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## Nina Gerassi-Navarro, *Pirate Novels: Fictions of Nation Building in Spanish America*

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*Pirate Novels: Fictions of Nation Building in Spanish America.* By Nina Gerassi-Navarro. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999. x + 251 pp. Illustrations, map, notes, bibliography, index. \$49.95 cloth, \$17.95 paper.)

How is the ambivalent figure of the pirate used to construct an image of the past which can be projected into the future for post-independence Spanish American nations? This is the question addressed by Nina Gerassi-

Navarro in her examination of nineteenth-century Spanish American historical novels centered around the portrayal of an outlaw who may be villain or hero, foreigner or native-born. During the period discussed here, Spanish America faced the task of envisioning a future for their newly independent nations, while the past they had to draw upon was one of colonial domination. As Gerassi-Navarro illuminates, historical fictions enable authors—who were active in the political arena as well as the literary scene—to reconstruct that past from particular ideological perspectives in order to form political projects for the national present and future. She approaches this question through the textual analysis of four non-canonical historical novels published between the early 1840s and the late 1880s by well-known authors from Argentina, Colombia and Mexico.

Based on her doctoral dissertation from Colombia University, Gerassi-Navarro makes a significant contribution to our understanding of how the historical novel functions to recreate images of the past which can be used to construct ideological visions for the future in nineteenth-century Spanish America. In its emphasis on how domestic romances are used to project political designs for national formation, her text builds on Doris Sommer's *Foundational Fictions* by extending this type of analysis to less canonical novels. The first chapter provides the background for the ensuing study through an introduction to the history of piracy in the Americas from the early sixteenth through the mid-eighteenth centuries. Of particular interest here is the manner in which historical changes in relations between European nations affect alliances in the Americas, since, as Gerassi-Navarro's study will later show, early post-independence Spanish American nation-building efforts will rely on political and ideological affiliations and sympathies with different European countries. The second chapter then examines how the pirate is represented in chronicles and epic poetry of the colonial period; in general, this representation consists of setting up the British corsair as an emblem of political and religious heresy during the Counter-Reformation.

In the nineteenth century, Spanish American novelists will alternately identify with the Spanish Catholic orthodoxy or the Northern European Protestant work ethic in their efforts to envision a future for their newly independent nations, as they project this future as either a continuation of or a rupture with their colonial past. This is the subject of the remaining chapters of *Pirate Novels*, which each examine the same four novels: Argentine Vicente Fidel López's *La novia del hereje* (1854); Colombian Soledad Acosta de Samper's *Los piratas de Cartagena* (1886); Mexican Justo Sierra O'Reilly's *El filibustero* (1841-1842); and Mexican Eligio Ancona's novel, also entitled *El filibustero* (1864). While the fifth and final chapter forms a separate emphasis on the use of melodrama and family romance, with attention to the question of the literary representation of gender and

race, one wonders whether the chapters on national identity in the fictionalized plots and nation building in the same historical fictions could have been integrated into a single chapter focused on the question of national formation as represented in these four historical novels.

*Pirate Novels* is a well-written and well-documented approach to a corpus of historical fictions which have not previously been the focus of sustained critical attention. Nina Gerassi-Navarro's contribution to studies of the nineteenth-century historical novel will undoubtedly be of tremendous use to scholars in this field. Most fascinating is the question of the ideological ambivalence of grounding a political project for a national future in a figure who is by definition outside the law. The author teases out the contradictions of such a representation, and demonstrates how the pirate—as villainous heretic and bloodthirsty foreign menace, or as a symbol of liberation from colonial oppression—is alternately a figure against whom Spanish Americans define themselves or with whom they can identify, in their efforts to form national identities that look backward toward the past, but will serve then in the future as they face the formidable task of nation building.

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