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Sir Francis Drake: The Once and Future Pirate

By  
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Sir Francis Drake, a highly successful plunderer of Spanish treasure and the first Englishman to circumnavigate the earth, has long been associated with some of the most heroic episodes of English history. His successes brought him fame and wealth, and he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth I even though he was not of noble birth. Drake terrified his Spanish enemies with surprise attacks and raids, and many citizens of the Caribbean colonies thought *El Draque* was the fiercest pirate captain they ever faced. Myths about Drake abound, such as his determination to finish his game of bowls before setting out to defeat the Spanish Armada or sending a cannon ball through the earth to prevent his wife from remarrying when she assumed he had died at sea after he had been absent for several years. The mystery surrounding his aquatic burial place led to all sorts of King Arthur-esque myths about his dying promise to respond to the beat of his drum should England ever have need of his protection. Every myth holds a grain of truth and says something significant about English society. Sir Francis Drake represents the quintessentially English qualities of Protestantism, patriotism, gentlemanly conduct, and confidence. He is intrinsically connected to English national identity, which is inherently tied to maritime achievements as the British Empire could not have been built or maintained without the Royal Navy. Drake is one of the most celebrated of England's navigators and naval leaders as well as one of the most prominent figures of the period cited as the origin of the empire, the Elizabethan Golden Age. By examining the key events of Drake's life and how those events were shaped in literature from the sixteenth through the twentieth century, the development and continued significance of the Drake mythos becomes evident.

When Queen Elizabeth I came to the throne in 1558, she inherited a country in extreme financial difficulties and religious turmoil. Years of wars against Ireland, France and Spain coupled with Queen Mary's bloody attempts to return England to Catholicism emptied the

coffers. Mary's king consort, Philip II of Spain, also used English money to fund his wars with the Netherlands. By the time Elizabeth became queen she barely had the funds to protect her own kingdom, much less assist allies or finance another war. She tried constantly to save money; a habit that earned her praise for prudence and criticism for perceived stinginess.<sup>1</sup> The lack of monetary security also contributed to the fact that England did not have much of an official navy, relying instead on the merchant marine in times of war. Meanwhile, Portugal and Spain dominated both world trade and European power in the sixteenth century. With the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, the pope effectively split the world between the two nations, thereby apparently excluding any other European state from establishing colonies or trading relations in the "New World" of the Americas or in the East Indies.<sup>2</sup> Both countries benefited from this situation, but it was the Spanish Empire in particular with which the English came into conflict.

England was not greatly concerned with Spain's overseas colonies in the first half of the sixteenth century because the majority of English mariners from common fishermen to petty pirates stayed close to home waters and did not often venture across the ocean. When the English provided covert aid between 1568 and 1572 to the French Huguenots during the Wars of Religion, however, the Huguenots taught them open-sea navigation.<sup>3</sup> Growing confidence among English seamen and increased tensions between Protestant England and Catholic Spain and France led to the escalation of piracy and privateering both at home and abroad. Local pirates had been a problem for centuries, especially within the English Channel, and proved extremely difficult to root out since they were often secretly supported by greedy or corrupt local

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Ronald, *The Pirate Queen* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007), 7-10.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, 20.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth R. Andrews, "The Expansion of English privateering and piracy in the Atlantic, c.1540-1625," in *Course et Piraterie*, vol. 1, ed. Michel Mollat, (Paris, 1975), 205-208 and N.A.M. Rodger, "Queen Elizabeth and the Myth of Sea Power in English History," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 14 (2004):154-156.

officials.<sup>4</sup> These pirates preyed on both English and foreign ships, and officially their actions were deemed illegal. Queen Elizabeth published many proclamations denouncing piracy and ordering her subjects not to aid or trade with any known criminals.<sup>5</sup>

But behind the scenes, as historian Kenneth R. Andrews observes, Elizabeth saw piracy as a way to wage war by proxy.<sup>6</sup> One way to do this was to issue letters of reprisal. While piracy was the illegal seizure of goods while at sea, privateering was the legally sanctioned version. Letters of reprisal allowed captains who could claim a loss at sea to capture the goods of any ship affiliated with the party which had initiated the original theft. But more often than not reprisals were used as an unofficial form of warfare, because they allowed the government to turn a blind eye to the actions of the merchant marine or unofficial navy by claiming that any seizure of goods or destruction of shipping was in fact a reprisal and therefore lawful. David Childs argues that England's shaky financial situation led Elizabeth to bend her own rules and reward rather than punish the most successful captains who brought in significant amounts of wealth to add to her treasury.<sup>7</sup> Her implicit ties to famous piratical figures, such as Sir Francis Drake, earned her the moniker "the pirate queen".

The line between piracy and privateering was extremely unclear. Even a licensed privateer might stray into piracy if he took more than the value of the losses he declared.<sup>8</sup> But it is important to remember that the sixteenth century definition of the term "pirate" was much more fluid than in subsequent centuries, when the term came to be associated solely with

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<sup>4</sup> Mark G. Hanna, "Elizabethan West Country" in *Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire, 1570-1740* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 22-36.

<sup>5</sup> Queen Elizabeth I. "A Proclamation to Represse all Piracies and Depredations upon the Seas." London, 1569. Microfilm. *Early English Books, 1475-1640*; 1850:31. Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1985.

<sup>6</sup> Andrews, "The Expansion of English privateering and piracy," 206.

<sup>7</sup> David Childs, *Pirate Nation: Elizabeth I and Her Royal Sea Rovers* (Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2015), 5-9.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, 9.

criminality.<sup>9</sup> To complicate matters, it was the seamen involved in privateering and piracy who proved to be the most experienced in navigation and maritime warfare, and were therefore the primary naval defense in times of war. During those periods, men who spent their lives operating on the edge of the law became the protectors of the realm and the symbols of English independence. N.A.M. Rodger claims that the "intimate connection between Protestantism, patriotism and plunder... was to become a distinctive and formative part of the English national myth."<sup>10</sup> It was this world in which Sir Francis Drake rose to prominence.

