which ended, however, in 1739 with the so-called "War of Jenkins's Ear" with Spain and, shortly afterwards, with the support of Austria in the War of the Austrian Succession, which lasted from 1740-1748. Furthermore, 1745 had seen the last Jacobite Rebellion; after it had failed, the Jacobite cause was lost permanently.

⁵³ The South Sea Bubble had caused the financial ruin of many in 1720. See Dear (544-545) for details.

However, more of significance for the following pages is that the South Sea Bubble can be seen as a “[...] spectacular curtain-raiser to the prosperity, vulgarity, and commercialism of the mid-eighteenth century” (Langford 416-417). It is a society marked by these elements that Tobias Smollett would write about.

3.2 The Royal Navy as an institution and setting

“Of the few productions which have come under the title of ‘Naval Novels’”, Edward Mangin wrote 1808 in *An Essay on Light Reading*, “Smollett has been said to be the originator [...] We cannot, however, agree in the dictum which attributes to him the highest excellence in nautical fiction” (Kelly 284). I disagree with Mangin, and I can only guess that a considerable number of present-day readers, of course time-wise much more distant from Smollett (1721–1771) than Mangin, will do likewise. Too vivid is the picture that Smollett paints of the eighteenth century not to capture the reader (perhaps especially the reader with a historical interest). The naval scenes in *Roderick Random*⁵⁴, i.e. chapters xxiv to xxxvii and, albeit much less striking, lxv to lxvii, can be counted among the richest and at the same time – even though they are indeed full of “life” – darkest pieces of literature of the period. Whether, or rather to which degree, Tobias Smollett exaggerated his view of life on board of a ship of the Royal Navy has been subject to much discussion, and in the next chapter I hope to be able to analyse and contextualize the two most striking social themes of the novel, in order to arrive at some personal assessment. Before doing so, however, it is important to get a more general insight into what the navy was like at the time Smollett wrote *in* and *about* it, respectively to outline why he chose the decks of a Royal Navy ship as the setting in the first place.

All in all, in the 1740s the Royal Navy was well on its way to future domination of the seas and ready for “Nelsonian inspiration” (J. Lewis 31), but was not quite there yet. Lacking an effective organisation was one of the most prominent problems that had to be solved⁵⁵. Nevertheless, the Royal Navy was already becoming a national institution and Britain was quite aware of its importance. At some points during this development, such statements of affairs as the one given to George II by the First Lord of the

⁵⁴ Being Smollett’s first novel, *The Adventures of Roderick Random* was published in January 1748.

⁵⁵ For a detailed study of the administration of the navy, see the respective chapters in Rodger (*Command*, especially 291 – 311).

Admiralty, Wager, in 1734, who told the king that “[...] [Britain was] ‘at present stronger than any other nation at sea, perhaps than any two’ [...]” (Rodger, *Command* 234) might not have been reflecting the situation of that particular phase thoroughly⁵⁶, but are a demonstration of Britain’s maritime self-confidence and the belief in the nation’s naval supremacy.

It could be argued that the roots of this development, which should eventually lead to dominance of the seas, can be found in a painful defeat at the end of the seventeenth century, during the Nine Years War (1688 – 1697). In the Battle of Beachy Head, fought on the 10th of July 1690, the English and their Dutch allies were defeated by the French, and Britain saw itself faced with the danger of an invasion, causing panic in England. As an effect, public support for a strong navy became enormous, and the parliament acted accordingly. The temper in the House of Commons is aptly described by Gilbert Burnet⁵⁷: “[a]ll the members he had spoken with said that ‘they dare not go back into their country if they do not give money liberally... we seem now not to be the same people that we were a year ago’” (Baugh 120). It was a naval disaster that played a decisive role in making the navy as an institution a part of the mindset of the British nation – at least the one of the eighteenth century. “From this time forward the constancy of public and parliamentary concern for the navy was a prominent fact of English political life. It did not matter whether the nation’s monarchs were naval enthusiasts, military enthusiasts, or neither” (Baugh 120). The position of Britain as leading naval power was already undoubted after the War of the Spanish Succession, as Ehrman (qtd. in Kennedy 87) has pointed out: “[a] the accession of William III, England was one of the three leading sea powers; at the accession of George I, she was the leading sea power, without a rival or even a companion”.

At the time when Smollett himself joined HMS *Chichester* as a surgeon’s second mate in October 1740, the Royal Navy was in a rather chaotic state, and most of those reforms that would make it so powerful and effective had either not really set in yet or would happen a few years later (J. Lewis 31). Nevertheless, although “[t]he Walpole era was one of peace, [...] the Navy was not neglected, and a large fleet was maintained in reserve” (Rodger, *Command* 292). Britain would soon need it. The conflict he himself, and in the novel *Roderick* as well, was about to participate in, is today probably mostly

⁵⁶ In this case, the alliance with France had ended in 1731 and both the French and Spanish army saw a revival.

⁵⁷ Burnet (1643 – 1715) was Bishop of Salisbury, and theologian respectively historian of Scottish descent.

remembered for its striking name – it was the so-called “War of Jenkins’s Ear” – and the disastrous campaign at Cartagena, which also features very prominently in *Roderick Random*. The cause of this conflict was, little surprisingly, trade; trade connected with the *Asiento* to be precise. Its purpose was to “[...] supply slaves to the Spanish Caribbean, plus one trading vessel a year – a concession which the British meant from the first to exploit to open up as extensive a commerce as they could manage in the teeth of Spanish legislation” (Rodger, *Command* 234). This led to harsh reactions on the Spanish side, trying to stop illicit British activities by employing guarda costas, “[...] privately owned coastguard vessels, whose crews caused heavy British losses and occasional atrocities” (Hattendorf 93). During one of these “searches” of British ships, a Spaniard was said to have cut off one ear of its captain, a man named Robert Jenkins.

This and other stories of torture and “[...] stout-hearted British tars rotting in putrid Spanish jails [...]” were exaggerated and blown up in Britain to such an extent that the government, basically not desiring a war with Spain, eventually seemed to have no other choice, being under unremitting pressure by public opinion. The public discussion was also getting political, being used by the “Patriots”⁵⁸, as they called themselves, to strengthen the opposition.

[They] mounted a brilliant campaign appealing to all the old certainties of the English naval myth. The public remained [...] convinced [...] that Spain was wealthy, effete and vulnerable. A ‘mad and vain nation... warmed and hardened by pride and prejudice’ identified with the traditional idea of national naval superiority which dictated that a war against Spain must necessarily be easy, glorious and profitable. Poets and musicians added their references to the glories of Queen Elizabeth’s reign. (Rodger, *Command* 235)

The initial success of the navy, capturing Porto Bello in late November 1740 under the command of Admiral Edward Vernon, further boosted such feelings, and it is fitting that in honour of him, “Rule Britannia”, linking victories of Alfred the Great with contemporary naval successes, was performed in public for the first time. “The Navy, ‘as essential to our Safety & Wealth as Parliament and Magna Charta’, was the guarantor of freedom, virtue and conquest” (Rodger, *Command* 235-36). This sums up the importance of the Royal Navy also in respect to the self-definition of Britain. However, the attack on Cartagena a few months later turned out to be a disaster, and

⁵⁸ “[...] [L]ed by dissident Whigs gathered around the Prince of Wales [...]” (Rodger, *Command* 235)

after it the War of Jenkins's Ear became absorbed in the wider struggle of the War of the Austrian Succession, which lasted from 1740 – 1748.

Even though it had not reached the peak of its power yet⁵⁹, I would argue that the Royal Navy had become an important aspect of British self-perception, and all in all, political leaders were becoming aware of the fact that naval mastery in combination with commercial strength and a foreign policy concerned with the preservation of political balance on the continent was the “[...] recipe for her long period as the leading world power” (Kennedy 88).

Based on the importance of the navy for British society, it is little surprising that the naval scenes feature so prominently in *Roderick Random*, a novel with the moral intention to “[...] expose the corruption of [this] society [...]” (Giddings 93) by showing how a young man has to suffer hardships and injustices in order to reach maturity. Smollett evidently considered the decks of a warship of the Royal Navy as the ideal setting, and the perfect opportunity to deal with many of the themes that can be found in the whole novel: the brutality of society and its disrespect for the individual, greed and hypocrisy of the upper classes (i.e. many of the superiors in *Roderick Random*), corruption and snobbery. From my point of view, Smollett's navy encompasses all of these social themes in a compact manner and tells the reader a lot about Smollett's perception of the society he was living in. The examples he used to state his point will be discussed in the next chapter, but generally speaking, Roderick's adventures

[...] develop powerfully as an immediate personal record of rage and of terror provoked by wilfully vicious authority. As a microcosmic representation of the world at large they reveal Smollett at his darkest; in this extended tableau the villains are almost unimaginably evil, while the victims – Roderick, Thomson [...], Morgan, all the Thunder's sick and wounded – are virtually helpless in the face of their perversity. As an elaborated episode the shipboard adventures dominate the second quarter of the novel, stopping its forward action [...] and establishing their integrity as a completed narrative in their own right, yet crucial to the overall effect of the novel as a whole, and particularly to its persistent thematic emphasis on the near-hopeless plight of innocence in the grim arena of human experience. (Beasley 63)

At this point it seems fitting to quote Edward Mangin once more: “[n]ow before a man can write like a seaman, he must learn to think like a seaman” (Kelly 285). It is hard to

⁵⁹ Ship design, for example, was one of the fields that saw major improvement only a few years later.

tell whether Smollett managed to do this (and maybe even harder to come up with a general definition of such a way of thinking). Nevertheless, I believe it is safe to say that Smollett drew heavily on his own experience serving as a surgeon's mate on board of HMS *Chichester*. Although Roderick should, as Boucé has pointed out, not be seen as an autobiographical portrait of the author (*Novels* 40-67), it is quite clear that Smollett allowed himself to be inspired by his own experiences – experiences which, especially in respect to his time in the navy, must have made an impression on the young Scot. Hence the background of the naval scenes in *Roderick Random* can be seen as a *mélange* of the general suitability of the navy for Smollett's literary purpose, as shown earlier, and the processing of personal experiences of the author. The latter, however, should be first and foremost considered in terms of giving the author a feeling of justification, even authority in writing about naval matters; he had been there himself, after all. To read more personal motives into it, like the processing of a trauma even, would be mere speculation. The question as to whether Smollett's account of the Royal Navy respectively aspects of the life in it are historically correct and authentic will be discussed in the following chapters.

3.2.1 Manning the Royal Navy

The portrayal of British society as corrupt, in fact as a “[...] parasitical society [...] in which creature feeds on creature, and one hangs on to the ankles of the next, the common bond of bribery [holding] them all together [...]” (Giddings 94) is already clear when Roderick is taking his first steps towards a career in the Royal Navy. His experiences at the Navy Office⁶⁰ and Surgeon's Hall⁶¹, where he goes to be examined in order to receive his qualifications, fit into the whole context of Smollett's London, in which Roderick “[...] encounters cunning, deception, hypocrisy, malice and treachery” (Speck 107). In the novel, Roderick has to face considerable competition when he decides to join the navy as a surgeon's mate:

“Well, (says he) you propose to go on board a man of war, as a surgeon's mate.”
To which I replied by a low bow. “I believe it will be a difficult matter [...] to procure a warrant, there being already such a swarm of Scotch surgeons at the Navy Office, in expectation of the next vacancy, that the commissioners are

⁶⁰ The Navy Office was located in Aldgate Ward, and was described as a “large modern Building, very commodious for Business [...]” (Maitland qtd. in Boucé, *Notes* 443). It was removed in 1788 (Boucé, *Notes* 443).

⁶¹ At that time (and until 1745) located in Monkwell Street, Cripplegate (Boucé, *Notes* 443).

afraid of being torn in pieces, and have actually applied for a guard to protect them. – However, some ships will soon be put in commission, and then we shall see what's to be done.” (Smollett 74)

The Navy Office and Surgeon's Hall were the two facilities where those wishing to become ship's surgeons respectively surgeon's mates needed to go; the former being a branch of the Admiralty responsible for personnel, food and uniforms, and the latter supplying the candidates with the necessary paper qualifications (J. Lewis 27-28).

If one was to succeed in this competition, a large amount of money was needed, since, frequently quite literally, no door would open if the person behind it was not bribed. An acquaintance of Roderick's (the reader later learns that his name is Jackson), tells him about his own experiences respectively expenses in regard to getting his warrant. “That the expence of his qualification for second mate of the third rate, amounted to thirteen shillings, exclusive of the warrant, which cost him half a guinea and half a crown, besides the present to the secretary, which consisted of a three pound twelve piece” (Smollett 76). Roderick is shocked after hearing this, but soon finds out about such “customs” himself.

Next day we returned to the Navy Office, where, after being called before the board and question'd about the place of my nativity and education, they order'd a letter to be made out for me, which, upon paying half a crown to the clerk, I receiv'd, and deliver'd into the hands of the clerk at Surgeon's Hall, together with a shilling for his trouble in registering my name. – By this time my whole stock was diminished to two shillings, and I saw not the least prospect of relief, even for present subsistence, much less to enable me to pay the fees at Surgeon's Hall for my examination, which was to happen in a fortnight. (Smollett 79)

Having passed his examination at Surgeon's Hall, Roderick is confronted with more costs, and the commission even tries to deceive him.

In less than a quarter of an hour, I was called in again, and received my qualification sealed up, and was ordered to pay five shillings. – I laid down my half-guinea upon the table, and stood some time, until one of them bid me begone; to this I replied, I will, when I have got my change; upon which another threw me five shillings and six-pence, saying, I would not be a true Scotchman if I went away without my change. I was afterwards obliged to give three shillings and six-pence to the beadles, and a shilling to an old woman who swept the hall. (Smollett 87-88)

There is some truth in this. Bribery was very common in eighteenth-century Britain, and, being the rule rather than the exception in service and public life, was “[...] indeed an accepted feature of the structure of society” (Giddings 85). Another interesting aspect is how one of the examiners at Surgeon’s Hall reacts when he learns that Roderick comes from Scotland: “[t]he first question he put to me was, ‘Where was you born?’ To which I answered, In Scotland. – ‘In Scotland (said he) I know that very well – we have scarce any other countrymen to examine here – you Scotchmen have overspread us of late as the locusts did Egypt [...]’” (Smollett 86). This is not merely polemical on the part of Smollett. One James Thomas observed that “Scotland [...] [is] fruitful of surgeons; they come here every day... The Change is quite full of them. They peruse the ship-bills and meet the sea-captains” (qtd. in J. Lewis 27). In making Roderick a Scotsman, Smollett did some pioneering work: he “[...] produced the first important novel in the English language to have a Scot as hero” (Crawford 60), and even put him in an institution “embodying” Britain – the Royal Navy. To reduce Smollett’s reasons for doing so to his own biography or historical authenticity would be too little. It is important to consider that

Smollett’s success with *Roderick Random* is all the more striking when we remember that the book appeared only two years after the defeat of Culloden, at a time when prejudice against Scots was strong, and when (unfairly) all Scots were often seen as tainted with Jacobitism. Rather than skirting round the question of anti-Scots prejudice, Smollett prefers to explore it and confront it directly. [...] [B]y choosing a Scot as his hero, and making the reader aware of the way in which Scottishness is treated, Smollett is beginning to construct a fiction that is not English (in the national sense) but both Scottish and truly British. (Crawford 60)

The aspect of serving the nation in the navy is certainly significant in this respect, and the notion of non-English seamen serving the British nation is further extended through Morgan, who is Welsh. There is even a hint at some “pan-Celtic solidarity⁶²”:

[...] they wished me joy of the event of the combat [Roderick is boxing with Crampley, one of his enemies of board the *Thunder*]; and the Welchman after observing, that in all likelihood, the ancient Scots and Britons were the same people, bid me ‘Praise Cot for putting mettle in my pelly, and strength in my limbs to support it’. (Smollett 156)

⁶² Interestingly, the main “Irish element” on board, the surgeon Dr. Mackshane, is portrayed as malicious and cowardly.

