

## Plan suggested for Dossier 4 on Piracy & Empire

**Intro:** [1- Introduce the docs:] An excerpt from the introductory paragraphs of a thematic & historic study of the notion of Empire: in the present case, the British empire, how it was born & how it developed (example of a 17<sup>th</sup>-century pirate); then a famous caricature by an equally famous engraver, James Gillray, showing William Pitt & Napoleon on either side of a dinner table, slicing up the globe & taking a huge share of it for themselves (early 19<sup>th</sup> c.); finally, an excerpt from the last chapter but one of R. L. Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, also a famous novel, narrated by a boy, enjoyed by readers with a taste for adventure & swashbuckling narratives, at the moment when the treasure is found & brought back to the ship (set in the 18<sup>th</sup> c.).

[2- Indicate what your angle of approach will be:] Therefore, this dossier clearly addresses the subject of the **unlawful the acquisition of wealth**. This is not a set of contradictory documents: all 3 documents converge toward stressing the **villainies & horrors that men are capable of** for the sake of power. What's more lumping together empire-building & piracy is obviously biased, which also gives this dossier a particularly anti-imperialist color.

[3- Indicate the plan you'll follow – slowly, clearly, fully. Give each of your parts a title to make sure everyone, including you, will know what's in them. See below.]

### 1) Depredations caused by the love of lucre & nations' bid for supremacy.

- In a way, the **desirability of those exotic places** (islands, colonies) is made clear by the appealing description of the Treasure Island cave (40-1), its beautiful, closed, natural setting also underlining its frailty. Mostly a feminine-sounding place (water) which will succumb to the violence of male desires.

- **Much violence** took place in the Caribbean to allow a pirate like Morgan to amass a colossal fortune: Cf. guns overturned, boats sunk, humans made prisoner & all-out plunder (6-9). Quote the places mentioned: Lago de Nicaragua, Jamaica, Panama + ship name = Hispaniola, the Caribbean island where Christopher Columbus first set foot in "America" → allusion to the terrible plunder of, and havoc wreaked in, the New World. Now this is only *one* pirate...

- Another pirate by the name of Morgan (49) in the adventure novel, one of 3 money-hungry buccaneers mentioned in the final paragraph. A paragraph that **takes stocks & generalizes on human behavior**, and whose **dark, melancholy tone** strikes the reader. An enumeration of the depredations & deaths caused by gold: 17 men from the ship, other ships scuttled [= *sabordés*], men executed (44-7), the skeleton of a former pirate found on the island (6). All the more powerful since the narrator is a child: same strategy used by Mark Twain in *Huckleberry Finn* for instance (slavery). The "adult" world hardly deserves its name.

- This dichotomy (child/adult, humor/seriousness) is also perceptible in the engraving. A **caricature** → an artistic genre whose aim is humor & laughter. Describe the funny details: dwarfish Napoleon sitting at the edge of his seat; France & England recognizable thanks to official colors, animal symbols & language (blue/red/"plumb-pudding" v. eagle/lion/"petit souper"). **Yet what is meant is the killing of thousands**, both countries wishing to carve out as big an empire for themselves as possible. As we know 1805 is the year of both Trafalgar (Oct. 21) & Austerlitz (Dec. 2), for instance → **extra dichotomy here: grotesque appearances v. frightful realities**. It may be futile / infantile to dream of empires, but the consequences are for real. Cf. the smoke coming out of the pudding, reminiscent of sacrifices or holocausts.

### 2) The hypocritical process of acquisition.

- **Hypocrisy & double-dealing visible** in the Stevenson excerpt: explain the hypocrisy of Silver's "polite salute" (33, reiterated 37) and the squire's —a man of honor— shocked reaction (insults 34, "dereliction of my duty" 38, etc.). Here also a humorous moment that the reader is supposed to enjoy, in spite of its immorality, because there is panache in defying a man to his face (this is one of the themes of the novel: Jim's boyish attraction for pirate life & mores while do-gooders like Livesey & Trelawney remain mostly unattractive & dull in his opinion).

- The same hypocrisy obtained while England was in the midst of building an empire. Explain the difference between buccaneers (= a "private" enterprise) & state-"licensed" privateers (= corsairs) → it was **in England's interest to allow thugs like Morgan** to plunder & kill ("positively encouraged it," "low-budget way of waging war" 22-3). Ferguson also hints at **the usual pretexes colonizing nations used** to justify their solely financial purposes ("self-conscious," "hoping to build a new life" 12-4).

- Hence the idea that **the great & the powerful are usurpers**, monarchies, empires & republics alike (Cf. the Phrygian cap + cockade?). As we know Pitt the Younger fought corruption in England, but a different view is put forward here by Gillray → beware of pomp & power + the Corsican emperor seen as a Corsair. Cf. huge, disproportionate knives/sword & forks used to slice... a Xmas pudding! Supposedly a mere conventional dinner (table, cloth, chairs, empty plates), but a lot more is at stake (steak?). Pitt & Napoleon are but two rogues who "[try] to steal the proceeds of someone else's Empire" (Ferguson, 14-5).

- Conventions again are used to hide the truth. Explain Ferguson's point that the dirty money stolen by pirates was then **laundered through land investments** (last paragraph) & Morgan was then gratified with a **ridiculously long list of titles** (43-4 + "Sir Henry" 41 + valley named after him 29-30) + "honourable retirement" (47) + "gentleman's son of good quality" 27.

**Conclusion:** [1- Summarize:] This is obviously a **sinister dossier** which shows how wrong a proverb like: "Ill-gotten goods seldom prosper" is. It does pay off to steal other people's property and kill them in the process; the "transition from piracy to political power" (Ferguson 51) is depressingly demonstrated; it takes years & years to teach a child that, however unappealing & unimaginative following moral precepts might sound, it is best to respect humans & the right of other peoples to enjoy their national resources.

[2- Branch out:] On the other hand, though, an optimistic person might remark that history, historians & intellectuals in general ensure that villains are unmasked / that **the memory of the downtrodden is honored in the end**. Em-pirates, so to speak, are rightfully called "thieves" (Ferguson 14), & historians clearly show that empire builders are mere "treasure-hunters" (to use Stevenson's words 30). Empire-building efforts are clearly labeled "smash-and-grab sprees" (10) or "organized crime" (17), etc. Also Stevenson's novel was written during the reign of Queen Victoria, whom Benjamin Disraeli, who died two years before, in 1881, had made Empress of India in 1876 → we may choose to read this adventure novel as an allegory, an appeal for change if we are optimistically inclined. This is a message which we, in these post-colonial times, can understand.