Francis Drake was born in roughly 1540, the eldest son of a large family. His father was a preacher in the Church of England, and Drake himself remained ardently Protestant his whole life. When he was quite young, his father moved the family from Devonshire to Kent in order to avoid persecution by Catholics supportive of Queen Mary.<sup>11</sup> The Drakes lived on an old naval hulk along the River Medway, and Francis Drake would have grown up surrounded by ships both big and small. He learned to sail while working as an apprentice to the master of a bark, a small vessel used for short voyages along the English coast or across the Channel.<sup>12</sup> When his master died Drake joined his cousin, the merchant John Hawkins, on a slaving voyage to the Caribbean in 1567. This was a dangerous destination because the Spanish were intent on maintaining their monopoly on New World trade and violent experiences with English and French Huguenot pirates and privateers led the local authorities to distrust all foreign ships.<sup>13</sup> After some disappointingly unsuccessful trade, Hawkins' ships turned for home in 1568.

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<sup>9</sup> Claire Jowitt, *The Culture of Piracy, 1580-1630: English literature and seaborne crime* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2010), 8-9.

<sup>10</sup> Rodger, "Queen Elizabeth and the Myth of Sea Power in English History," 156.

<sup>11</sup> William Camden, *The History of the Most Renowned and Victorious Princess Elizabeth [...]*, (London, 1688, facsimile of 4th ed. New York: 1970), 248.

<sup>12</sup> John Sudgen, *Sir Francis Drake* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1990), 6-9.

<sup>13</sup> David Cordingly and John Falconer, *Pirates: Fact and Fiction* (Collins & Brown, 1992), 24 and I. A. Wright, Introduction to *Documents Concerning English Voyages to the Spanish Main 1569-1580*, ed. I.A. Wright (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1932): xvi-xx.

A hurricane forced the English fleet backwards and into the port of San Juan de Ulúa in Veracruz, Mexico to repair damages. Unfortunately, a Spanish fleet carrying the brand new viceroy to his domain in Mexico arrived the very next day. Hurried negotiations occurred, and both the English and Spanish fleets ended up anchored next to each other in the little harbor. The Spanish promised not to attack the weakened and outnumbered English, but they did not keep their end of the bargain. After the unprovoked battle was over, and with only two of his original four vessels, Hawkins, Drake and the survivors fled as fast as they could without adequate provisions and in total disarray.<sup>14</sup> Drake, in command of a small bark, lost contact with Hawkins' larger ship on the homeward voyage, and Hawkins later accused his cousin of desertion, saying that he "forsook us in our great misery."<sup>15</sup> While Hawkins never pressed the issue farther, and it is perfectly plausible that the wind was responsible for separating the ships, Garret Mattingly posits that Drake might have taken the accusation personally as an implication of cowardice.<sup>16</sup> This blow to his fierce pride and the treachery of the Spanish greatly influenced Drake and the San Juan de Ulúa episode fueled his ambition for years to come. His passionate Protestantism automatically set him at odds with Catholic Spain, but the unfair losses suffered by himself and his cousin just fanned the flame of his desire for revenge.

Over the next couple of years, Drake returned to the Caribbean to take prizes as he found them and gather both money and intelligence about geography and Spanish activities in the area. These voyages were, according to Kenneth R. Andrews, "unquestionably piratical

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<sup>14</sup> John Hawkins, "The Third Troublesome Voyage Made with the *Jesus of Lübeck*, the *Minion*, and Four Other Ships to the Parts of the Guinea and the West Indies in the Years 1567 and 1568," in *Voyages to the New World*, ed. David Freeman Hawke, (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1972), 142. See also David Cordingly and John Falconer, *Pirates: Fact and Fiction*, 24.

<sup>15</sup> Hawkins, "The Third Troublesome Voyage," 142.

<sup>16</sup> Garret Mattingly, *The Defeat of the Spanish Armada* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1984), 85-6.

expeditions."<sup>17</sup> The danger of provoking war with Spain prevented Queen Elizabeth's government from issuing letters of reprisal to either Drake or Hawkins after San Juan de Ulúa, no matter how legitimate their claims.<sup>18</sup> So Drake characteristically took matters into his own hands and went about recouping his losses as he saw fit, with or without official permission.

It was Drake's daring and highly successful raid on the Spanish treasure port of Nombre de Dios (in Colón, Panama) that really set the tone for the rest of his career. He and a small crew set sail from England in May 1572, arriving near Nombre de Dios in July.<sup>19</sup> This town was the main transfer site for all the valuable commodities of Spain's South American colonies. Ships sailed up the coast from Peru to drop off their cargos of silver, gold, jewels and valuable textiles on the Pacific side of Panama. These goods were then hauled across the isthmus by mule trains on well-worn paths and deposited on the Atlantic side in Nombre de Dios. Treasure fleets sailed from Spain twice a year to pick up the vast quantities of valuables.<sup>20</sup> Drake initially planned to capture the treasure deposited in the town before a fleet arrived to take it away. He and his crew snuck into Nombre de Dios in the middle of the night where they met a half-hearted resistance. The Spaniards fled, but upon breaking into the treasure house the Englishmen discovered it was empty and they had arrived too late.<sup>21</sup> Though they returned to their ships empty handed, Drake was determined that this voyage would not be for nothing.

For the next several months, the Englishmen sailed up and down the coast, capturing Spanish ships, plundering towns and waiting for the mule trains to bring new loads of treasure into town. Drake established an alliance between himself with the local tribes of runaway slaves,

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<sup>17</sup> Kenneth R. Andrews, *Drake's Voyages: A Re-Assessment of their place in Elizabethan Maritime Expansion* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1967), 33-4.

<sup>18</sup> Wright, Introduction to *Documents Concerning English Voyages*, xx.

<sup>19</sup> Philip Nichols, "Sir Francis Drake Revived," in *Documents Concerning English Voyages*, ed. I.A. Wright, 254-57.

<sup>20</sup> See Andrews, *Drake's Voyages*, 34-9 and Wright, Introduction to *Documents Concerning English Voyages*, xxxvii-xlv.

<sup>21</sup> Nichols, "Sir Francis Drake Revived," 260-267.



known as *cimaroons*, whom he encountered on his previous trips. With their guidance, Drake and his men hiked through the swamps and forests of Panama in order to approach Nombre de Dios from the land instead of by sea. It was on this trek through the jungle that Drake first sighted the Pacific Ocean from a tree-fort built by the *cimaroons*.<sup>22</sup> He prayed aloud that he would one day sail on those waters; this aim would be one of the many reasons behind his famous circumnavigation of the earth between 1577 and 1580.