Nevertheless, in respect to *Roderick Random*, the scenes at the corrupt Navy Office can be regarded as an instance of the satire that Smollett was also aiming for, as he says himself in the preface⁶³. It is, so to speak, satire⁶⁴ with a generally true core but applied in a factually “wrong” context (authenticity is, however, in my opinion not actually an essential component of the concept of satire). Reality was different. There was actually a great deal of competition, but rather *for* than *of* seamen. “[...] [T]he problem was that the Navy was trying to draw a quarter out of a pint pot, and moreover that others were trying to draw from it at the same time. There was intense competition for men between the Navy, the merchant service and privateering” (Rodger, *Wooden World* 182). So despite having “[...] access to the largest reservoir of seamen of any nation [...]” (Baugh 133), the British navy frequently had to deal with an acute shortage of manpower, of course especially in times of war, when many more seamen were needed for the men of war. However, as Baugh (133) has remarked,

[f]or all the failings of its mode of recruitment, the British navy solved its problem of wartime shortage better than its opponents solved theirs. At the height of a war it could claim a preponderance of skilled manpower even when it did not, on some occasions, possess a preponderance of ships. It is equally the case, however, that manning the fleet was its most intractable problem – one that generated other administrative problems in turn and, above all, seriously affected naval readiness in the early months of every war.

The War of Jenkins’s Ear was no different. It “[...] got off to a sluggish start, and was bedevilled thereafter by dithering, delays and ineptitude” (J. Lewis 39). As usual in the early phase of a war, the British navy was lacking men. A number of ways to recruit seamen existed, and the steps taken (or not taken) by the Admiralty to improve the means of recruitment are a highly interesting historical topic⁶⁵, albeit one that does not bear much significance for this thesis.

⁶³ „Of all kinds of satire, there is none so entertaining, and universally improving, as that which is introduced, as it were, occasionally, in the course of an interesting story, which brings every incident home to life; and by representing familiar scenes in an uncommon and amusing point of view, invests them with all the grace of novelty, while nature is appealed to in every particular” (Smollett xxxiii). Beasley (44-46) has, among others, commented on Smollett and satire respectively caricature, which makes it unnecessary for me to linger over this issue here.

⁶⁴ According to Giddings (97) these scenes and the chapter on Lord Strutwell (Smollett 306–313), who pretends to be influential and who “[...] lives on the hopeful gifts of many unknowing young men [like Roderick] who regard his becrested portals as beckoning gates to fame and fortune [...]” (Giddings 96), are the [...] main peaks of satire in the novel, in which Smollett is really focusing on his subject accurately [...]”.

⁶⁵ See Rodger (*Wooden World* 164-182) for details.

At this point, all that matters is that “[t]here was never a moment during the whole century and a quarter [1690-1815] when a merely administrative remedy could have solved the manning problem” (Baugh 134). To a certain extent, the Royal Navy had to rely on force.

3.2.1.1 Impressment

Roderick should, after all, end up in the navy, but not quite like he had imagined. Being “recruited” to serve King and Country on board of a warship could at that time quite easily also look like this:

[...] [A]s I crossed Tower-wharf, a squat tawny fellow, with a hanger by his side, and a cudgel in his hand, came up to me, calling, ‘Yo, ho! brother you must come along with me.’ – As I did not like his appearance, instead of answering his salutation, I quickened my pace in hopes of ridding myself of his company; which he perceiving, whistled aloud, and immediately another sailor appeared before me, who laid hold of me by the collar and began to drag me along. – Not being of a humour to relish such treatment, I disengaged myself of the assailant, and with one blow of my cudgel, laid him motionless on the ground: and perceiving myself surrounded in a trice, by ten or a dozen more, exerted myself with such dexterity and success, that some of my opponents were fain to attack me with drawn cutlasses; and after an obstinate engagement, in which I received a large wound on the head, and another on my left cheek, I was disarmed, taken prisoner, and carried on board a pressing tender; where, after being pinioned like a malefactor, I was thrust down into the hold, among a parcel of miserable wretches, the sight of whom well nigh distracted me. (Smollett 139)

Roderick has fallen victim to a so-called press gang, which was the name given to a group of seamen whose job it was to (forcibly) bring in men for service at sea in times of war. Roderick is taken directly on board of a “pressing tender”, “[a] small vessel used to convey impressed men to receiving ships” (Bouc , *Notes* 451). Another possibility was to take the unfortunate men to a “rendezvous”, as the naval recruiting centres were called, where they were locked up in a “press room” before being brought to receiving ships (Dear 278). As I will show in the chapter on Marryat’s *Mr Midshipman Easy*, the method of recruiting men through impressment was also employed on sea⁶⁶. Operating in times of war, impressment “[...] was odious to all who knew it, it had no defenders except as a cruel necessity, and to condemn it was easy and popular” (Rodger, *Wooden*

⁶⁶ See page ???

World 164). What is little surprising, the navy wanted men who had as much experience on sea as possible – after all, it was essential for a ship’s crew to work as a team, not only to have success in battle, but to survive an often dangerous and long voyage. Motivation was a significant aspect to consider, and so volunteers were of course preferred. These were, as I have mentioned earlier, also desired by merchant ships, where pay was considerably better than in the navy, which meant that the navy

[...] relied ultimately on physical compulsion, which was exercised through the inequitable and erratic practice of impressment. This applied only to ‘seamen, seafaring men and persons whose occupations or callings are to work in vessels and boats upon rivers’, but included anyone who had ever been so employed. (Baugh 135)

Clearly, this is not the case with Roderick, who has no naval experience whatsoever. Still, his being forced into service is not historically unauthentic. Many so-called “landmen” (spelled “landsmen” from about 1800 onward), in theory safe from impressment, were, although they were “[...] men who had never been to sea, [...] caught up in the navy’s clutches” (Baugh 135). Although most of them were later released⁶⁷ after their status had been found out,

[t]he navy trained up more landsmen than has commonly been recognized. [...] One captain commented in 1760 that, rather than keep a dissatisfied seaman who was the best in the world, he would prefer ‘a willing and contented landman, who with a little time, and his own endeavours, I could make a seaman of. This would have been widely recognized by his colleagues. (Baugh 137-138)

Sometimes they were indeed “willing and contented”, since for some pressed men, who would have had the chance to be released because of their status, [...] the attractions of a service of which they knew little were joined by the repulsions of home – poverty, boredom, the narrow world of rural society, or domestic strife” (Rodger, *Wooden World* 178). Nevertheless, as some evidence suggests (Baugh 138-139 provides some figures), it seems to be correct to assume that “[t]he importance of the press to the Navy lay not so much in its numerical contribution as in its selective ability to take skilled seamen,

⁶⁷ There were, however, also times in which a so-called „hot press“ was authorized; this happened when the need for men was more acute than usual. In such cases, press gangs were told to take men even if they carried some form of protection. A hot press, which could also incorporate road blocks and the like, “[...] had to be organized in secrecy, to catch the protected seamen unawares” (Rodger, *Wooden World* 178). News of a hot press in any district usually drove most of the men into hiding (Dear 441).

the class the Navy stood most in need of” (Rodger, *Wooden World* 150). Fortunately for the British, France seems to have had a similar problem. One should, however, be aware of the fact that it is not always possible to distinguish between volunteers, pressed men and landsmen. “[...] [D]uring the [eighteenth] century the demand for men was so prodigious that virtually any man brought in by the press gangs was accepted and rated on board as a landsman, being paid less than an ordinary seaman” (Dear 308). Although Rodger contradicts this to a certain extent, the opportunity to volunteer for a certain ship “[...] was an important reason for a seaman to volunteer rather than take his chance of being pressed [...]” (Rodger, *Wooden World* 178). For reasons such as this, it will, most probably, never be known how many men on board of a Royal Navy ship were “true” volunteers, a problem which is also connected with impressment on sea, as we will see in the chapter on Marryat.

Among those recruited, it was not always easy to distinguish pressed men from volunteers, and before they had been long in the Service, sometimes before they had joined it at all in any legal sense, it was impossible to say that all pressed men were all unhappy, or indeed all volunteers happy. It is easy to over-stress the differences between the two classes. For many practical purposes the distinction between them was so difficult to draw, and so weak an indicator of behaviour, attitude and usefulness, that it is best for the historian to consider the recruiting service ashore and afloat as a unified system, applying various interlocked means to the same objective of manning the Navy. (Rodger, *Wooden World* 182)

In any case, Smollett’s hero experiences a blessing in disguise. Roderick is lucky enough to meet an acquaintance, Thomson, on board the *Thunder*, on which he is taken, and even is put in the position he hoped for in the first place:

[...] I was, at the request of the surgeon, exempted from all other duty, than that of assisting his mates in making and administering medicines to the sick. – This good office I owed to the friendship of Mr. Thomson, who had represented me in such a favourable light to the surgeon, that he demanded me of the lieutenant, to supply the place of his third mate, who was lately dead. (Smollett 143)

Even though Roderick is put into his desired position in a manner that can only be seen as inhumane, brutal and barbarous – one must, for example, not forget that many of the pressed men had families – through the eyes of the modern reader, Smollett only criticizes the way in which this is done, respectively the methods employed by the press

gang and on board the tender. Handcuffed and wounded in the encounter with the press gang, Roderick tells the midshipman that

[...] unless my hurts were dressed, I should bleed to death. But compassion was a weakness of which no man could justly accuse this person, who squirting a mouthful of dissolved tobacco upon me, through the gratings, told me, 'I was a mutinous dog, and that I might die and be damned.' – [...] In the mean time, loss of blood, vexation and want of food, contributed, with the noisome stench of the place, to throw me into a swoon [...]. (Smollett 139-140)

But, in respect to impressment, that is it basically. “Smollett denounces the methods of the press-gang, but at no point in *Roderick Random* does he raise the issue and express an explicit condemnation of this institution, which, in some sort, establishes violence as a pragmatic necessity” (Bouc , *Novels* 291). In other words, impressment was seen as disagreeable, or rather obnoxious, but also, at the end of the day overshadowing all objections, an unavoidable necessity, or a sacrifice for the greater, common good. I do not doubt that this was the viewpoint of the vast majority of Smollett’s contemporaries. The following quotes taken from Rodger (*Wooden World* 150-151) support this claim. One officer remarked that “[n]o man who had the least spark of humanity but must be very sensible of the hardships in impressing seamen”, and a press lieutenant told that he, having caught some men who had tried to escape, “could not refrain from shedding the sympathetic tear [himself]. Is it not a hard case to act a part so repugnant to one’s nature and temperament? But would it not be the worst of acts to eat the bread of one’s country and betray its most material interests?”. Perhaps the most striking is the opinion of a seaman who had been pressed into the Royal Navy himself. He says: “[s]uch are the methods frequently made use of to obtain seamen for the Service in this land of liberty. It seems shocking to the feelings of humanity... It is a hardship which nothing but absolute necessity can reconcile to our boasted freedom”.

The individual had to subordinate its own well-being to a society that needed it. That is also how the jurist Sir Michael Foster expressed it in 1758 (qtd. in Bouc , *Novels* 278).

War itself is a great Evil, but it is chosen to avoid a greater. The Practice of Pressing is one of the Mischiefs War brings with it. But it is a Maxim in Law, and good Policy too, that all private Mischiefs must be borne with Patience, for preventing a National Calamity.

3.3 Social themes in *Roderick Random*

3.3.1 Victualling and provisions as aspects of shipboard life

Trying to “judge” life in the Georgian Navy bears one problem that should be considered perhaps in any historical analysis: standards and perceptions were different. This is also true of the food, respectively victualling, on board of a navy ship. Roderick soon finds out about the diet of the service.

[W]e heard the boatswain pipe to dinner; and immediately the boy belonging to our mess, run to the locker, from whence he carried off a large wooden platter, and in a few minutes, returned with it full of boiled peas, crying, ‘Scaldings,’ all the way as he came. – The cloaths, consisting of a piece of an old sail, was instantly laid, covered with three plates, which by the colour, I could with difficulty discern to be metal, and as many spoons of the same composition, two of which were curtailed in the handles, and the other in the lip. Mr. Morgan himself enriched this mess with a lump of salt butter, scooped from an old gallipot, and a handful of onions shorn, with some pepper. – I was not very much tempted with the appearance of this dish, of which, nevertheless, my mess-mates eat heartily, advising me to follow their example, as it was banyan day, and we could have no meat till next noon. [...] They told me that on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, the ship’s company had no allowance of meat, and that these meagre days were called banyan days [...]. (Smollett 148-149)

Named after a Hindu sect living a vegetarian life style, on such banyan days fish or cheese were issued. This custom of meatless days was introduced in Elizabethan times in order to economize on the cost of meat (Dear 30). A little earlier, Roderick had met a person who held both an important and unique position of board.