The first joint attempt of the English and *cimaroons* to surprise and capture the treasure-carrying mule trains was ruined when one of Drake's men leapt from cover too soon, which alerted the Spaniards to the presence of thieves. Five months of waiting had come to nothing, but Drake refused to give up. He met a French Huguenot captain while raiding the coast in March 1573, and the two parties decided to band together and split the proceeds. Once again, they lay in wait for the mule trains to pass, and this time they quite literally struck gold. They took all the gold with them back to their ships, but there was so much silver that they were forced to leave most of it behind. With the voyage made, the captains divided the treasure, Drake rewarded the *cimaroons* for their assistance, and the Englishmen sailed for home. In an illustration of Drake's characteristic bravado, he sailed straight past the port in which the Spanish authorities were belatedly gathering to come after him in a ship covered with colorful silk streamers and a huge English flag flying proudly overhead.<sup>23</sup>

Contemporary literary sources for these early expeditions are limited. The only English account of the voyage published within Drake's lifetime was that of a captured Portuguese pilot, Lopez de Vaz. It was included in Richard Hakluyt's first edition of his famous collection of English maritime history entitled *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffics and*

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<sup>22</sup> William Camden, *The History of the Most Renowned*, 249 and Nicholas, "Sir Francis Drake Revived," 300.

<sup>23</sup> Nichols, "Sir Francis Drake Revived," 303-324.

*Discoveries of the English Nation*.<sup>24</sup> De Vaz's account is brief and to the point and serves only to list the events of 1572-73 rather than to describe Drake, and it was published over a decade after the events discussed.

Drake's successes in the Caribbean were not ignored by his contemporaries, as the apparent lack of sources might imply. On the contrary, upon his return to Plymouth with a shipload of gold his plundering was celebrated by ordinary citizens as both an act of patriotism and bravery in the face of Spanish Catholic tyranny. According to John Cummins, the level of enthusiasm from Drake's countrymen towards his exploits depended upon their class. Noblemen who felt that Drake had risen above his social station disliked him and never approved of his exploits.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, the government instructed him to lie low for a while, since he had acted without letters of reprisal and his triumph might endanger already fractured relations between England and Spain.<sup>26</sup> The Spanish began to refer to Drake as *El Draque*, or "The Dragon", partly due to his penchant for setting the towns he raided on fire, and partly for his perceived ferocity.<sup>27</sup> Then and later, Queen Elizabeth was careful to suppress details about anti-Spanish voyages in case Spain got hold of a printed narrative and learned just what the English were up to in the New World.<sup>28</sup> Rather than being ignored, Drake's raids were of such a sensitive nature that they were censored. While contemporary literature may not add much to an understanding of the construction of Drake's character at this stage, these reactions indicate the level of cultural and political recognition his early raids received.

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<sup>24</sup> See "The First Voyage Attempted and Set Forth by the Expert and Valiant Captain M[aster] Francis Drake Himself [...] Written and Recorded by One Lopez Vaz..." in *Voyages to the New World*, 161-62.

<sup>25</sup> John Cummins, "'That Golden Knight': Drake and his Reputation." *History Today* 46, no.1 (1996): 15-16.

<sup>26</sup> Wright, Introduction to *Documents Concerning English Voyages*, xlv.

<sup>27</sup> Cummins, "'That Golden Knight'," 15.

<sup>28</sup> W. T. Jewkes, *Sir Francis Drake and the Famous Voyage, 1577-1580: Essays commemorating the quadricentennial of Drake's circumnavigation of the Earth*, ed. Norman J. W. Thrower (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984): 116 and David B. Quinn, "Early Accounts of the Famous Voyage," in *Sir Francis Drake and the Famous Voyage*, 35.

After a period of absence from the historical record, Drake reappeared again in 1577 when he set off on the voyage that became the famous circumnavigation. The original intentions of the expedition are shrouded in mystery because the only extant document from the planning stage, the Draft Plan, was seriously damaged by fire and the text is incomplete. It is clear, however, that Drake was sent to find new markets in, and explore, the "South Sea" (i.e. the Pacific Ocean). More than that, such as specific destinations, cannot be determined from this document.<sup>29</sup>

Drake set off from Plymouth in December 1577 with a small fleet of five ships and 164 men. They sailed southwards to the coast of Africa, where they restocked their fresh water and captured several Spanish fishing and trading vessels. Then they crossed the Atlantic and sighted Brazil in early April, 1578. After sailing down the coast, taking a few more Spanish ships and battling severe storms the whole way, Drake consolidated the fleet down to three ships. At Port St. Julian (in modern-day southern Argentina), Drake executed his former friend Thomas Doughty on charges of treason. This episode came to be known as the Doughty Affair and was the most controversial event of the whole voyage. When the three ships entered the Strait of Magellan in August they encountered more fierce storms. One ship, the *Marigold*, was lost, while Drake in the *Pelican* (recently renamed the *Golden Hind*) was blown into the Pacific and the *Elizabeth* lost sight of both and eventually returned home to England rather than braving the treacherous western coast of South America.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See Andrews, *Drake's Voyages*, 46-53; John Hampden, ed. *Francis Drake: Privateer* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1972), 110-17; E.G.R. Taylor, "Master John Dee, Drake and the Straits of Anian," *The Mariner's Mirror* 15, no.2 (1929): 125-130 and E.G.R. Taylor, "The Missing Draft Project of Drake's Voyage of 1577-80." *The Geographical Journal* 75, no.1 (1930): 46-47.

<sup>30</sup> See Andrews, *Drake's Voyages*, 42-56; Camden, *The History of the Most Renowned...*, 250-53; "The Famous voyage of Sir Francis Drake into the South Sea..." in *The Tudor Venturers: selected from The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffics and Discoveries of the English Nation [...] ed. by John Hampden* (London: The Folio Society, 1970); and Sir Francis Drake, *The World Encompassed*, in *March of America Facsimile Series, No. 11* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms Inc., 1966. Originally published London, 1628.)

The *Golden Hind* fought the storms and eventually sailed northwards, where Drake pounced on ship after ship and town after town, taking Spanish treasure and dashing away before the authorities could catch up. The most spectacular prize was the ship colloquially termed the *Cacafuego* (the "Shitfire"), which carried huge amounts of gold and silver, precious stones and jewels, and other valuable goods.<sup>31</sup> The Spanish were taken completely by surprise because up to this point they had been the only maritime presence in this part of the world. After the haul of treasure obtained on these coasts, Drake felt the voyage was made, so he sailed on. He knew he couldn't return via the Strait of Magellan with the Spaniards on the lookout for him, so in April-June 1579, he sailed north to somewhere around 40° N. He eventually anchored in present-day California to repair his ship and make ready for the unknown perils of a voyage across the Pacific to the Moluccas (i.e. the Indonesian islands in the Malay archipelago). While in California, Drake and his crew interacted with a native tribe which had never encountered Europeans before. The natives were welcoming, offered sacrifices and gifts, and made speeches. The English interpreted these actions in their own ethnocentric way and assumed that they were being worshipped and that the natives wanted Drake to be their king. He accepted the honorary role and claimed the land for Queen Elizabeth.<sup>32</sup>

The voyage across the Pacific was uneventful and they sighted the Moluccas in October, 1579. Drake managed to set up trading relations with the king of Ternate, which might have provided England with a toehold in the Portuguese-controlled East Indies had these relations been pursued. Unfortunately, war with Spain interrupted England's prospects of overseas trade before this could happen. The only incident of note on the homebound voyage occurred when the *Golden Hind*, weighed down by treasure, became grounded on a rock in the Indian Ocean.

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<sup>31</sup> Camden, *The History of the Most Renowned...*, 252 and "The Famous voyage," in *The Tudor Venturers*, 155.

<sup>32</sup> "The Famous voyage," in *The Tudor Venturers*, 156-60.

The frightened crew heaved a couple tons of less valuable goods and several cannon overboard to lighten the ship and prayed for their lives.<sup>33</sup> Finally, they arrived back in Plymouth in November 1580 as the first Englishmen ever to circumnavigate the earth. Drake's fame was cemented and Queen Elizabeth ordered Drake's ship, the *Golden Hind*, to be permanently anchored at Deptford on the Thames so that it might be a monument of this feat of English endurance and navigational skill.<sup>34</sup> Drake hosted a celebratory banquet for the queen on the deck of the *Hind* in April 1581 during which he was knighted.<sup>35</sup>

The significance of the circumnavigation might make one expect a plethora of contemporary documentation related to such an achievement. But the censorship on Drake's 1572-73 raids applied even more to this voyage, which kept the published accounts few and far between in the years immediately following his return. Drake did keep a log book or diary, in which he wrote an account of events and painted pictures of the plants and animals he saw, but this book was placed in the Tower of London for safekeeping upon his return in 1580 and never seen again. The chaplain of the *Golden Hind*, Francis Fletcher, was also known to have kept notes which existed long enough to allow a few subsequent authors to make use of them, but they too disappeared.<sup>36</sup> The only account of the circumnavigation published in Drake's lifetime was "The Famous Voyage of Sir Francis Drake" printed by Hakluyt in 1589 in the same work containing Lopez de Vaz's version of the Nombre de Dios raids. The anonymous account was inserted as an unnumbered leaflet in the first edition of *The Principall Navigations*. This last-minute inclusion was probably due to the censorship surrounding voyages of consequence, but

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<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, 164.

<sup>34</sup> R. C. Anderson, "The Golden Hind at Deptford," *The Mariner's Mirror* 27, no. 1 (1941): 77-78.

<sup>35</sup> Andrews, *Drake's Voyages*, 81.

<sup>36</sup> Hampden, *Francis Drake, Privateer*, 120.

Hakluyt knew that a collection of the most important maritime accomplishments of the English could not possibly be complete without Drake's voyage of circumnavigation.<sup>37</sup>

Hakluyt's account is written as though the author was a member of the crew, and Drake is consistently referred to as "our Generall." The author makes frequent diversions into the strange flora and fauna, to explain names of islands, and to describe trade with the natives in the various exotic places visited on the voyage. The looting of Spanish ships or the sacking of towns is described as "rifling," and any acts which might be construed as piracy or violence on the part of the English are carefully spun in order to demonstrate the courage, restraint and sophistication of the English as compared to the Spanish, who seem unfit to govern.<sup>38</sup> The author is also careful to emphasize Drake's humanity, courtesy, and piety. According to Claire Jowitt, this account presents "a merchant's Drake" because it is, more than anything else, concerned with the prospects of English trade in the Americas and the East Indies. Jowitt argues that since Hakluyt himself was very interested in the expansion of the English cloth trade, each trading interaction with a new people is discussed in terms of this trade.<sup>39</sup> The local climate and resources like sheep (for making wool) are noted, and in the case of the natives of North America, the author pointedly notes how the English gave them cloth to cover their nakedness. Jowitt claims that in this account, any 'piratical' actions done by Drake were actually meant to demonstrate English abhorrence to Iberian trade monopolies, especially as this account was printed after the escalation of Anglo-Spanish tensions with the 1588 Armada Campaign. Drake is a mercantile hero, not a selfish pirate.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Quinn, "Early Accounts of the Famous Voyage," 34-36.

<sup>38</sup> Jowitt, *The Culture of Piracy*, 54, 56.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.* 60-67.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, 67.

Two personal accounts by actual participants in the voyage were also written in the sixteenth century, but left unprinted. John Cooke and Captain John Winter both sailed on the *Elizabeth*, the ship which turned back in the Strait of Magellan. Neither provides an account of whole voyage but each sheds light on the controversial Doughty Affair which remained a black spot on Drake's reputation his whole life.<sup>41</sup> Thomas Doughty and his younger brother John were two of the gentleman (as opposed to common sailors) who took part in the circumnavigation. Thomas Doughty and Francis Drake began the voyage, to all appearances, as friends. Conflict between the two first arose in the Cape Verde islands near the beginning of the voyage when Doughty was made captain of a prize. According to John Cooke's account, Drake charged Doughty with keeping order among the Englishmen manning the newly acquired vessel. Yet when Drake's own brother Thomas was the first to cause trouble, and Doughty informed Drake of his actions, Drake blew up at him. Cooke writes that Drake, "not without some great oaths, seemed to wonder what Thomas Doughty should mean to touch his brother, and did as it were assure himself that he had some farther meaning in this, and that he meant to shoot at his credit, and he would not, nor could not (by God's life as he sware) suffer it." From this time, continual grudges developed between the two men.<sup>42</sup> Drake, always sensitive about his reputation, immediately assumed Doughty was trying to tarnish his character by shaming his brother. The tension was based on status and merit, something Doughty, as a gentlemen, would have been born with but which Drake had to work toward.