We descended by divers ladders to a space as dark as a dungeon, which I understood was immersed several feet under water, being immediately above the hold: I had no sooner approached this dismal gulph, than my nose was saluted with an intolerable stench of putrified cheese, and rancid butter, that issued from an apartment at the foot of the ladder, resembling a chandler’s shop, where, by the faint glimmering of a candle, I could perceive a man with a pale meagre countenance, sitting behind a kind of desk, having spectacles on his nose, and a pen in his hand. – This [...] was the ship’s steward, who sat there to distribute provision to the several messes, and to mark what each had received. – He [Thomson] therefore presented my name to him, and desired I might be entered in his mess [...]. (Smollett 143-144)

Generally speaking, the so-called purser was a warrant officer responsible for provisions and clothing, but in reality had a number of functions – both official and unofficial ones. He was, being placed on a ship by the Victualling Board of the navy, responsible for the value of the stores of the ship, which meant he, “[i]n order to recoup himself [...] had to keep a very detailed account and complex account of the consumption of every officer and man for each day. This was based upon the ship’s muster, which purser and captain kept jointly [...]” (Rodger, *Wooden World* 88). Also supplying goods such as hammocks, bedding, candles and, by custom, tobacco for sale to the men, he often acted as a banker for his shipmates. As Rodger has pointed out (*Wooden World* 88), “[t]he key to a purser’s survival in all these activities was credit”, which, to raise an initial capital, was often sought by the purser himself beforehand. Indeed, many pursers did prosper as “[...] ’men of business’, trading on their connections and their credit as bankers and agents, for the rewards of pursery itself were slender and precarious” (Rodger, *Wooden World* 98). Because this was the case, a purser often felt tempted to abuse his responsibilities (Kemp 448).

Coming back to the quote above, it is especially the description of the stench that strikes the reader. Indeed, “[...] the intolerable stench of putrified, and rancid butter [...]” (Smollett 144) must have been a familiar sensation to eighteenth-century seamen, since the preservation of cheese and butter was a major problem. Smollett mentions this particular problem more than once. Morgan, the Welsh surgeon’s mate, for example, undertakes to “[...] prove, that though the stench he complained of, did not flow from the steward’s own body, he was nevertheless the author of it, by serving out damaged provisions to the ship’s company; and in particular, putrified cheese, from the use of which only [...] such unsavoury steams could arise” (Smollett 151). This also hints to the fact that the distribution service of the navy was at the “[...] mercy of wind and weather [and] was not always able to get the cheese and butter to the ships before the six months guarantee had expired” (Rodger, *Wooden World* 85). Preservation was generally a massive problem at the time, and often large quantities of food would go rotten. One Lieutenant Watkins, who served on the *Chichester* at the same time as Smollett, noted in December 1740: “[h]ad a survey and condemned Eighteen Hundred and Ninety five pounds of cheese...” (qtd. in Giddings 86). There were many complaints about the type of cheese which the navy issued in Smollett’s time, but the “thin, hard and durable [...] but practically inedible [...]” Suffolk cheese did not necessarily have

been destroyed. In his pamphlet *An Appeal to the Public in Vindication of Truth and Matters of Fact* from 1761, William Thompson states

that seamen in the King's Fleet have made buttons for their jackets and trowses, with the cheese they were served with, having preferred it by reason of its tough and durable quality, to buttons made of common metal; and that Carpenters in the Navy-service have made Trucks to their Ship's flagstaffs with whoel Cheeses, which have stood the Weather equally with any timber. (qtd. in Boucé, *Novels* 271)

The description of the situation during the attack on Cartagena is also reliable in respect to provisions very similar to what Smollett experienced himself, and what he wrote in his *Account of the Expedition against Cartagena*. Given the climatical circumstances of the region (the city is located on the northern coast of Colombia), there is no reason to doubt the authenticity of Roderick's description.

But of all the consequences of victory, none was more grateful than plenty of fresh water, after we had languished five weeks on the allowance of a purser's quart per diem for each man, in the Torrid Zone, where the sun was vertical, and the expence of bodily fluid so great, that a gallon of liquor could scarce supply the waste of twenty-four hours: especially, as our provisions consisted of putrid salt beef, the which the sailors gave the name of Irish horse; salt port of New England, which though neither fish nor flesh, savoured of both; bread from the same country, every biscuit whereof, like a piece of clock work, moved by its own internal impulse, occasioned by the myriads of insects that dwelt within it; and butter served out by the gill, that tasted like train-oil thickened with salt. (Smollett 185).

Considering that "[...] two years was regarded as the maximum time beef or pork in cask could be kept in store [...]" and that some ships, like the *Elizabeth* at Madras, received "[...] in April 1758 a cask of beef which had been packed as long ago as October 1755" (Rodger, *Wooden World* 85), it is not surprising that, at best, the taste of it had suffered. However, experienced "salts" like Morgan knew ways to make it still edible:

[Morgan], ordering the boy to bring a piece of salt beef from the brine, cut off a slice and mixed it with an equal quantity of onions, which seasoning with a moderate proportion of pepper and salt, he brought into a consistence with oil and vinegar. – Then tasting the dish [...] recommended it to our palate with such heartiness, that I could not help doing honour to his preparation. But I had no sooner swallowed a mouthful that I thought my entrails were scorched, and

endeavoured with a deluge of small beer, to allay the heat it occasioned. (Smollett 152)

Although it might be the case that “[...] it is possible to guess that with a reasonable amount of fresh provisions the men of the Navy probably ate something nearer a balanced diet than many of their contemporaries ashore” (Rodger, *Wooden World* 87), and the calories necessary for hard physical labour were provided, this does not mean that the situation was not a problem. As earlier quotations have shown, the stench of rotten provisions, especially cheese, was almost ubiquitous on board, and furthermore “[...] according to the climatorial pathology of then in favour among medical men, foul air was not merely unpleasant but the carrier of disease⁶⁸. Captains therefore had reason to worry about decayed cheese ‘which might be, by its nauseous smell, be liable to cause an infection’” (Rodger, *Wooden World* 85). Even though quality and especially distribution of provisions improved during the course of the eighteenth century, some diet-related problems persisted. Scurvy, perhaps the most famous naval ailment,

“[o]bviously [...] persisted because the standard shipboard diet provided by the Victualling Office was mainly designed so that the food would keep – salt beef and pork, Suffolk cheese which might be as hard as beeswax, a large daily ration of unleavened bread, a gallon of beer a day per man, plus other less consequential items. Not only was this diet entirely deficient in vitamin C, it was also, as Lind⁶⁹ remarked, ‘extremely gross, viscid and hard of digestion’. Sick men were taken off it. (Baugh 143)

Problems with provisions were of course even more dramatic when a ship was engaged in a longer phase of combat. During the siege of Cartagena, an epidemic of yellow fever rages, which is made even worse by the lack of fresh water and provisions. Roderick is being sarcastic when he states:

How simply do then do those people argue, who ascribe the great mortality among us, to our bad provision and want of water; and affirm, that a great many valuable lives might have been saved, if the useless transports had been employed on fetching fresh stock, turtle, fruit, and other refreshments, from Jamaica and other adjacent islands, for the use of the army and the fleet! (Smollett 186)

⁶⁸ For further comments on sickness on board, see page 65.

⁶⁹ James Lind (1716-1794) was a Scottish doctor and a pioneer of hygiene in the Royal Navy. Among others, he developed the theory that scurvy could be cured by citrus fruits.

This quote is also interesting because it hints at the second social theme I would like to address in this chapter: Smollett and his portrayal or rather criticism of authority in *Roderick Random*.

3.3.2 Authority

Generally speaking, the picture that Smollett paints of authority in *Roderick Random* is clearly a negative one. Those who hold positions of authority are all abusing it in one way or another. In the novel's naval scenes, Roderick has four direct enemies; however, as a fifth, I have also added Admiral Vernon, the only non-fictional character, because in judging him, Smollett follows similar lines as in the portrayal of the others. Each of these five characters represents a special kind of badness, as will be shown in the following paragraphs.

To begin with, Captain Oakhum, stands for brutality. He is described as “[...] grossly ignorant, and intolerably assuming, false, vindictive, and unforgiving; a merciless tyrant to his inferiors, an abject sycophant to those above him” (Smollett 156). His sadistic behaviour is perhaps most striking when he orders all the ship's sick men to be brought on deck to examine them, even though many of them are clearly not in the condition for this. Oakhum consider the men on the sick list of the ship “[...] lazy, lubberly sons of bitches, who were good for nothing on board, but to eat the king's provision, and encourage idleness in the skulkers” (Smollett 158). A shocking spectacle commences:

The surgeon grinned approbation, and, taking the list, began to examine the complaints of each as they could crawl to the place appointed. – The first who came under his cognizance, was a poor fellow just freed of a fever, which had weakened him so much, that he could hardly stand. – Mr. Mackshane (for that was the doctor's name) having felt his pulse, protested he was as well as any man in the world; and the captain delivered him over to the boatswain's mate, with orders that he should receive a round dozen at the gangway immediately, for counterfeiting himself sick when he was not; – but before the discipline could be executed, the man dropt down on the deck, and had well nigh perished under the hands of the executioner. (Smollett 158)

This is only the first of numerous seamen to suffer from the captain's sadistic order. The infamous “cat o' nine tails” is applied, and some men even die of the treatment they receive. Smollett gives some more examples before stating that “[...] [i]t would be

tedious and disagreeable to describe the fate of every miserable object that suffered by the inhumanity and ignorance of the captain and surgeon, who so wantonly sacrificed the lives of their fellow-creatures” (Smollett 159). In the end, the captain is happy with the results: “[o]n the whole, the number of sick was reduced to less than a dozen; and the authors of this reduction were applauding themselves for the service they had done to their king and country [...]” (Smollett 159). Although it is important to keep in mind that generally the period’s attitude towards physical violence was essentially different from the one of most modern people, and that harsh disciplinary measures were often considered necessary in order to maintain order, such extreme behaviour of officers would have been the exception rather than the rule⁷⁰. After all, it could provoke a mutiny, but also had less extreme effects. As Rodger (*Wooden World* 212) has pointed out, “[a] brutal officer was, of necessity, an inefficient officer, distrusted by the Service for reasons both moral and practical”. Nevertheless, sadistic caprices such as the one described in Roderick Random are not born from Smollett’s fantasy. As the case of William Hervey shows, “[...] [i]t is clear that cruelty did exist, but equally clear that it was not tolerated” (Rodger, *Wooden World* 212). The fact that Oakhum and Mackshane are not eventually punished by some higher authority, but are placed on board of another ship, is fitting the overall concept of the novel. Smollett paints the picture of a society in which the mighty and powerful cannot or, more likely, do not want to revenge the powerless individual. After all, the malefactors are themselves representing society in one way or the other.

This also applies to Mackshane, the ship’s surgeon. He is, most of all, malicious, wicked and cowardly. As the quote on the previous page reveals, he often seeks the protection of a higher authority, i.e. the captain, and is portrayed as intriguing and lying.

The doctor left nothing unattempted towards the completion of his vengeance against the Welchman and me. He went among the sick under pretence of enquiring into their grievances, with a view of picking up complaints to our prejudice; but finding himself frustrated in that expectation, by the good-will we had procured from the patients by our diligence and humanity, he took the resolution of listening to our conversation, by hiding himself behind the canvas that surrounded our birth; here too he was detected [...] immediately interpreting to be the doctor, he [Morgan] tipt me the wink, and pointed to the place [...]; upon which I snatched up [a] bone, and levelled it with all my force at him [...]. – It had the desired effect, for we heard the listener tumble down [...]. – I

⁷⁰ Nevertheless, “[t]he tyranny of Oakhum, absolute master on board, especially at sea when he had to render no account to any higher authority, was not a new feature, either in literature or in the pamphlets of those who had been complaining from the beginning of the eighteenth century of the flagrant abuses of this autocratic principle” (Bouc  , *Novels* 268).

applauded myself for this feat, which turned out one of the most unlucky exploits of my life, Mackshane from that night marking me out for destruction. (Smollett 166).

This is soon turned into action. Roderick is unjustly accused of being a spy and treated sadistically (Smollett 166), and Morgan is also put into custody. Being examined in a corrupted version of a trial, the Welshman is eventually even falsely accused of plotting to murder Oakhum.

Mackshane stepping forward, hemmed a good while, in order to clear his throat, and before he began, Morgan accosted him thus: ‘Doctor Mackshane, look in my face – look in the face of an honest man, who abhors a false-witness as he abhors the tevil, and Got be judge between you and me.’ – The doctor not minding this conjuration, made the following speech [...]: [...] and if so be it appears as how you are an honest man, then it is my opinion, that you deserve to be acquitted, in relation to that there affair; for I tell you what, captain Oakhum is resolved for to everybody justice. – As for my own part, all that I have to alledge, is that I have been informed, you have spoken disrespectful words against your captain, who to be sure, is the most honourable and generous commander in the king’s service [...]. (Smollett 171)

Mackshane, whose connection with the captain is further underlined by the fact that both are Irish and Roman Catholics, is a representative of what Giddings (94) has called “[...] a parasitical society, [...] in which one [creature] hangs on to the ankles of the next [...]”. His desire to be a confederate of the captain, the strongest possible ally on board, is only exceeded by his cowardice (Smollett 180-183), clearly revealing the weaknesses of his personality.

Crampley can be seen as embodying the hatefulness in society; even worse, he stands for groundless hatefulness. This is already visible when Roderick encounters him the very first time, on board of the pressing tender, on which Crampley serves as midshipman. Being robbed of his handkerchief, Roderick complains about it and is met with more than mere repudiation.

I complained bitterly of this robbery, to the midshipman on deck, telling him at the same time, that unless my hurts were dressed, I should bleed to death. But compassion was a weakness of which no man could justly accuse this person, who squirting a mouthful of dissolved tobacco upon me, through the gratings, told me ‘I was a mutinous dog, and that I might die and be damned.’ – Finding there was no other remedy, I appealed to patience, and laid up this usage in my memory, to be recalled at a fitter season. (Smollett 139-140)

This is foreshadowing the constant conflict between Roderick and Crampley, who soon meet each other again on board the *Thunder*:

[M]y old enemy the midshipman (whose name was Crampley) entertaining an implacable animosity against me, for the disgrace he had suffered on my account [Roderick had complained about his earlier treatment by Crampley], had since that time taken all opportunities of reviling and ridiculing me, when I was not intitled to retort his bad usage. [...] In particular, being one day present, while I dressed a wound in a sailor's leg, he began to sing a song, which I thought highly injurious to the honour of my country, and therefore signified my resentment, by observing, that the Scots always laid their account in finding enemies among the ignorant, insignificant and malicious. – This [...] enraged him so much that [...] the affair began to be very serious [...]. (Smollett 155)

Here, Smollett further intensifies his portrayal of Crampley by letting him injure not only Roderick's (and maybe Smollett's) Scottish pride, but also the concept of Britishness, which Smollett approved of. After all, Roderick is, among other Scotsmen like Thompson, serving *Britain* on board of the *Thunder*. An interesting aspect to be considered is that Crampley is eventually even made captain of the *Lizard*, the ship that the men serve on later. Once more, there is no real punishment, except for the physical blows he has to take in his final encounter with Roderick after they are wrecked on the south coast of England, due to Crampley's unwillingness to listen to the seamen.

As soon as I set foot on terra firma, my indignation, which had boiled so long within me, broke out against Crampley, whom I immediately challenged to close combat [...]. [T]hen flying upon my antagonist, knocked out several of his fore-teeth with the but-end of the piece [the pistol], and would certainly have made an end of him with that instrument, had he not disengaged himself, and seized his cutlass [...]. [...] I drew my hanger, and having flung my pistol at his head, closed with him in a transport of fury, and thrust my weapon into his mouth, which it enlarged on one side to his ear. [...] I followed close, and with one stroke cut the tendons of the back of his hand, upon which his cutlass dropt, and he remained defenceless. – I know not with what cruelty my rage might have inspired me, if I had not at that instant, been felled to the ground by a blow on the back part of my head, which deprived me of all sensation. (Smollett 210)

However, at least, unlike Mackshane, Crampley is indeed willing to dirty his hands himself. Quite literally, this can by no means be said of the next character, Captain Whiffle. Certainly the least dangerous and violent of the characters mentioned here, he nevertheless represents negative traits, such as vanity and “awkwardness” of some members of the upper classes. One should consider, as Boucé (*Novels*, 267) has pointed

out, “[t]hat Whiffle, with his sartorial elegance and his homosexual tendencies, represents a type current in the Navy of that time in highly unlikely, and, after all, difficult to verify”. Still, portrayed as an eccentric out of touch with the reality of shipboard life, he is bound to clash with the brave “tar” Morgan, who, being a proud man, is insulted when Whiffle calls him “[...] a monster and a stinkard [...]” (Smollett 196) and verbally fires back: “[...] I will proclaim it before the world, that he is disguised and transfigured, and transmographed with affectation and whimsies; and that he is more like a papoon [baboon] than one of the human race” (Smollett 196). Roderick’s first meeting with Whiffle adds to the impression that Morgan’s account has created.

When I entered the room, I was ordered to stand by the door, until captain Whiffle had reconnoitred me at a distance, with a spy-glass, who having consulted one sense in this manner, bid me advance gradually, that his nose might have intelligence, before it could be much offended: I therefore approached with great caution and success, and he was pleased to say, ‘Ay, this creature is tolerable.’ (Smollett 197)

Considering that “[c]rews’ uniforms were not introduced in the Navy until 1748, the men were clad in a motley of blue jackets, check or spotted shirts, loose neckerchiefs, waistcoats and calf-length white trousering [...]” (J. Lewis 42), Whiffle’s orders in respect to clothing are indeed interesting.

Next day, our commander [...] gave orders, that none of the lieutenants should appear upon deck, without a wig, sword, and ruffles; nor any midshipman, or other petty officer, be seen with a check short or dirty linen. [...] These singular regulations did not prepossess the ship’s company in his favour; but on the contrary, gave scandal an opportunity to be very busy with his character, and accuse him of maintaining a correspondence with his surgeon, not fit to be named. (Smollett 199)

This reference to homosexuality could be interpreted as being part of Smollett’s criticism of the debauchery of the upper social classes. Another member of this class is, however, being criticized by Smollett for completely different reasons. The only non-fictional figure in this group, Admiral Edward Vernon (1682–1758), is today probably

best known for “inventing” grog⁷¹; his role in the siege of Cartagena is not exactly fitted for endowing him with enduring fame. At this point, the story of the Cartagena disaster cannot be fully told and historically evaluated⁷². The attempt failed, and considering a popular poem of the time, “Admiral Hosier⁷³’s Ghost” written by Richard Glover in 1740, history seemed to repeat itself. A few lines from the poem should clarify what I mean:

Sent in this foul clime to languish
Think what thousands fell in vain
Wasted with disease and anguish
Not in glorious battle slain. (qtd. in Baugh 142)

Rather, I would like to briefly comment on Smollett’s portrayal of Vernon’s role respectively his failure. The author’s negative perception of authority is in this case reflected in presenting Vernon and Brigadier-General Thomas Wentworth, the commander of the land troops, actually at least to some extent justified, as “[...] dilatory, incapable of taking advantage of Spanish weaknesses, and so riven by resentment and suspicion of each other as to be quite incapable of cross-service co-operation” (J. Lewis 45). Smollett wrote:

[P]erhaps, the general was too much of a gentleman to ask a favour of this kind [to spare some badly needed surgeons] from his fellow-chief, who on the other hand, would not derogate so far from his own dignity, as to offer such assistance unasked; for I may venture to affirm, that by this time, the Daemon of discord with her sooty wings, had breathed her influence upon our counsels; and it might be said of these great men, [...] as of Caesar and Pompey, the one could not brook a superior, and the other was impatient of an equal. (Smollett 187)

This not only general criticism of the false pride of military leaders, resulting in the deaths of regular soldiers, but also part of Smollett’s personal military-historical account of historical events which he had experienced first-hand himself. It is indeed hard not to seek refuge in sarcasm when many men lose their lives because pressing

⁷¹ Vernon had issued an order in 1740, saying that the daily ration of rum had to be diluted with water in order to reduce drunkenness in his fleet. The Admiral’s own nickname “Old Grog” after the program coat he often wore, gave the drink its name (Dear 249).

⁷² For an overview of the campaign, I recommend J. Lewis (41–49). The horrors of the siege are partly analyzed in the next chapter.

⁷³ Vice-admiral Francis Hosier led the “[...] disastrous Caribbean expedition of 1726. In two years a squadron of 4750 men lost over 4000 dead, including the admiral and his successor, seven captains and fifty lieutenants” (Rodger, *Wooden World* 98).

home an advantage is regarded as “[...] a barbarous insult over the enemy’s distress [...]” (Smollett 185).

All of these examples – in a specific, much alleviated way even the one concerned with Captain Whiffle – have one thing in common: in the context of the social microcosm of a ship, they express, as Peck (24) has pointed out, a “[...] lack of respect for the body [...]”. The brutality (for, in respect to Mackshane, his intrigues ultimately lead to physical punishment) respectively, as Smollett despite the satirical element obviously saw it, the “corruption” of a male body in Whiffle’s case, are affronts to the body.

The distinguishing feature of a civilized or liberal or democratic society may be said to be respect for the individual, which necessarily involves respect for the individual’s body. By contrast, a maritime economy, particularly in times of war, appears to treat bodies with contempt. The difference becomes more scandalous when we appreciate that it is the wealth produced by maritime activity that, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, creates the conditions necessary for a civilized life. (Peck 24-25)

The mistreatment of the body is, in the case of *Roderick Random*, a part of the bigger, general maritime theme. The body represents the individual, and how Roderick experiences the treatment of individuals in the maritime sphere, will be the subject of the next chapter.

3.4 The maritime sphere in *Roderick Random*

The difference between life on shore and the maritime sphere is reflected in *Roderick Random* in various ways. The first instance is the appearance of Bowling, who is Roderick’s uncle and a typical “old salt” and “honest tar”, for whom “[...] ships and the sea constituted their sole horizon [...]” (Bouc  , *Novels* 267). Coming to the estate of Roderick’s grandfather, he approaches the entanglement of greed and intrigues in an extremely direct way. Clearly, being used to a life at sea, he has no time for messing around longer than necessary, which must lead to conflict. Bowling helps Roderick to get revenge on his schoolmaster, who has treated him unfairly and brutally, and eventually takes him away. His otherness is constantly reflected in the way he speaks;

his language is full of nautical lingo. Bowling approaches Roderick's grandfather, who is lying on his deathbed, as follows:

'What! he's not a weigh. How fare ye, – how fare ye, old gentleman? – Lord have mercy upon your poor sinful soul.' – But the dying man turned his sunken eyes towards us, – when my uncle went on. 'Here's poor Rory come to see you before you die and receive your blessing. – What man! don't despair, – you have been a great sinner, 'tis true, – what then? There's a righteous judge above, – isn't there? He minds me no more that a porpuss [porpoise] – Yes, yes, he's a going, – the land crabs will have him, I see that; – his anchor's a peak, i' faith!' – This homely consolation scandalized the company so much, and especially the parson, who probably thought his province invaded, that we were obliged to retire into another room [...]. (Smollett 12)

Through the intervention of a man who had been travelling for the biggest part of his life, Roderick begins his own voyage during which his basic innocence and good moral sense is at times "[...] perverted [...]" and a "[...] corrupt desire to restore himself to the genteel status of his birth by foul means" (Beasley 51) is developed. Still, Roderick is, in a novel that is deeply concerned with the collision between good and evil, essentially a good person. His "[...] apprenticeship to life itself" (Bouc  , *Novels* 100), the overcoming of various obstacles in order to reach moral maturity, is ended by being restored to the position which should have been his from the start. This moral voyage, respectively its ending, has been frequently criticized (e.g. Giddings 93; 97), but I agree with Bouc   (*Novels* 124), who wrote that

[e]ven if the reader remains a trifle sceptical about the sudden transformation of the hero, there is no doubt about the consistency of Smollett's moral intentions all through the novel: the give the book a structural unity which the plot in itself could not give it. Smollett makes his hero achieve a certain evolution, somewhat marred by clumsiness and improbability.

Roderick's adventures at sea not only make up the probably most captivating section of the novel, but are also relevant in terms of the bigger picture of *Roderick Random*. By having a somewhat closer look at the characters which have authority in the book, I have already tried to demonstrate that the naval chapters – or, in other words, the maritime sphere – are reflecting the world at large in the microcosm of a ship. In the whole narrative these chapters have a double function.

As an elaborated episode, the shipboard adventures dominate the second quarter of the novel, stopping its forward action for fourteen chapters and establishing their integrity as a completed narrative in their own right, yet crucial to the overall effect of the novel as a whole, and particularly to its persistent thematic emphasis on the near-hopeless plight of innocence in the grim arena of human experience. (Beasley 63)

It is a “grim arena” indeed, to which Roderick descends both literally and symbolically, when he is thrown into the hold of the press tender respectively finds his new home in the bowels of a man of thunder⁷⁴. This notion of being buried is further illustrated by Smollett by frequently pointing at the lack of fresh air, as the episodes concerned with the stench caused by rotten provisions have shown. The problem of ventilation is also an issue when Roderick catches the fever, which has already raged among the crew, himself.

The change of the atmosphere [...] conspired with the stench that surrounded us, the heat of the climate, our own constitutions impoverished by bad provision, and our despair, to introduce the bilious fever among us, which raged with such violence that three fourths of those whom it invaded, died in a deplorable manner; the colour of their skin, being by the extreme putrefaction of their juices, changed into that of soot. [...] I found myself threatened with the symptoms of this terrible distemper; and knowing very well that I stood no chance for my life, if I should be obliged to lie in the cockpit, which by this time, was grown intolerable even to people in health, by reason of the heat and unwholesome smell of decayed provision. (Smollett 189-190)

Roderick's request to be allowed to move up to the middle deck where the circumstances are slightly better, is of course refused by Oakhum, who only “offers” him to “[...] lie in the hospital, which, by the bye, was three degrees more offensive and more suffocating than our own birth below” (Smollett 190). However, the behaviour he had formerly shown to a sergeant eventually saves Roderick:

While I lay gasping for breath in this infernal abode, I was visited by a serjeant [...] He being informed of my condition, offered me the use of his birth in the middle-deck, which was inclosed with canvas and well-aired by a port hole that remained open within it. – Here I lay and enjoyed the breeze. (Smollett 190-191)

⁷⁴ The surgeon's birth was, in a bigger warship of the eighteenth century, relatively deep down in the ship, below the waterline. See Baugh (116-117) and Rodger (*Wooden World* 6-7) for a longitudinal section of such a ship.

Roderick of course recovers, but generally Smollett is authentic in both the portrayal of the catastrophe that indeed unfolded in reality⁷⁵, and the description of the general problem. Ventilation was indeed a

[...] perennial problem, especially in winter or bad weather, when the ports and hatches were closed. The air in the bowels of the ship was sometimes suffocatingly bad, and those unlucky enough to descend to the depths [like Roderick] would lower a candle in a lantern to test whether or not it stayed alight. Much ingenuity was devoted to the circulation of air. Admiral Wager, in the year that war broke out, recommended a system of pipes and fires; Stephen Hale, the inventor of a wind-mill-operated scheme for use in Newgate Prison, came up with the 'ships' lungs', driven by bellows in a box. Mr Sutton, the progenitor of a rival air pump, conceded that Hales's ventilators 'will keep a prison sweet, but my pipes will sweeten even a boghouse'. (J. Lewis 37)

However, this is just one aspect of the dark and haunting picture that Smollett paints of the maritime sphere in *Roderick Random*; to a large extent the author's very graphic description of some of the horrors that Roderick and his fellow seamen experience is the element that captivates the reader most. The naval chapters are without any doubt "[...] among the most sombre in Smollett's work. Roderick finds himself not in the realm of Poseidon but rather in that of Hades, peopled, if not with ghosts, at least with living corpses. Contempt of life in all its forms darkens these pages" (Bouc , *Novels* 112). Considering the following quotes, it is difficult not to agree. Especially the episodes describing the situation of the sick are striking.

The sick and wounded were squeezed into certain vessels, which thence obtained the name of hospital ships, though methinks they scarce deserved such a title; seeing none of them could boast either surgeon, nurse or cook; and the space between decks was so confined, that the miserable patients had not room to sit upright in their beds. Their wounds and stumps being neglected, contracted filth and putrefaction, and millions of maggots were hatched amid the corruption of their sores. (Smollett 187)

The lack of surgeons in the campaign was indeed fact; however, it is not Admiral Vernon that must be blamed as harshly as Smollett did. The admiral "[...] himself complained of the lack of surgeon's mates, and asked the 'Navy Board' to send out a

⁷⁵ The harsh facts are that „[b]y May 1741, only 1,500 soldiers out of General Wentworth's force of 8,000 were fit to fight; in July 2,260 men died in three weeks" (Bouc , *Notes* 457).

supplementary contingent with all speed” (Bouc , *Novels* 276). But also in times of peace, the situation of the sick is not much better:

[b]ut when I followed him [Thomson] with the medicines into the sick birth or hospital, and observed the situation of the patients, I was much less surprised to find people die on board, than astonished to find any body recover. – Here I saw about fifty miserable wretches, suspended in rows, so huddled one upon another, that not more than fourteen inches of space was allotted for each with his bed and bedding; and deprived of the light of day, as well as of fresh air; breathing nothing but a noisome atmosphere of the morbid steams exhaling from their own excrements and diseased bodies, devoured with vermin hatched in the filth that surrounded them, and destitute of every convenience necessary for people in that helpless condition. (Smollett 149)

There is reason to assume that this is rather extreme and dramatic, but not actually unauthentic. Fourteen inches were indeed the regulation space which a seaman was given to sling his hammock (Bouc , *Notes* 454), and the general circumstances might sound horrible, but were not made up by Smollett. The already mentioned famous physician James Lind gave an account of an equally horrible instance:

I have known a thousand men confined together in one guard ship, some hundreds of whom had neither a bed, nor so much as a change of linen: I have seen many of these brought into Haslar Hospital in the same clothes and shirts as they had on, when pressed several months before. In this case, it was impossible to prevent the generation of disease. (qtd. in Giddings 87)

In respect to amputations, there is no reason to doubt Smollett’s description of the way in which they are carried out when the ship was engaged in battle.