Drake continued to be wary of Doughty's perceived insubordination all the way across the Atlantic, relieving him of command and shifting him from ship to ship to prevent him from turning the men's minds against Drake's authority. On the way down the storm-wracked coast of

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<sup>41</sup> Cummins, "That Golden Knight", 16.

<sup>42</sup> John Cooke, "John Cooke's Narrative," in *Francis Drake, Privateer*, ed. by John Hampden, 222.

South America the little English fleet became separated on a number of occasions and lost time regrouping. In frustration with the weather and paranoid about Doughty's conduct, Drake accused Doughty of sorcery.<sup>43</sup> For a militant Protestant like Drake, accusations of magic and conjuring were a serious business, without the connotation of ridiculousness which they would have today. By the time the fleet reached Port St. Julian (in present-day southern Argentina), Drake had evidently decided to conclude the Doughty matter. Here Doughty was put on trial, as if in England, for treason. Drake brought up various issues from before the trip had even started and Doughty countered by asking to see Drake's commission for the voyage from queen. Drake refused to produce the document, accusing Doughty of poisoning the late Earl of Essex, claiming that the queen and court could be corrupted with gold, and informing the Lord Treasurer, Burghley, of the voyage. The queen was very specific that of anyone, Burghley (who favored peace with Spain) must not be told of such an anti-Spanish expedition because he was likely to put an end to it before it even began. Doughty refuted the former two charges successfully, but admitted to the latter. The jury ultimately found Doughty guilty and sentenced him to execution, which was carried out two days later.<sup>44</sup> Every description of the execution, in both pro- and anti-Drake accounts, focuses on Doughty's dignity, devout faith and humility in his final moments. Back home, John Doughty accused Drake of murder, but the proceedings never went ahead, mostly likely due to Drake's newly privileged status at court.<sup>45</sup>

Despite the black cloud of the Doughty Affair, the circumnavigation made Drake a national hero. Not only did he bring the queen a significant amount of valuable loot, but he succeeded in becoming the first English captain to circumnavigate the earth. Kenneth R. Andrews notes that the resounding success of the voyage, culminating in the knighting of a

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<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, 224.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, 229-230.

<sup>45</sup> Hampden, *Francis Drake: Privateer*, 245.



common mariner, served to "inflate the national ego" and "open up the oceans to the English."<sup>46</sup> The extent of Drake's travels opened up possibilities never before explored, such as plundering Spanish colonies on the Pacific side of South America. Drake's personal war with Spain, stemming from his experience at San Juan de Ulúa and his Protestant zeal, and played out in his plundering of Spanish shipping and towns throughout the whole of the circumnavigation, inspired Englishmen who were otherwise intimidated by the sheer size and power of the Spanish Empire. As Garrett Mattingly says, "the notion that a private person, a simple knight, could be at war with the greatest king in Christendom belonged in a romance of chivalry."<sup>47</sup> Drake was beginning to transform into a symbol of English patriotism. He was celebrated socially, especially in his native Devonshire, where he was selected to be mayor of Plymouth in 1581 and served as a Member of Parliament until 1585. He was appointed to numerous councils and committees to look after the management of the navy, maintenance of various docks and harbors, and local affairs.<sup>48</sup>

While literary commemoration of his exploits was at first suppressed—apart from Hakluyt's straightforward accounts which eschewed condemning details about English activities in Spanish territories—the literature of the next generation sought to reshape the narratives of Drake's voyages and construct him as an exemplar of English patriotism. Peace with Spain in 1604 meant that the navy had no war to fight, and either through neglect or disuse ships decayed and men deserted. The outbreak of the 30 Years War in 1618 and the failure of the Spanish Match in 1625 led to renewed anti-Spanish sentiment in England. Many influential figures in court called for a return to the chivalry and heroism of the Elizabethan age when Protestant

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<sup>46</sup> Andrews, *Drake's Voyages*, 82-85.

<sup>47</sup> Mattingly, *The Defeat of the Spanish Armada*, 86.

<sup>48</sup> Sugden, *Sir Francis Drake* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1990), 163, 171-72.

admirals led the cause against the tyranny of Catholic Spain.<sup>49</sup> According to Claire Jowitt, the prestige and effectiveness of England's maritime endeavors seriously declined under Charles I. Those who recognized and despaired at this weakness felt that there were no Drakes left to defy their enemies and win spectacular victories at sea. Therefore, literature was supposed to inspire heroism and make seafaring noble once again.<sup>50</sup> Figures such as Drake, known for their anti-Spanish policies, were revived by early seventeenth century authors, historians and playwrights to encourage a firmer stance against Catholicism and even to subtly advocate for renewed war with Spain.<sup>51</sup>

Two of the principal literary works in the Drake canon were published in the midst of this nostalgic revival of Elizabethan adventurers. *Sir Francis Drake Revived* (1626) is the most complete account of Drake's 1572-73 Caribbean raiding and *The World Encompassed by Sir Francis Drake* (1628) recounts the circumnavigation. Both texts were compiled by the Reverend Philip Nichols from primary sources. *Sir Francis Drake Revived* was the result of a project initiated by Drake in 1589 during a period of brief disgrace after one highly unsuccessful voyage. He had employed Nichols as a ghost writer, and according to W. T. Jewkes, Drake intended to edit, revise and print this account of his first great success to redeem his reputation. In a preface written by Drake to Queen Elizabeth, he labels his activities in the Caribbean "services against the Spaniards" and "service done to your Majestie" and hopes that both "posteritie" and "our present Age...may be satisfied in the rightfulness of these Actions."<sup>52</sup> He defends his piracy by arguing that injury to Spain (England's enemy) was the right course to be taken by a patriotic and

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<sup>49</sup> Bruce Wathen, *The Construction of a Hero* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2009), 34-6.

<sup>50</sup> Jowitt, *The Culture of Piracy*, 71-73.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, 68 and Mark Netzloff, "Sir Francis Drake's Ghost: Piracy, Cultural Memory, and Spectral Nationhood," in *Pirates? The Politics of Plunder 1550-165*, ed. Claire Jowitt (Basingstoke, 2006), 145-48.

<sup>52</sup> Sir Francis Drake, Prefatory Letter to "Sir Francis Drake Revived," in *Documents Concerning English Voyages*, ed. I.A. Wright, 249.

loyal subject of the queen. The origin of this account is extremely important in the formation of the Drake mythos because, as in the Doughty Affair, it shows how interested Drake himself was in cultivating his reputation. The report remained unpublished in his lifetime, however, and was only printed in 1626 for Drake's nephew, also called Sir Francis Drake, when England was at war with Spain once again.<sup>53</sup> He added the subtitle which reads, "Calling upon this Dull or Effeminate Age to follow his Noble steps for Gold and Silver. By this Memorable Relation of the Rare occurrences (never yet declared to the World) in a third Voyage made by him into the West-Indies..."<sup>54</sup> With these words, Sir Francis Drake the younger implied that his fellow Englishmen lacked the militarism, masculinity and drive that his daring uncle was known for.<sup>55</sup> By using Drake as the model, he sought to encourage a return to the adventurous Elizabethan glory days.

*The World Encompassed* was a companion to *Sir Francis Drake Revived*, also printed for Sir Francis Drake the younger.<sup>56</sup> This long account of the circumnavigation is more detailed than the version printed by Hakluyt and it was based largely on the personal journal of Francis Fletcher, the chaplain of the *Golden Hind*. Historians believe that Philip Nichols also had a hand in the writing process.<sup>57</sup> The subtitle, "Offered now at last to public view, both for the honor of the actor, but especially for the stirring up of heroic spirits, to benefit their country, and eternize their names by like noble attempts" is another clear call to the English to imitate the heroism of the 1570s-80s. According to Claire Jowitt, unlike the mercantile picture of Drake in Hakluyt's

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<sup>53</sup> Quinn, "Early Accounts of the Famous Voyage," 36-38, 45.

<sup>54</sup> Sir Francis Drake, "Sir Francis Drake Revived," in *Documents Concerning English Voyages*, 247.

<sup>55</sup> Netzloff, "Sir Francis Drake's Ghost," 148.

<sup>56</sup> Sir Francis Drake, *The World Encompassed*, in *March of America Facsimile Series, No. 11* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms Inc., 1966. Originally published London, 1628), title page.

<sup>57</sup> See *ibid.*, John H. Parry, "Drake and the World Encompassed," in *Sir Francis Drake and the Famous Voyage*, 6-8 and Quinn, "Early Accounts of the Famous Voyage," 36, 39.

version, *The World Encompassed* presents "a gentleman's Drake."<sup>58</sup> The economic landscape transformed between 1570 and 1620, and English overseas exploration, commerce and the beginnings of colonization began to be funded by joint-stock companies instead of the private interests of the past. The joint-stock companies were often made up of non-merchants and gentlemen with little to no maritime experience, which changed the focus of literature about the sea. With more cultured gentlemen joining in, a celebration of aristocratic conduct upon the seas made transoceanic voyages like romantic quests and privateering less about recouping losses and more about chivalry and maintaining honor.<sup>59</sup> Drake was just such a gentleman: his humane policies of setting all passengers of a prize ship on land and dining with captured captains—even Spaniards—as long as they likewise demonstrated no disrespect are diligently recorded. Drake's nephew offers a slightly altered view of the realities of the circumnavigation and depicts the Spanish as deserving of the consequences of Drake's piracy due to their incompetence or cruelty.<sup>60</sup> "The Famous Voyage" was a polished account of the voyage, but *The World Encompassed* shined Drake's image even more, shaping him into the hero that England needed.

The significance of the circumnavigation outlived Drake by centuries. Even the frontispiece illustration of *The World Encompassed* indicated that, to the English, the voyage was about more than Drake's piratical raids on Spanish colonies or trade agreements in the East Indies. In the upper portion of the image, a hand descends from the clouds to pull a ship around a globe. This represents the hand of God guiding Drake on his way.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Jowitt, *The Culture of Piracy*, 49-50.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, 49-50, 68-73.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, 77.

<sup>61</sup> Wathen, *The Construction of a Hero*, 38-39.



The Protestant patriot may have been a pirate, but he served his queen and his God with unflinching loyalty. Drake was revived in literature and naval histories in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries whenever Protestantism was felt to be in danger or England and Spain were at war again.<sup>62</sup> The circumnavigation, the source of Drake's fame during his lifetime, remained the achievement most often associated with him until well into the eighteenth century, at which point the newly established British Empire reshaped society and redefined conduct at sea. The focus of the Drake mythos became defensive warfare as exhibited by Drake's role in the defeat of the Spanish Armada.

The 1580s saw the escalation of Anglo-Spanish tensions, which culminated in the beginning of what came to be known in England as the Spanish War. The English knew that

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<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, 49-51.

Spain was the power with which they had to contend if they wished to establish colonies in the New World, trade with the East or even maintain independence at home. Philip II of Spain, who had technically been King of England when he was married to Queen Mary, wanted to keep the little Protestant island in its place. That place was under the boot heel of Catholic Spain.

Rumors began to circulate in the early-mid 1580s that Philip would try to invade England and take over. The proud English turned their noses up at the very thought, but Elizabeth knew better than to ignore such reports. Then, in 1585, Philip ordered all English ships in Spanish ports to be impounded and their crews imprisoned. The *Primrose*, a merchant ship, managed to escape and made it back to London with a Spanish official and his orders from the king on board. Suddenly those rumors of invasion were confirmed: Philip intended to use the English ships as part of a vast fleet which would conquer and subdue England by sea.<sup>63</sup> Elizabeth could not afford a war with the powerful and wealthy Spain, and she lacked a strong navy of her own. So on July 1, 1585, she commissioned Drake to sail to Spain and secure the release of the English ships.<sup>64</sup> No other specific instructions are extant, and there may not have been any at the time. But Drake's intention to make this a profitable voyage were clear from the beginning.

In September 1585, Drake and his fleet set off on their way to Spain in great haste. The rush was caused partially by Drake's desire to be back on the sea tormenting the Spanish, and partially by a concern that the queen would change her mind about allowing the fleet to sail at all.<sup>65</sup> The English anchored first in northwestern Spain, where Drake demanded the release of any English ships impounded there. When the local authorities protested that the ships had in

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<sup>63</sup> See Andrews, *Drake's Voyages*, 96-101 and David W. Waters, Introduction to *The True and Perfecte Newes of the Woorthy and Valiaunt Exploytes Performed and Doone by that Valiant Knight Syr Frauncis Drake, 1587*, facsimile edition with an introduction by David W. Waters (Hartford: 1955): 22-30.