By this time our patients had increased to such a degree, that we did not know which to begin with; and the first mate plainly told the surgeon, that if he did not get up immediately, and perform his duty, he would complain of his behaviour to the admiral, and make application for his warrant. – This effectually roused Mackshane [...] and in order to strengthen his resolution, had recourse more than once to a case-bottle of rum which he freely communicated to the chaplain and purser, who had as much need of such extraordinary inspiration as himself: Being thus supported, he went to work, and arms and legs were hewed down without mercy. (Smollett 183)

As Jeremy Lewis has correctly remarked, “[...] amputation was the universal panacea for shattered limbs” (39), and, little surprising, the process was even more dramatic in

the height of battle. That “[...] arms and legs were hewed down without mercy [...]” (Smollett 183) fits the basic idea of the time reflected in widely used manuals, such as *The Navy Surgeon* by John Atkins and Aubrey’s *The Sea Surgeon*: “[...] the heat and surprise in action make it the properest time for amputation, men meeting their misfortune with greater strength and resolution than when they have spent a night under thought and reflection” (qtd. in J. Lewis 39). When one of the seamen, Jack Rattlin, injures his leg, Mackshane’s drive to amputate the leg⁷⁶ is therefore not rooted in maliciousness, but rather in the approach which was common at the time. Scenes of battles are frequently described in gory details, which underline the portrayal of the maritime sphere as a brutal inferno. More than simply unnerved by the battle, the parson “[...] stript himself to the skin, and besmearing his body with blood, could scarce be with-held from running upon deck in that condition” (Smollett 183). Even more striking and shocking is Roderick’s account of what he experiences while being chained to the mast while the *Thunder* is engaged in battle with a French man of war.

[...] I concealed my agitation as well as I could, till the head of the officer of Marines, who stood next to me, being shot off, bounced from the deck athwart my face, leaving me well-nigh blind with brains. – I could contain myself no longer, but began to bellow with all the strength of my lungs; when a drummer coming towards me, asked if I was wounded; and before I could answer, received a great shot in his belly which tore out his intrails, and he fell flat on my breast. – This accident entirely bereft me of all discretion: I redoubled my cries, which were drowned in the noise of battle [...] and became quite frantick [...] till my spirits being quite exhausted, I remained quiet and insensible of the load that oppressed me. (Smollett 167-168)

These very intense descriptions respectively the picture that Smollett paints of life in the Royal Navy has also seen some serious criticism. The eminent naval historian N.A.M. Rodger has called Tobias Smollett “[...] another writer whose works have perhaps been drawn on more than they deserve [...]” (*Wooden World* 14).

As he [Smollett] had served one voyage as a surgeon’s mate he was not wholly unacquainted with the Navy, but he remains a poor, or rather over-rich, substitute for documentary evidence. In picaresque novels a man is not upon oath, and I regard the attempt to guess [...] which of Smollett’s incidents may be taken as faithfully reflecting sea life, as more amusing than useful for the historian. (Rodger, *Wooden World* 14)

⁷⁶ „He examined the fracture and the wound, and concluding from a livid colour extending itself upon the limb, that a mortification would ensue, resolved to amputate the leg immediately” (Smollett 163-164). However, since there is also time for consideration (there is no ongoing battle in the background, so to speak), both Rattlin and the surgeon’s mates oppose this and manage to save the leg.

There might be some truth in this, but in my opinion, it would be a mistake to dismiss the naval chapters in *Roderick Random* as a mere product of the imagination and pure exaggeration. Smollett never actually claims that his experiences reflect standards in the British navy – even if they do in some cases, as, for example, quotes from other contemporaries such as James Lind have shown. Provisions, to briefly return to one aspect, were probably better than in other navies; but Smollett never claims the contrary. He describes his own first-hand experiences which happen, in respect to such aspects of battle, sickness, and lack of provisions, to stem from an infamous naval disaster. As nobody would doubt, such disasters did happen in reality, and Smollett gives his account of one. I will briefly mention another example. The fact that Oakhum is a brutal and sadistic representative of authority does not necessarily mean that Smollett thought that all captains of ships of the Royal Navy were like this. Certainly he wanted to comment on society in general through characters like Oakhum, but this does not change the fact that there *were* some captains like this in reality, even though they were certainly the exception and not the rule. In the end, I believe it is a matter of emphasis. Smollett was, after all, writing a novel, and was aware of what would capture his readers most, but he is clearly within the frame of authenticity when he tells of floating carcasses around the ship (189) or describes the state the sick are in because of a lack of surgeons (149). He might be exaggerating in some instances, like in the amount of violence carried to excess by Oakhum, but rarely describes purely imagined events or situations. Rodger, on the other hand, certainly has a point in stating that the Royal Navy could never have been as successful as it was if a navy ship was “[...] a sort of floating concentration camp” (*Wooden World* 13) or a floating hell manned by badly paid, unfortunate wretches ruled by the lash. As long as one is aware of the danger of generalizing Smollett’s account, it is possible to critically cherish the naval chapters in *Roderick Random* also for their historical value, especially if one considers that his non-fictional work *An Account of the Expedition against Cartagena* is strikingly similar to *Roderick Random* (J. Lewis 46). Denying that life on sea *could* be hell on earth would be an insult to the memory of those who went through it.

I agree with Boucé (*Novels* 279) when he states that, considering how hardened the period was psychologically and physically, “[...] the mere fact of daring to describe, even with a few satirical exaggerations, incidents in which men were treated almost like brute beasts, is already a courageous challenge to the system of social oppression and a cry of hope for the future”.

4 **FREDERICK MARRYAT'S MR. MIDSHIPMAN EASY**

4.1 Historical background

When *Mr. Midshipman Easy* was published in 1836, Britain was in the middle of a period which has been given two labels; labels which, at a first, quick glance, somewhat contradict each other: the Time of Troubles respectively the Age of Reform. Both have, as the following paragraphs will show, some justification.

Internationally, Britain continued the acquisition of new colonies⁷⁷, and already established ones like Australia were further explored and saw more settlement. In respect to the Royal Navy, it can be said that William IV – who had become king after his brother George IV had died in 1830 – was not called “the Sailor King” without reason. He showed a considerable amount of interest in naval matters and, being Lord High Admiral before he was crowned king, tried to reform various aspects of the service, for example the promotion system or putting some limits to flogging (Peck 50). However, “[...] his enthusiasm for the new post was matched by his clumsiness and indiscretion [...]” (Peck 51). For the Britain of the 1830s, the Royal Navy was, even though the call for various reforms was also to be heard in the navy, a stable factor, a national institution people could basically count upon; the *Pax Britannica*⁷⁸ was, although not yet a commonplace of imperial thought as in later decades, already in effect. The problems lay elsewhere. The label “Time of Troubles” is justified because, “[...] forty years of Tory domination were ending in panic and dismay; Ireland, unappeased by Catholic Emancipation, was smouldering with rebellion; from Kent to Dorset the skies were alight with burning ricks” (Young qtd. in Parascandola 7). Still, these times of political and social instability saw a vast number of reforms of various kinds, social as well as economic ones. The most prominent one is, however, of parliamentary nature: the Reform Act of 1832. It disenfranchised the vast majority of the so-called rotten boroughs, and redistributed the now available seats among the counties and boroughs which had until then not been represented in parliament. All this created a general climate of change: “[p]erhaps no people ever felt they were in a transitional period more than those in the nineteenth century. And never did the

⁷⁷ The Falkland Islands and St. Helena, for example, became parts of the British Empire in 1832-1833.

⁷⁸ The notion of the *Pax Britannica* meant maintenance of (global) peace under British rule, in which of course the Royal Navy played a decisive part.

transition seem to be so radical, threatening to change the established order of Christian orthodoxy, rule by the nobility, and the fixed hierarchical structure” (Parascandola 7).

4.2 *Mr. Midshipman Easy* and its Mediterranean setting

Considering the historical background of the period in which Marryat placed one of his relatively well-remembered novels, *Mr. Midshipman Easy* (published 1836), it is, for a better basic understanding of the book, well worth looking at the setting he chose. In a sense, the Mediterranean setting of *Mr. Midshipman Easy* is itself thematic, and in order to make this clear, it is essential to contextualize it historically.

A century earlier, the assumption that a narrative like the one discussed on the following pages would have rather been placed in the Caribbean or a similarly “exotic” region, is a relatively safe one. When Marryat sent his hero Jack Easy on his way, he had good reason to let him travel the Mediterranean, as will be shown. However, no dates can be found in the book, and neither Nelson nor Napoleon are mentioned once. Nevertheless, it is, considering the information given in the novel, possible to infer an approximate point in time. In this respect, two islands are the most important: Minorca and Malta. Both are places of retreat and, especially in the case of Malta, of strategic significance. This is hinted at by Jack, when he is addressing his best friend and fellow midshipman Ned Gascoigne:

“We shall be at Minorca in a day or two,” observed Jack, after a while; “now I shall be glad to get there. Do you know, Ned, that I feel very much satisfied with myself; I have got into no scrape this time, and I shall, notwithstanding, have a good story to tell the governor when I go to Malta.” (Marryat 215)

This is just one of numerous instances in which Minorca and Malta, where Jack even befriends the governor (who is always eager to hear about Jack’s adventures), play a role (e.g. Marryat 230; 189, 195⁷⁹). On that basis, it could be argued that Jack Easy sails the Mediterranean sometime between 1800 and 1802.

⁷⁹ Frequently, like in these cases, Marryat is referring to Port Mahon (and not Minorca as such). Port Mahon is the capital of Minorca and was very practicable for the British navy since it has a large and deep natural harbour.

This assumption is based on historical facts: Minorca, before being returned to the Spanish in 1802, had (once again) been under British control from the Capture of Minorca in 1798; Malta, on the other hand, became part of the British Empire with the Treaty of Paris (1814), but had been presented to Sir Alexander Ball as a British Dominion and was seized in 1800 (Kennedy 134). Consolidating British control over the island had become “[...] an important strategic goal; like that of Minorca, it played an important role in consolidating Britain’s defensive position in the western Mediterranean” (Hattendorf 112-113). The core of this “defensive position” was, as Conway (29) has remarked, the navy’s primary purpose of home defence. A “Western Squadron” had been created in the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748). Its strategy of longer-distance blockades of French ports “[...] was to be pursued in every successive conflict, with the partial exception of the American war, up and to the struggle with Napoleon” and the importance that was ascribed to the Western Squadron is also reflected in the fact that “[e]ven after 1815, naval installations and victualling yards were constructed on the assumption that when the next war came, the Western Squadron would again play an important role” (Conway 28). This blockading strategy, in which Minorca was considered to be of special strategic importance, is also indirectly mentioned in *Mr. Midshipman Easy*, and Marryat is even referring to a rather famous example: the blockade of Toulon under the command on none other than Admiral Horatio Nelson (1758-1805). The fleet off Toulon is mentioned several times; once, for example, Jack’s ship is on the way to the fleet with a number of bullocks on board “[...] destined to drive the scurvy out of the Toulon fleet” (Marryat 212), and another time the midshipmen discuss whether their ship was bound to “[...] join the fleet off Toulon” (Marryat 223).

This seems to conflict with the theory that the *Mr. Midshipman Easy* is set somewhere between 1800 and 1802 (the latter being more probable), since the blockade of the city in southern France only began in 1803. But whether Marryat was simply historically imprecise or if Minorca continued to be used by the British for certain purposes after they had returned it to Spain in 1802, is probably not the most important thing to be discussed here and must be left to a more serious historical analysis. What is more significant is that the Mediterranean setting must have had a special place in the British nation’s memory in terms of naval engagement.

Marryat, a navy veteran himself, wrote *Mr. Midshipman Easy* in 1836, a time when the *Pax Britannica* had already been established for 20 years, and people were aware of the nation's unchallenged sea power. Britannia indeed ruled the waves, and a sea nation like Britain would remember a period in which, at its height around 1804, "[...] nearly three-quarters (72 percent) of the Royal Navy's vessels were operating in European waters" (Rodger, *Command* 615-617). Furthermore, various campaigns in the Mediterranean were also connected with Admiral Nelson⁸⁰, a national hero who Mahan even called "the embodiment of sea power" (qtd. in Kennedy 132). To complete the picture, one should consider another naval hero of the time, a man under which Frederick Marryat had served as a midshipman himself: Lord Cochrane (1775-1860). He commanded the frigate *Imperieuse*, which the young Marryat joined in 1806 and on which he saw active service against the French (J. Sutherland 412). Cochrane also adds to the significance of Minorca, since he frequently used the island as a base for various activities along the Spanish coast (Harvey 32-40). The significance of "the extraordinary Thomas" for Marryat's novels should not be underestimated, since he admired his commander and created many Cochrane-like figures in his work (Bassnett 179). Although not exclusively active in the Mediterranean, "[...] distinguished himself through several daring (some might say foolhardy) attacks on the French and became a highly popular public hero" (Bassnett 179). Cochrane was a figure which the British public was extremely interested in, and there is reason to assume that he too was linked to the Mediterranean in public perception.

If Nelson was unquestionably Britain's greatest admiral since Drake, Cochrane was her greatest single-ship captain; indeed he was the last of his kind, at the grey age of steam he so forcefully championed came to replace the far more romantic age of sail. As a master of naval deception and trickery, he was in a class of his own. (Harvey qtd. in Bassnett 179)

As far as the historical context of his choice of geographical setting is concerned, Marryat is therefore all in all authentic – after all, he had served in the Mediterranean himself. He had encountered French ships in combat, just like Jack:

[t]he mist rolled off the stagnant water, and discovered the brig, who as soon as she perceived the boat, threw out the French tricolour, and fired a gun of defiance. Mr Smallsole was undecided; the gun fired was not a heavy one, and so Mr Joliffe remarked; the men, as usual, anxious for the attack, asserted the

⁸⁰ See M. Lewis (173) for more information on Nelson and the nature of the blockades.

same, and Mr Smallsole, afraid of retreating from the enemy and being afterwards despised by the ship's company, ordered the boats to weigh their grapnels. (Marryat 191)

The battle that ensues in the book was highly likely to have happened in reality since “[...] the run-down of the French main fleets and of the merchant marine freed thousands of Frenchmen for privateering, which remained the only occupation left at sea – and a highly profitable one at that” (Kennedy 131). Among a number of regions, the Mediterranean was also affected by this.

The question whether *Mr. Midshipman Easy* is set during the Napoleonic Wars is a rather tricky one, since there is disagreement amongst historians to when the French Revolutionary Wars ended, and the Napoleonic Wars started. Following McLynn (215), the start is dated as early as 1799, when Napoleon Bonaparte seized power in France. But what is more important at this point is that *Mr. Midshipman Easy* is set in the same period and has, at least partly, the same geographical naval setting as the Napoleonic Wars, which ended in 1815. The key point here is that

[t]here was a certain element in Marryat's novels which evoked the days of the Napoleonic wars. Marryat anticipated a trend [...] of setting his novels in the recent past [...]. The period of the Napoleonic wars, one of the greatest in British naval history, was recent enough so that many readers had lived through it, yet it was far enough removed to detach it from the present age. (Parascandola 11-12)

On the basis of these considerations, it could be argued with some right that Marryat had good reasons to place his narrative in the Mediterranean and in particular such places as Gibraltar, Tarragona, Minorca or Malta. These reasons do not only stem from the wish for authenticity, but also from the fact that the Mediterranean was a geographical region that played an important part in making Britain *the* ultimately unchallenged global sea power after 1815. Marryat was aware of that and broached the issue of reaching the peak of a development (i.e. Britain and its empire) to place his rites of passage narrative in this, from a British perspective important historical theatre. But besides Jack's personal development, there's more to the book, as will be shown in the following chapters. In respect to the Mediterranean setting, “Marryat was drawing both upon his own experience and on the nostalgia for past greatness [both of which held] strong national appeal” (Bassnett 180).

4.3 The seamen in *Mr. Midshipman Easy*

Imagining the ship's community as a social ladder, Jack Easy would have to be placed somewhere in the middle. Even though this position gives the author the possibility to comment on the hero both from "above" and "below", Marryat chose to do almost exclusively the latter. As Guggenbühl (24) has correctly observed, the novel gives a voice mostly to the upper and middle "classes" of shipboard life. It is usually people with a more or less big amount of authority who Marryat allows to comment on Jack, most of all Captain Wilson and the governor of Malta – and both support and protect the young midshipman.

The average "Jack Tar" has a different function in *Mr. Midshipman Easy*. For example, he sometimes serves a comic purpose, but most of the time the "normal" men are relatively anonymous and do not have a voice of their own, except, as will be shown, the ex-slave Mesty. As especially the next chapter will reveal, Marryat argued strongly in favour of a clear social hierarchy, which becomes very obvious indeed when he ridicules Jack's father's ideas of equality. Therefore it is "[...] almost inevitable that Marryat, being an officer [himself], would take his greatest cares in depicting officers", and it is no wonder he is more concerned with them than with the ordinary sailor who is, "[...] in a sense, the first working class hero [...]" (Parascandola 32).

However, there are certain exceptions, and these exceptions actually provide for some of the most interesting elements of the novel, at least from a historical point of view. In these exceptions, the ship's crew are used by Marryat in order to comment on some bigger naval issues, and in the following the two most striking ones will be examined. Following the novel's chronology, I will start with mutiny.

It can be said that the mutiny actually stems from Jack's very own disobedience. Having captured a Spanish ship, he decides, or rather follows Mesty's advice, to go on a "cruise" (Marryat 93). The crew approve of this: "[t]he cutter's crew knew very well that Jack was acting contrary to orders, but anything was to them a change from the monotony of a man-of-war, and they, as well as Mesty, highly approved of a holiday" (Marryat 95). Jack soon loses control over the situation, and the men, led by the coxswain⁸¹, require to be set on shore when the ship reaches some small uninhabited

⁸¹ The coxswain was usually the petty officer responsible for the barge used by a commanding officer.

islands, later identified as the Zaffarine⁸² islands. Having no other choice, the midshipman, basically being in command of the cutter, is forced to let them go and remains on board with Mesty and a Spaniard. The situation turns for the worse when Mesty's prediction becomes true:

"I tell you, sar, this night they get drunk, to-morrow they get drunk again, but drunken men never keep quiet, – suppose one man say to others, 'Let's go board and kill officer, and then we do as we please,' they all say yes, and they all come and do it. No, sar – must have [their] boat – if not for your sake, I must hab it, save my own life anyhow, for they hate me and kill me first; by de powers, stop a little." (Marryat 110)

The young midshipman soon gets "[...] melancholy forebodings which he [can] not shake off [...]" (Marryat 110); he cannot sleep because he

[...] had reflected so much since he had left the ship, he had had his eyes so much opened, and had felt what a responsibility he had taken by indulging himself in a whim of the moment, that it might be almost said, that in the course of a one fortnight he had at once from a boy sprung up into a man. He was mortified and angry, but he was chiefly so with himself. (Marryat 110-111).

This quote hints at a key issue in Marryat's work. The officer is a sort of role model, and Marryat points out that the misbehaviour of those higher up in the hierarchy has consequences, since those beneath them will feel tempted to disobey in some way or another themselves. Not behaving like gentlemen – for this is what, from Marryat's point of view, officers had to be – therefore creates the danger of undermining the established order. This seems to be true especially in this case, since the seamen do not really have a "proper" reason to mutiny. They are not used brutally or see themselves confronted with an unfair and dictatorial commander. The point is not stressed much further, but Jack is basically as guilty as the mutineers. In the case of the mutiny in *Mr. Midshipman Easy*, it is therefore possible to say that Marryat applied the principle of cause and effect in a naval setting in which authority and following orders were regarded as nothing less but essential. Before following the course of the mutiny further, it is perhaps useful to have a brief look at the author's "officer-as-gentlemen" attitude, in order to further explain what has just been said about the role of the officer.

⁸² The Zaffarine islands are a group of three small islands off the coast of Melilla, today an autonomous Spanish city in North Africa.

In one of his authorial intrusions, Marryat states:

We do not write these novels merely to amuse, – we have always had it in our view to instruct, and it must not be supposed that we have no other end in view than to make the reader laugh. If we were to write an elaborate work, telling truths, and plain truths, confining ourselves only to point out errors and demand reform, it would not be a read; we have therefore selected this light and trifling species of writing [...] as a channel through which we may convey wholesome advice in a palatable shape. (Marryat 182-183)

The desire to “instruct” is also reflected in the episode described above. In order to illustrate this further, another quote will be of use:

“Mesty,” replied Jack [...], “it was not the sharks – it was I, – I who have murdered these men [in the course of the mutiny, some mutineers were eaten by sharks].” Mesty looked at Jack with surprise. “How dat possible?” “If I had not disobeyed orders,” replied our hero [...] “if I had not shown them the example of disobedience, this would not have happened. How could I expect submission from them? It’s all my fault – I see it now – and, O God! when will the sight be blotted from my memory?” (Marryat 113)

In this case, Marryat’s “pointing out errors”, as he stated in the passage quoted, is done in an obvious way, and in “palatable shape” by interlacing it into an adventurous story of a mutiny, even including some gory details when some of the men, including the coxswain, who had been the leader of the mutiny, are eaten by sharks. On this basis, the bigger picture becomes somewhat clearer. Marryat was, equipped with his own experiences, concerned with all sorts of naval affairs, and the matters such as “[...] smuggling, naval discipline, methods of promotion, and the treatment of younger officers and common seamen by senior officers are especially important to Marryat” (Parascandola 12). The latter seems to be especially important at this point, since both the behaviour of officers in a manner that should do justice to their status as the gentlemen that Marryat assumed capable and effective officers must be, and the leading of the regular men on board of a ship had the same core: leading by example. This is not very surprising keeping in mind that Marryat was a man who had strong moral views on the state of the Royal Navy. But Marryat’s ideas in respect to order and society will be discussed in some more detail in the next chapter. For the moment, we shall return to the mutiny itself.

It ends very well for the vast majority of the mutineers. First, they themselves, being devoid of provisions, beg to be taken up on board again, and promise to do their duty “[...] cheerfully till we join the ship, and then be hung as an example to mutineers” (Marryat 123), as they say themselves. Jack and Mesty agree, and, having proved themselves to be worthy and brave seamen in a battle that follows soon after, they are even protected by Jack and basically forgiven everything: “[h]is natural correctness of feeling decided him, in the first place, to tell the whole truth; and in the next, his kind feelings determined him to tell only part of it. [...] [A]nd as for the men, after an action with the enemy, if they behave well, even mutiny is forgiven” (Marryat 127). That the mutiny is, at least partly, Jack’s fault represents a viewpoint that was by no means exclusive to Marryat:

[s]ea captains once held the view, and doubtless many still do, that mutinous outbreaks reflect gross personal failure of officership. “Mutiny, sir!” the stern if fatherly Amd. Cuthbert Collingwood is said to have declared. “Mutiny in my ship! If it can have arrived at that it must be my fault, and the fault of every of my officers.” Another British naval notable of the Georgian era, Adm. the Earl St. Vincent, thought the suppression of mutiny “the most meritorious of all military services” (Guttridge 2)

Considering that the leader of the mutiny and some others had already been punished, it seems to be no problem to forgive the others, who had also shown that they were again willing to submit to order. Furthermore, and perhaps most significant in this respect, it makes the fact that Jack himself is forgiven more credible, both from a factual and moral perspective. The treatment he has received – firm, but kind – must equally be given to his men (Parascandola 32). It’s once more leading by example *par excellence*. “In other words, respect for the rules is moderated by a sense of the most productive course of action. This might be a lesson in how to run a ship, but it is also an idea about how to run a country; Marryat stresses the wisdom of conservative paternalism” (Peck 62). In the specific case of mutinies, the year 1797 is essential to consider for anyone aiming to understand why, by Marryat’s time, punishments were actually lessened (Parascandola 30). In that year, there were massive mutinies at Spithead and the Nore⁸³, which reflected that

⁸³ Spithead, close to the naval base of Portsmouth, is a traditional anchorage of the British navy, and the mutiny there was followed by one at the Nore, which is a sandbank at the mouth of the River Thames and a former naval anchorage as well. For a close observation see Guttridge (42-56; 57-72).

[t]he sailors were hitting back. Where there are abuses there have to be changes, and improvements followed the mutiny, but what we might also note is a reputation for fairness associated with Collingwood and Nelson, the two principal naval commanders of the era. There is always a stress on how they knew their men, showing respect for the navy as a body of men and the body of each individual. The reputations of Collingwood and Nelson do [...] have a basis in fact, but the emphasis on their humanity is also a way of reconciling the harsh facts of life at sea with the values of those at home. (Peck 26-27)

Certain values are also arguably at the core of the next issue. Impressment has already been discussed earlier in this thesis. However, an important aspect that has yet to be considered is impressments at sea, especially since the topic was among those that Marryat seems to have been rather passionate about. Before looking at his attitudes towards impressment respectively the context of the time, the novel itself must be considered. Setting out for the second time on a ship fitted out by himself and equipped with a “letter of marque⁸⁴”, Jack and Lieutenant Oxbelly (for whom his looks must have been eponymous) discuss the danger they might have to face from a Channel cruiser:

“[...] [b]ut, sir, if you please, we’ll now get under way as fast as we can, for there is a Channel cruiser working up at St. Helen’s, and we may give him the go-by by running through the Needles.” “But what need we care for the Channel cruiser?” “You forget, sir, that as soon as she drops her anchor she will come on board and take a fancy to at least ten of our men.” “But they are protected.” “Yes, sir, but that’s no protection now-a-days. I have sailed in a privateer at least three years, and I know that they have no respect for letters of marque or for privateers.” (Marryat 318-319)

The ship manages to avoid the cruiser; however, the men are less fortunate the second time. The chapter heading speaking of “[...] a slight difference of opinion between those who should be friends” already hints at the attitude towards impressments represented by Marryat. Realizing that a British cruiser is on their heels, Jack and Oxbelly once more discuss the topic, coming to the conclusion the need to impress men for his Majesty’s service is “[...] not their fault [...] – the navy must be manned, and as things are so, so things must be. It’s the king’s prerogative [...] and we cannot fight the battles of the country without it” (Marryat 335). Gascoigne especially despises the “[...] demagogues on shore who exclaim against impressment, [but] are quiet enough on the point when they know that their lives and property depend upon sailors’ exertions.”

⁸⁴ A letter of marque was “[...] a commission [...] licensing the master of a privately owned ship to cruise in search of enemy merchant vessels, either as reprisal for injuries suffered or as acts of war” (Dear 315).

“However, a scapegoat is soon found, when Oxbelly, who had served as a purser in the navy, states that

“[...] it’s not our fault if we are obliged to take men by force; it’s the fault of those who do not legislate so as to prevent the necessity.” [...] [Gascoigne replies] “[...] one thing is certain, that if they gave the subject half the consideration they have others of less magnitude, an arrangement might be made by which his Majesty’s navy would never be shot of men.” “No doubt, no doubt, Mr Gascoigne; but nevertheless, the king’s prerogative must never be given up.” “There I agree with you, Mr Oxbelly; it must be held in case of sudden emergency and absolute need.” (Marryat 335-336)

These quotes, especially when Gascoigne is speaking, basically reveal parts of Marryat’s own point of view. The number one priority, and the British navy’s main task, was at that time protecting Britain. However, as has been said, Marryat was highly interested in naval matters of all sorts also after he had left the service, and impressment seems to have been one of the issues that he was most concerned about. In 1822, when he was still in the service, Marryat published a pamphlet called *Suggestions for the Abolition of the Present System of Impressment in the Naval Service*. As Warner has stated, “Marryat regarded impressment as a relic of feudalism; preferential purchase by the king of all commodities, including labour” (61). Without a doubt, Marryat was aware that men were needed, but opposed pressing them into the service if it could be avoided. This “relic” could, he argued, be replaced with a new system. He was calling for reform, but had, given the delicateness of the topic, to be careful⁸⁵. Marryat’s solution was to make the service more attractive to volunteers, and had a number of suggestions in respect to improving medical treatment, pay and pensions, chances for promotion or abolishing severe punishment (Parascandola 24). Marryat was not alone in this: “[b]y this time, humanitarians were attacking [impressment] as barbarous, while most naval officers considered it as expensive and inefficient as it was unpopular” (Warner 61).

However, Jack’s crew soon finds itself faced with the danger of being pressed. A lieutenant, having boarded Jack’s ship, musters the man:

The men came aft to the mainmast, with Mesty at their head, and answered to their names. As the men passed over, the lieutenant made a pencil-mark against

⁸⁵ Madden (qtd. In Parascandola 24) reports that „[...] the pamphlet angered King William IV enough to make him later refuse Marryat a promotion”. Warner (137) provides some details of the story.

ten of them, who appeared the finest seamen; and, when the roll had been called, he ordered those men to get their bags and go into the boat. (Marryat 338)

There is no reason to doubt the authenticity of this scene, for it was indeed the most able men that the Navy was more or less constantly in need of.