<sup>64</sup> David W. Waters, Introduction to *The True and Perfecte Newes...*, 22.

<sup>65</sup> See Andrews, *Drake's Voyages*, 96-109; Walter Bigges, "A Summary and True Discourse of Sir Francis Drake's West Indian Voyage," in *Voyages to the New World*, 162-185; and Waters, Introduction to *The True and Perfecte Newes*, 22-43.

fact already been released, Drake caused a skirmish which forced the Spanish to let him restock his ships with fresh water and provisions. Sailing away from the Spanish coast, Drake and his men attacked various towns in the Cape Verde islands and the Antilles, including Santo Domingo on the isle of Hispaniola which had once been the capital of Spanish America. Each town had barely any defenses with minimal or disorganized resistance, and each battle was another fairly easy victory for the English. Drake took all these cities and held them for ransom, yet he continually received only a fraction of the ransom amount he asked for. Eventually Drake did not have enough men to take another city due to rampant and unidentifiable disease. Everyone was discouraged at the small amount of loot collected so far, so they sailed for home.<sup>66</sup>

While sailing along the Florida coast to catch the trade winds to cross the ocean, a captured Portuguese pilot informed Drake of the location of another Spanish outpost. At St. Augustine, Drake and his men destroyed everything in sight and took the ordnance to prevent the fortress from being a threat to the new English colony set up by Sir Walter Raleigh on the island of Roanoke. The English fleet continued up the American coast to Roanoke and made contact with the colonists, who were in desperate need of supplies. After the ship and supplies that Drake sent them was lost in a hurricane which arrived the next day, Drake offered to take the colonists home. They all arrived back in England in July 1586 with little, monetarily speaking, to show for their efforts. But in the case of this voyage, the effect of the easy victories outweighed the monetary profits. Spain finally realized that it needed to protect its colonies or this would continue to happen and it hated *El Draque* more than ever. Meanwhile, the English were emboldened to stand up to proud Spain.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Waters, Introduction to *The True and Perfecte Newes*, 43.

When Drake returned from this voyage he was even more celebrated than before he left. The poet Thomas Greepe wrote a short epic on the West Indies raids entitled *The True and Perfecte Newes of the Woorthy and Valiaunt Exploytes Performed and Doone by that Valiant Knight Syr Frauncis Drake*. As this poem was published in 1587 it was actually the first printed narrative of any of Drake's exploits, predating even Hakluyt's *Principall Navigations* by at least two years.<sup>68</sup> Greepe explains in his dedicatory epistle that he wants even the "vulgar sort" (i.e. the common people) to know the truth of Drake's achievements so that they might honor him appropriately.<sup>69</sup> From beginning to end, the poem extols Drake's bravery, loyalty, leadership and navigational skills, and great courtesy. Greepe creates a glorified picture of the voyage, however, and skips over any unpleasant things like disease, and the visit to Roanoke. He compares Drake to various Biblical and classical figures like Gideon and Ulysses. The tone is celebratory and grand, and Greepe's message can be summed up in the lines: "His rare attempts performed and done, / With honor, fame and victory: / The like before who ever won, / That you can call to memory. / Therefore I pray for England's sake: / the Lord preserve the noble Drake."<sup>70</sup> Greepe does not just put Drake on a pedestal; he connects him to the very nature of England.

About the same time that Drake and his fleet returned from the West Indies in 1586, rumors that Philip was definitely preparing to invade England began to circulate with renewed vigor. One of Spain's most distinguished nobles, the Marquis de Santa Cruz, began collecting and building sizeable ships and amassing stores of provisions under the king's orders. The preparations could not remain secret for long, so the Spanish embraced this chance to prove their wealth and power by actually publishing a full description of all their ships, a list of the noble captains and commanders on both land and sea, and even the number and size of the guns on the

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<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, 14.

<sup>69</sup> Thomas Greepe, *The True and Perfecte Newes*, n.p.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*, n.p.



ships and the provisions they needed to victual the fleet.<sup>71</sup> While Philip might just as well have utilized this maritime force for the protection of his colonies, he hoped instead to intimidate Elizabeth into submission. Just as before, when Spain captured those English ships in 1585, Elizabeth knew she had do something to prevent a war her treasury couldn't afford. So in March 1587, she commissioned Drake to slow down the Armada preparations by disrupting the flow of supplies and preventing the various fleets from assembling.<sup>72</sup>

That April, Drake's fleet set out from Plymouth just before a royal messenger could catch him to tell him that the queen did not want him causing serious damage as she was then in peace negotiations with Philip. Whether the message was really intended to reach Drake is unknown. Kenneth R. Andrews believes that it was a ploy to distance Elizabeth from responsibility should Drake wreak havoc.<sup>73</sup> On the way to Spain, Drake's fleet met with some Flemish vessels which informed him that Cadiz, a large bay in southern Spain near the Strait of Gibraltar, would be a good place to start his mission. Upon reaching Cadiz, Drake wasted no time conferring with his fellow captains or commanders to come up with a plan and instead he dove straight into the bay, guns blazing. The battle lasted about a full day, and according to Drake himself, they managed to destroy some thirty vessels including one belonging to Santa Cruz himself. They also ruined a vast quantity of supplies, including hoops and pipe staves for making barrels as well as fishing nets.<sup>74</sup> Next the English fleet sailed to Cape St. Vincent, at the southern tip of Portugal, from which vantage point they could keep an eye on all Mediterranean shipping and a substantial

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<sup>71</sup> Daniel Archdeacon, trans., *A True Discourse of the Armie Which the King of Spaine Caused to Be Assembled in the Haven of Lisbon* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1588).