It was at sea [...] that impressment was at its most productive. Only at sea could seamen easily be found, with little chance of evasion or disguise. [...] The great advantage of pressing at sea was its selective ability to provide good seamen, the class of which the Service was most acutely in need. (Rodger, *Wooden World* 180-181)

It is little surprising that in times of war the problem was more pressing than in a relatively peaceful period. This also explains why the lieutenant leading the press gang does neither care that Jack would be short-handed if some men were taken away, nor that frequently no respect for papers that should protect a crew was shown, as Oxbelly has remarked in an earlier quote. As Rodger has noted, many seamen, being faced with impressment, then decided to “volunteer”, since the navy also sometimes offered welcome opportunities. Still, “[...] men at sea were often as willing to oppose the press with force as those on land [...]” (Rodger, *Wooden World* 181), and this is also the case in *Mr. Midshipman Easy*:

[t]he lieutenant [...] flew forward to seize Mesty, who, striking him a blow with the flat of his sabre, almost levelled him to the deck. At this the men and other officers of the frigate darted forward; but, after a short scuffle, in which a few wounds were received, were beaten back into their boats. The lieutenant was thrown in after them, by the nervous arm of Mesty – and assailed by cold shot and other missiles, they sheered off with precipitation, and pulled back in the direction of the frigate. (Marryat 339)

Marryat’s attitude towards impressment has already been mentioned. However, if it is true that the author was himself in a “[...] dilemma in choosing between the rights of the government and those of the individual [...]”, as Parascandola (27) has said, the crew’s success in defending themselves can be interpreted as a relatively reliable sign for which position he stood for in the end.

4.4 The maritime sphere and the concept of initiation

Generally speaking, the story of Jack Easy is one of initiation and development, wrapped up in a historical adventure story at sea. The sea, a rough place to learn life's lessons, is certainly a fitting testing ground for strength and character, and both elements are significant elements of Marryat's nautical fiction. But before having a closer look at the development Jack undergoes in the maritime sphere respectively shedding some light on the context of this development, it might be useful to briefly explore the position of a midshipman in order to arrive at some conclusion why Marryat chose this position for the hero of this novel.

A midshipman, as defined by Dear (367) is

a non-commissioned rank in all navies [...] immediately below that of sub-lieutenant in the Royal Navy. [...] The name dates from the early [seventeenth] century when young gentlemen were sent to sea as captain's servants or King's Letter boys to obtain the necessary training to become midshipmen and then officers.

Basically, midshipmen were on board to learn, and this is what Jack does both in respect to his naval skills and, more important here, also as regards his personal development. The element of learning is also indirectly reflected in the term "midshipman", since it comes from the fact that they were "[...] stationed amidships where, doubtless, they could observe what was going on without getting in the way" (Dear 367). Although they also had to work on board, learning seamanship, navigation etc. (also something Jack has to do in the novel) was essential.

Marryat, probably with a wink of the eye, frequently gives various stereotypes of a typical midshipman:

There were at the time but three other midshipmen in the ship, of whom it can only be said that they were like midshipmen in general, with little appetite for learning, but good appetites for dinner, hating everything like work, fond of everything like fun, fighting '*à l'outrance*' one minute, and sworn friends the next – with general principles of honour and justice, but which were occasionally warped according to circumstances; with all the virtues and vices so heterogeneously jumbled and heaped together, that it was almost impossible to ascribe any action to its true motive, and to ascertain to what point their vice was softened down into almost a virtue, and their virtues from mere excess degenerated into vice. (Marryat 65-66)

There are more generalizations in the narrative: For example, “[...] there is a peculiar providence for midshipmen” (Marryat 160), all of them like “[...] fun, and [are] quite thoughtless of the consequences” (Marryat 138), and “[i]t is astonishing what sacrifices midshipmen will make for the objects of their adoration” (Marryat 176). Considering all this, it can be argued that midshipmen are, not unlike their contemporaries on shore, young men with stereotypical juvenile qualities, whose character is still subject to change and can, to a certain extent, be formed by their surroundings. In addition to this, their social backgrounds are of interest too, since many of them aspired to become an officer one day – and officers were, as has been mentioned earlier, supposed to be gentlemen. Jack, for example, comes from a family that is landed gentry; the other midshipmen have various backgrounds: the bully Vigors is “[...] the son of the clerk in the dockyard at Plymouth [...]” (Marryat 65), and the father of Gossett, for example, is a “wealthy yeoman of Lynn, in Norfolk” (Marryat 65). All in all, the description of the midshipmen in the novel is authentic. Although midshipmen in the Age of Sail seem to have come from various social backgrounds, middle class families seem to have the biggest share. Vigors and Gossett, and also Jack, who can be seen as coming from the upper middle class are therefore authentic. The historical facts support this, since the largest group was the sons of professional men, including the sons of naval officers and the like, followed by landed gentry. From the latter group, to which Jack belongs, came about 27% percent of officers in the Age of Sail (Lavery 90).

However, there is reason to assume that Marryat did create Jack’s background the way he did not simply because he wanted to create an air of authenticity. By making him a privileged middle class youth, the didactic element which Marryat saw as an integral part of this narrative could be made clear. Contrary to his contemporaries of the working class, who were so to speak forced to learn their lessons by their life circumstances, Jack has, from Marryat’s perspective, at the beginning of the novel not yet realized how the world really works. “What Easy must learn, as in other Marryat novels, is how to become a gentleman. He must overcome not a lowly birth or illegitimacy, but his father’s notion of equality, which threatens the concept of a gentleman. Jack must claim his proper station in life and aid those below him” (Parascandola 83). His “handicap” is that he has been indoctrinated over years by his father in terms of the latter’s principles of equality, and furthermore has been spoiled by

his mother. This makes him, in the initial stage, very unfit for service in the navy. Ironically, Jack decides to go to sea because he hopes to be able to find social equality there. He tells his father that he thinks that

“[...] people on shore seem determined not to listen to reason or argument. But it has occurred to me, that although the whole earth has been so nefariously divided among the few, that the waters at least are the property of all. No man claims his share of the sea – every one may there plough as he pleases, without being taken up for a trespasser. Even war makes no difference; every one may go on as he pleases, and if they meet, it is nothing but a neutral ground on which the parties contend. It is, then, only upon the ocean that I am likely to find that equality and rights of man, which we are so anxious to establish on shore; and therefore I have resolved not to go to school again, which I detest, but to go to sea, and propagate our opinions as much as I can.” (Marryat 44)

This egalitarian attitude already leads to a conflict with the otherwise well-meaning first lieutenant Sawbridge before Jack has even set foot on the *Harpy*, the sloop of war that he embarks on. The experienced officer discusses the soon-to-be midshipman with Captain Wilson, who knows Jack's family respectively the principles of Jack's father, who sees himself as a “philosopher”, which is, as far as Marryat is concerned, “[...] the very best profession a man can take up when he is fit for nothing else [...]” (Marryat 9). Wilson is surprised that Jack, of all professions, has chosen to join the service, and even more so that he expects to see his egalitarian principles realized there:

“I little thought, at that time, that his only son, who has no more occasion to go to sea than the Archbishop of Canterbury, for his father has a very handsome property [...] would ever have sailed with me, and have brought these opinions with him into any ship that I commanded. It is a pity, a great pity –” “He never could have brought his pigs to a worse market,” observed Sawbridge. (Marryat 50)

This rather sloppy remark pretty much hits, considering the early phase of Jack's development, the proverbial nail pretty much on the head. Jack always wants to “argue the point” with his superiors, but is always treated with indulgence, at least by the positive and important characters such as Captain Wilson. He is aware of Jack's “handicap”, and does not blame the young men for it. Sensing his potential and realizing that he is to be led and not driven, decided to keep Jack as midshipman and soon explains to him the nature of the service, and the incompatibility of Jack's philosophy with it. Nevertheless, Wilson does so in a manner that still contains a

positive aspect for Jack, showing the captain's willingness to engage himself in basically setting Jack right:

[f]or at the same time [that he was explaining to Jack that he was entering a service in which equality could never for a moment exist, if the service was to exist, he contrived to show that all the grades were leveled, by all being equally bound to do their duty to their country, and that, in fact, whether a seaman obeyed his orders, or he obeyed the orders of his superior officer, they were in reality only obeying the orders of the country, which were administered through their channels. (Marryat 53-54).

Although Marryat held the view that it was essential for the service that officers behaved and acted like gentlemen (e.g. Marryat 182-187), the way in which Wilson treats Jack seems to be more than simple politeness and kindness; it is one of those elements of the novel in which Marryat appears relatively unauthentic. Jack is forgiven everything, even though some of his "adventures" are nothing short of disobeying orders and deserting, which were (and still are) serious offences in the service. One of the very few who, so to speak, tries to spoil the fun is Captain Tartar, who meets Jack and Gascoigne in Sicily. The captain soon realizes who he is dealing with:

"[a]nd so, sir," cried Captain Tartar, in a voice of thunder, rising from his chair, "you're a d---d runaway midshipman, who, of you belonged to my ship, instead of marrying Donna Agnes, I would marry you to the gunner's daughter⁸⁶, by G--d; two midshipmen sporting plain clothes in the best society in Palermo, and having the impudence to ask a post-captain to dine with them! To ask me and address me as 'Tartar,' and 'my dear fellow'! you infernal young scamps!" (Marryat 179)

What happens afterwards could be seen as blowing up the principle of the importance of gentlemanly behaviour so much that it becomes corrupted. Tartar's behaviour is described as an insult to the honour of the midshipmen – even though his outrage is justified – and one of Jack's future brothers-in-law kills him in an ensuing duel: "[...] at the first fire the ball of Don Philip passed through Captain Tartar's brain, and he instantly fell dead" (Marryat 182). That Marryat as an author punishes Tartar with death seems unproportional and over the top, even though Marryat tries to justify it: "[i]n every other service but the English navy there is not that power of grossly insulting and

⁸⁶ The so-called „gunner's daughter“ was the “[...] name of the gun to which the boys serving in a warship of the British Navy were ‘married’, or tied, when receiving punishment” (Dear 252).

then sheltering yourself under your rank; nor is it necessary for the discipline of any service” (Marryat 181). He prefers gentlemanly officers like Wilson, who meets his ideal of a perfect superior.

In the wooden world of a Marryat ship, a handful of officers form a kind of benevolent aristocracy. They are constantly occupied with the lower ranks – their duties, troubles and amusements – ruling them, advising them and sympathizing with them. In repose, Marryat’s crews have the kind of reverence for their natural superiors that Carlyle would approvingly define as “Hero-Worship”. (Engel qtd. in Parascandola 34).

Once again, Lord Cochrane can be seen as a real-life model for one of Marryat’s fictional characters. By and by, Jack begins to realize that his initial motivation to go to sea was foolish and might have been a mistake: “‘I’d not only give up the ocean,’ thought Jack, ‘and my share of it, but also my share of the *Harpy*, unto any one who fancies it. Equality enough here! for every one appears equally miserable off.’” (Marryat 57). Marryat also shows that a certain amount of hypocrisy is involved in a viewpoint such as Jack’s. This becomes clear in the midshipman’s first encounter with the purser’s steward, a man named Easthupp.

Jack knew a gentleman when he met one, and did not choose to be a companion to a man beneath him in every way, but who, upon the strength of Jack’s liberal opinions, presumed to be his equal. Jack’s equality did not go so far as that; in theory it was all very well, but in practice it was only when it suited his own purpose. (Marryat 81)

What is effectually happening to Jack in the maritime sphere is that having “[...] absorbed his father’s ideas, [he] has to be re-educated by his wiser substitute fathers that he encounters on sea” (Peck 61) – these are, most of all, Captain Wilson and Sawbridge, but also the seamen Joliffe who tells him that “[t]he service is a rough, but good school, where everybody finds his level, – not the level of equality, but the level which his natural talent and acquirements will rise or sink him to, in proportion as they are plus and minus” (Marryat 87). The navy is the perfect setting for such a lesson as Jack receives, and in the end Jack has learned it for life. Returning home and finding the family estate in a chaotic state and the principles of his father, who seems to have gone “[...] as mad as a March hare [...]” (Marryat 299), exploited by some wicked servants, his development is effectively made clear. Jack is aware of the change he has undergone

during his time in the navy (Marryat 305), and Marryat makes this explicit towards the end of *Mr. Midshipman Easy*, when the now reformed ex-midshipman and his father argue. Jack denies the principle that all men are born equal, and tells Mr. Easy that he believes

“[...] it is to this inequality that society owes its firmest cementation – that we are enabled to live in peace and happiness, protected by just laws, each doing his duty in that state of life to which he is called, rising above or sinking in the scale of society according as he has been entrusted with the five talents or the one. Equality can and does exist nowhere. We are told that it does not exist in heaven itself – how can it exist upon earth?” (Marryat 310)

This is (from a modern perspective) a rather cynical stance, which also supports Parascandola’s claim that the ex-slave Mesty, a former Ashanti prince, is serving as a mirror for Jack Easy (107). Attracted by the principles of equality that Jack defends in the beginning, he feels grateful because Jack is the first to treat him as an equal. However, when Jack’s viewpoints change, Mesty must change also. When Jack and his father argue, Nicodemus Easy is certain that a former slave would support the principles that his son has come to despise:

“[...] [h]e has suffered and he can estimate the divine right of equality. Ask him now, ask him if you dare, Jack, whether he will admit the truth of your argument.” “Well, I’ll ask him,” replied Jack, “and I tell you candidly that he was once one of your disciples. Mesty, what’s your opinion of equality?” “Equality, Massa Easy?” replied Mesty, pulling up his cravat; “I say d---n equality, now I major-domo.” (Marryat 312)

This once more reveals the hypocrisy that Marryat saw in egalitarian principles, and not only as regards individuals representing such values, but also whole countries – or rather, one specific country. The emphasis that America put on a system of democracy was alienating not only Marryat, who viewed developments there with suspicion.

[...] [F]or Marryat, rule by more than the smallest aristocratic minority amounted to mob rule. Democracy was thought to lead to a lawlessness, bordering on anarchy, particularly in the more sparsely populated areas. The egalitarian spirit was said to cause a uniformity in dress, language, education, and religion. Americans were also reviled for their hypocrisy; they claimed to be a classless society, yet demonstrated strong aristocratic feelings in their social relationships. In addition, many travellers criticized the existence of slavery in the land of equality. (Parascandola 82)

To illustrate this is one of the purposes that Mesty as a character has in *Mr. Midshipman Easy*; after all, he had run away from America (Marryat 120), a country representing, in Marryat's eyes, the danger of democracy. For him, "[...] America [...] is, in essence, a nation full of Nicodemus Easys driven mad by their institutions" (Parascandola 85). But America is just one aspect to consider when for anyone trying to establish a context for the fact that social order is such a prominent theme in the novel. Marryat seems, at least politically, to have been a man of the eighteenth century, in which he was born, and longed to see order preserved in troubled times. He, based on his own experiences, obviously saw a model for this in the Royal Navy. Reforms that he wanted to see realized in the service, such as impressment, were one thing; revolutionizing a strongly hierarchical system something completely different. This is exactly what is represented in the book. Once Jack has learned his lesson and has been rid of principles considered both foolish and dangerous by Marryat, there is no reason for him to remain in the navy. The institution has done its job: "[l]ife at sea is [...] primarily a means of training unruly youths to become men [...]" (Bassnett 182). He can afford to leave the navy, since service has taught him all he needs to become useful for society. Jack's conversation with the governor of Malta sums this up:

"[a]nd leave the service altogether, sir?" replied Jack. "Why, I must say, that I do not think you exactly fitted for it. I shall be sorry to lose you, as you have a wonderful talent for adventure [...]; but, if I understand right from Captain Wilson, you were brought into the profession because he thought that the service might be of use in eradicating false notions, rather than from any intention or necessity of your following it up as a profession." (Marryat 297)

The navy has made him a man, and the lessons he has learned at sea enable Jack Easy to become a valuable member of society and a pillar of the community. Marryat pictures him as continuing to serve the nation; Jack eventually becomes a Conservative MP: "Our hero, who was now of age, [...] became a great favourite, kept a pack of hounds, rode with the foremost, received a deputation to stand for the county, on the conservative interest, and took his seat in parliament" (Marryat 343). There is reason to assume that the theme of order respectively finding one's place in a hierarchical society features so prominently in *Mr. Midshipman Easy* because Marryat was so concerned with the socio-political context of his time. The maritime sphere as such serves

Marryat's bigger purpose, since "[t]he hierarchical structure of naval life could [...] serve to remind readers of the need for social order in an age troubled by the constant threat of social unrest, while the heroic exploits of valiant individual characters provided models of bravery" (Bassnett 180).

Marryat saw the structure of society as he knew it and wanted it to be threatened by reforms such as the Reform Act of 1832⁸⁷. In a letter from Spa to Lady Blessington, he wrote:

"I [...] see the English papers [...] and I am very much disgusted. Nothing but duels and blackguardism. Surely we are extremely altered by this Reform. Our House of Lords was the *beau ideal* of all that was aristocratical and elegant. Now we have language that would disgust the hustings. In the House of Commons it is the same, or even worse. The gentleman's repartee, the quiet sarcasm, the playful hit, where are they? [...] This is very bad, and it appears to me, strongly smacking of revolution; for if the language of the lower classes is to take the precedence, will not they also soon do the same? I am becoming more Conservative every day; I cannot help it; I feel it a duty as a lover of my country. (qtd. in Warner 105)

In *Mr. Midshipman Easy*, Marryat allows his worldview to triumph in the end. Jack explains to his father that "[t]he most lasting and imperishable form of building is that of the pyramid, which defies ages and to that may the most perfect form of society be compared. It is based upon the many, and rising by degrees, it becomes less as wealth, talent and rank increase in the individual, until it ends at the apex or monarch [...]" (Marryat 311). Towards the end of the novel, Marryat's dislike of democratic principles and his disbelief in democracy as a form of government is perhaps voiced more clearly than ever before: "[a] monarchy may be overthrown by a revolution, and republicanism succeed, but that is shortly followed by despotism, till [...] monarchy succeeds again unanimous consent, as the most legitimate and equitable form of government [...]" (Marryat 311). The warship and service in the Royal Navy are all in all Marryat's model for how society should be. In its historical context, *Mr. Midshipman Easy* therefore is "[...] a novel that, both nervously and angrily, rejects the modern world [...]" (Peck 64).

⁸⁷ See chapter 4.1.

5 CONCLUSION

The analysis of *Captain Singleton*, *Roderick Random* and *Mr. Midshipman Easy* has shown that the three authors frequently dealt with similar issues respectively themes, such as the struggle of the individual vs. social and political order, identity and finding ones place in the world, violence and history itself. All of the three main protagonists – Bob Singleton, Roderick Random and Jack Easy – are changed by their experiences in the maritime sphere, and all of them end up in a position which allows the respective author to communicate a deeper meaning. To be successful in this attempt, the novels need to be, at least for the biggest part, authentic.

Defoe's Bob Singleton changes in the most dramatic way of all three. He sets out on his pirate cruises as a morally blank *tabula rasa*, a maritime heathen in the most basic meaning of the term, and develops, initially being an "enemy of all nations", for that was the way in which pirates were perceived in Defoe's time, a desire to return to his native England. Pirates were, although not yet conceived to be as grotesque in behaviour and appearance as in the Victorian period (Peck 22), a threat to the order of Defoe's time. They threatened the merchant activities of a nation which was in the process of building a maritime empire largely based on such activities; Defoe, highly interested in trade and finance, was basically writing in a mercantile culture, and in such a culture piracy could flourish. Bob Singleton is, as a pirate captain, a fascinating "other" who lives in a world which has, as I have shown, a social order radically different from the one people in Britain were living in at the beginning of the eighteenth century. This world respectively the life of a pirate had to be portrayed more or less authentically in order to make it credible, and, keeping in mind that some of the aspects Defoe emphasizes in the novel differ from the ones accentuated in some actual pirate narratives, and, all in all, Defoe did not fail in this attempt.

Roderick Random's maritime sphere, on the other hand, is not so revolutionary in its essence; quite to the contrary. The young Scot serves in the Royal Navy, an institution which, being so important for the whole nation, represents society for Smollett. The author wrote "[...] from the heart of the mercantile economy, offering an unblinking view of its brutality, inhumanity and rapaciousness" (Peck 23). This is what Roderick learns during his time at sea, and the naval chapters in *Roderick Random* feature all

these negative aspects. Even though Smollett casts most of it in rather extreme terms to get his point of an unfair and ruthless society across, he never actually tells lies. It is true that the novel should not be read as a historical source reliable in every respect, but the context in which and about which Smollett wrote, is in its essence authentic.

Marryat also criticises society in *Mr. Midshipman Easy*, by painting a picture how society should be from his point of view. A number of the more unpleasant aspects of shipboard life are neglected or only hinted at, such as physical punishment; however, the context for Marryat's basic theme, the preservation of a hierarchical social order, is authentic, since both external (Napoleonic France) and, a little later, internal (reforms and socially motivated riots like in Bristol) threatened the established order of the time. Marryat, a former officer himself, also paints a somewhat extreme picture, albeit in the opposite way compared to Smollett. Writing in the 1830s, Britain's naval supremacy had already been established, so he is worried about the status quo – but not because it is threatened from the outside, but because he fears that society as he knows it will be turned upside down because of internal tensions. The navy, perhaps a bigger national institution than ever before, is the perfect setting for presenting his somewhat reactionary ideas of a perfect society. Times had obviously changed, and his perspective differs especially from Smollett, but what remains the same is the use of the maritime sphere to illustrate what is a bigger problem from the author's point of view. It can be said that Marryat is writing from the perspective of the establishment, or rather is showing the concerns of the ruling class of a nation which had (almost) reached the peak of its power with the help of such men as Roderick Random, and whose wealth has been threatened by such men as Bob Singleton. The sailor of Marryat's time was "[...] transformed from a dangerous character to a solid citizen working for the best interests of society" (Peck 51). However, what he has in common with the other authors is that all try to come to terms with contemporary life respectively the socio-political circumstances of their time. In all three novels, naval matters are so intensively linked with the society of that period that they are a suitable model used to describe, comment, criticize or develop ideas for a bigger, more general picture. Nevertheless, one should never forget the perhaps more "simple" element of adventure; all three authors certainly wanted to create a good read. That the fiction they wrote is, all in all, relatively authentic is a good thing indeed, because life in such an environment as described in the novels seems to have been an adventure itself, and one well worth telling. On the high seas, life could indeed sometimes be stranger than fiction.

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7 INDEX

A

Avery 6, 7, 8, 9, 21, 31, 33, 35

B

British identity 2

British navy 2

Britishness 2, 59

C

Captain Singleton 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15,
16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30,
31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 38, 89, 91, 92, 93

Cochrane 72, 85, 92

E

egalitarian principles

equality 83, 86

empire 1, 2, 3, 73, 89

I

impressment 48, 49, 50, 51, 78, 79, 80, 87

Impressment 48, 78, 79

J

Jacobite 4, 13, 39

Jacobites *See Jacobitism*

Jacobitism 4, 5, 13, 14, 46

M

Marooning 29

midshipman

midshipmen 26, 51, 58, 59, 60, 70, 72, 74, 75, 81,
83, 84, 85, 86

Mr. Midshipman Easy 3, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75,
80, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91

N

national identity *See Britishness*

navy 2, 3, 20, 21, 24, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 46, 47, 48,
49, 52, 53, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 77, 78, 79, 80, 83,
84, 85, 87, *See Royal Navy*

Nelson 1, 2, 70, 71, 72, 78, 92

P

piracy 2, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 19, 21, 24, 27, 34,
36, 38, 89

pirate *See piracy*

press gang 48, 51, 80

provisions 21, 25, 52, 53, 54, 55, 64, 68, 77

R

Roderick Random 2, 3, 39, 40, 42, 43, 44, 46, 47, 48,
51, 52, 56, 57, 62, 63, 65, 68, 89, 90, 91

Rodger 1, 12, 40, 41, 42, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 53, 54,
55, 57, 61, 64, 67, 68, 72, 80, 93

Royal Navy 2, 3, 21, 24, 25, 28, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44,
46, 48, 50, 51, 55, 67, 68, 69, 72, 76, 81, 87, 88,
89, 91, 92

S

Scotland 2, 4, 5, 13, 46

Scottishness 46

Seven Years War 1

sick

sickness 43, 50, 56, 57, 65, 66, 68

slave 37, 74, 86

T

The General History of Pirates 25

The King of Pirates 7, 8, 9

W

War of Jenkins's Ear 39, 42, 43, 47

War of Spanish Succession 5

APPENDIXES

Abstract

Generally speaking, this thesis examines three novels – Daniel Defoe’s *Captain Singleton*, *Roderick Random* by Tobias Smollett, and *Mr. Midshipman Easy* written by Frederick Marryat – brought to paper in a historical period which was crucial in Britain’s rise to undisputed hegemony on the high seas. Considering the constant significance of naval matters during the almost 140 years that passed between Defoe’s and Marryat’s novel, the basis hypothesis of this thesis is that the significance of these matters for Britain respectively British society is reflected in one way or another in all three books. Furthermore, there is reason to assume that all of the mentioned authors used the maritime setting – one could also refer to it as the “maritime sphere” – in order to convey a somewhat deeper meaning, and not just provide an exciting story (even though the latter is certainly an important element in its own right).

Regardless of whether their basic environment makes them either a threat to the established order respectively society (by becoming a pirate) or, basically, a protector of it (by serving in the navy), the three main protagonists Bob Singleton, Roderick Random and Jack Easy act in a certain historical and socio-political context. In order to be able to scratch the adventurous surface of the novels to get to the core of what the authors had to say about the times and the society which they lived in, one should consider these contexts closely. This is what this thesis aims for. Looking at how actual historical facts, events, and developments are reflected in the novels and why this is done in a certain manner hopefully helps to answer some questions concerning the authenticity of the authors’ depictions of various aspects of shipboard life in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. An air of authenticity gives the novels a general credibility, which is, in the cases of nautical fiction examined, essential to enable the reader to grasp what the authors had to say about certain circumstances of their time. Each author was shaped by his time in one way or another, and this thesis aims to show that changing circumstance or, better, changing historical contexts are reflected in the depiction of life in the “wooden world” of a ship in the Age of Sail.

Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit beschäftigt sich im Wesentlichen mit drei Romanen unterschiedlicher Autoren – Daniel Defoe, Tobias Smollett und Frederick Marryat – die allesamt in einer historischen Zeitspanne geschrieben wurden bzw. angesiedelt sind, die höchst signifikant für die Entwicklung der britischen Hegemonie auf den Weltmeeren war. Bei diesen drei Romanen handelt es sich um *Captain Singleton* von Defoe, Smolletts *Roderick Random* und *Mr. Midshipman Easy* des ehemaligen Navy-Offiziers Captain Marryat, und allen drei ist eines gemeinsam: das Element der Seefahrt nimmt einen zentralen Stellenwert ein, unabhängig davon, wie viel der Handlung des gesamten Romans tatsächlich in der maritimen Sphäre stattfindet.

Da in den knapp 140 Jahren, die zwischen dem frühen achtzehnten Jahrhundert des Bob Singleton und dem Erscheinen von *Mr. Midshipman Easy* 1836 liegen, die Seefahrt einer der wesentlichsten Faktoren – manche meinen, *der* wesentlichste Faktor schlechthin – im weiteren Aufstieg Großbritanniens war, ist die Grundannahme dieser Diplomarbeit, dass sich dies in gewisser Art und Weise in den Romanen niederschlägt. Ob sich die Hauptprotagonisten der Romane nun in einem Umfeld bewegen, das sozusagen eine Bedrohung für die Gesellschaft darstellt – wie die Piraten in *Captain Singleton* – oder aufgrund seiner Signifikanz für die Gesellschaft dazu geeignet scheint, allgemeine Aussagen über eben diese Gesellschaft zu treffen, wie in *Roderick Random* und *Mr. Midshipman Easy*: bei allen drei Beispielen steckt mehr dahinter als nur eine aufregende Abenteuergeschichte, wobei dieses Element natürlich eine ebenso wichtige Rolle spielt.

Um allerdings den ernsthafteren Kern der Romane erkennen zu können, ist es wesentlich, sie in ihren historischen und sozio-politischen Kontext zu setzen; dies ist das Bestreben der vorliegenden Diplomarbeit. Der Vergleich mit tatsächlichen historischen Ist-Situationen soll beleuchten, wie weit die Schilderungen der Autoren authentisch sind. Dass sie dies im Großen und Ganzen sind, verleiht den unterliegenden, in gewissermaßen „größeren“ Aussagen nicht nur mehr Schärfe, sondern scheint für ihre Glaubwürdigkeit von zentraler Bedeutung zu sein. Jeder der drei Autoren war dabei von den Umständen seiner Zeit geprägt, und die Arbeit zeigt, dass sich diese veränderten Umstände in der Darstellung des Lebens auf See widerspiegeln.

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