<sup>72</sup> Andrews, *Drake's Voyages*, 117.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 120; William Camden, *The History of the Most Renowned*, 396; and State Papers Domestic 1588, SP 12/201 No.33, ff.71-72 in *The Armada in the Public Records*, ed. N.A.M. Rodger (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1988), 32.

amount of Atlantic shipping, which always stopped off at the Azores just to the north.<sup>75</sup> After capturing and disarming three forts on this part of the coast as well as plundering numerous fisheries, Drake suddenly sailed out to the Azores. A storm blew up on the way there, and some of the fleet sailed back to England. In the Azores, the remainder of the fleet captured an incredibly valuable prize: a large Portuguese galleon which was just returning from the East Indies. As this galleon was called the *Philip*, it was seen in England as a sign not only that King Philip could be defeated but also as proof that the agile little English ships could take on the gigantic Spanish galleons and win.<sup>76</sup>

Drake's miraculous success at Cadiz was not without controversy. One of the commanders in the expedition, William Borough, was a traditionally-minded soldier who was horrified by Drake's spontaneous actions. Borough's ship stood off from the main fighting in Cadiz Bay to avoid the Spanish ships set on fire, as he later claimed.<sup>77</sup> Borough wrote to Drake while the fleet was off Portugal about all the reasons why landing there and taking the forts was a bad idea.<sup>78</sup> Drake still hated to be questioned, and he had Borough arrested on his ship and went ahead anyway. During the storm on the trip out to the Azores, Borough's ship was one of those that sailed for home when his former crew mutinied and reinstated him as captain. Accusations flew back and forth between Drake and Borough after that: Borough charged Drake with recklessness and Drake in return charged Borough with cowardice for not fighting at Cadiz and apparently deserting on the way to Azores. Borough countered by dredging up John Hawkins' one time accusation that Drake had deserted him after San Juan de Ulúa.<sup>79</sup> Drake tried Borough

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<sup>75</sup> See Andrews, *Drake's Voyages*, 120-24 for this and the following.

<sup>76</sup> Camden, *The History of the Most Renowned...*, 396-97.

<sup>77</sup> Cummins, "'That Golden Knight'," 15-16.

<sup>78</sup> Andrews, *Drake's Voyages*, 119-22.

<sup>79</sup> David B. Quinn, *Sir Francis Drake as seen by his contemporaries* (Providence, Rhode Island: The John Carter Brown Library, 1996), 16-17.

in his absence and convicted him for mutiny, the punishment for which was death.<sup>80</sup> But this dispute paled in comparison with the rapid escalation of events which lead to warfare in 1588.

The commemoration of Drake's spectacular Cadiz raid happened almost immediately after news of the events reached England. Henry Haslop's *Newes Out of the Coast of Spain*, printed within 1587, included an account of the raid on Cadiz, including details about everything spoiled or destroyed by the English, written up by Drake's second in command Captain Thomas Fenner. Following Fenner's account is a letter from Drake to Walsingham in which he briefly describes events off the coast of Portugal.<sup>81</sup> The two documents are shrouded in Haslop's heavy-handed classical and Biblical allusions, but the whole episode was clearly incredibly exciting for the English. Not to mention that Drake was once again proving his heroism and loyalty to queen and country. But poets barely had time to glorify the expedition before events of even more significance happened much closer to home.

Philip finally launched his invasion of England in late May 1588. Drake was a vocal advocate for an offensive plan to meet the Armada off the coast of Spain rather than in the English Channel. At the very least such activity would keep the Spanish too busy to think of invading England that year. He won his fellow commanders, the Lord High Admiral Howard and eventually even the queen over to his cause, but contrary winds prevented the English fleet from leaving Plymouth.<sup>82</sup> N.A.M. Rodger argues that this was the for the best, because Drake's plan would have left England defenseless if it proved unsuccessful and the navy was destroyed by Spain in the open ocean.<sup>83</sup> When the report came on the 19th of July that the Armada had

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<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*, 122-24.

<sup>81</sup> Henry Haslop, *Newes Out of the Coast of Spaine [...]*, (London, 1587), Facsimile edition, *The English Experience*, no. 466, (New York: De Capo Press Inc.), 1972.

<sup>82</sup> State Papers Domestic 1588, SP 12/209 No.40, f.77 in *The Armada in the Public Records*, ed. N.A.M. Rodger, 42-43 and Mattingly, *The Defeat of the Spanish Armada*, 236-39.

<sup>83</sup> N.A.M. Rodger, Introduction to *The Armada in the Public Records*, 11.

been sighted in the Channel, they scrambled to finish repairing and re-provisioning the fleet and get out of Plymouth Sound before the Armada trapped them as Drake trapped the Spanish at Cadiz.<sup>84</sup>

The Spanish sailed up the Channel in an unbreakable crescent formation. Their orders were to meet up with the Duke of Parma, who was in command of the forces busy subduing the revolts in the Spanish Netherlands. Together the two fleets would sail up the Thames and conquer London. But the primary fleet, led by the Duke of Medina Sidonia, didn't know that Parma was not in control of any harbor in which the Armada could land, and even if he had such a harbor the shoals off the coast would prevent the approach of the large Spanish galleons.<sup>85</sup> Miscommunication and guesswork plagued both sides, however, because neither England nor Spain had much experience with naval warfare in the sixteenth century. The Armada was made up of giant, ungainly ships with long-range ordnance and crews full of soldiers without much sea experience. The English navy was a combination of the ships retained by the queen as a very small, standing navy and those privateers, merchants and ship-owning gentlemen who agreed to join the fight. Their crews had significantly more sea experience than the Spanish, and they had more agile ships with heavy armament for close-range battle.<sup>86</sup>

For a week after the initial sighting, the English and Spanish fought a series of battles as the Armada pressed steadily on towards the proposed rendezvous points with Parma. The English successfully protected their coast and prevented the Spanish from making landfall, but they could not manage to break the Spanish formation until they sent in fire ships as the Armada sat anchored off Calais. Most of the Spaniards panicked and cut their anchor lines to get away from the blazing ships, and fled in disorder, which allowed the English to begin picking the

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<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*, 12.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, 4.

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*, 8 and Andrews, *Drake's Voyages*, 115-16.

enemy off as they chose. No Spanish ships were actually touched by the fire ships, but by the time Medina Sidonia reformed the crescent, a windstorm began to pick up.<sup>87</sup> Without their anchors, the galleons were powerless against the force of the gales. Although the English claimed then and since that it was their navy that defeated the Spanish Armada, in reality it was the wind.<sup>88</sup> The squalls blew the remainder of the Spanish fleet into the North Sea, and the English followed them for a time to make sure they wouldn't try to invade by land. But the Spanish were forced to sail home via Scotland and past Northern Ireland, where the majority of the weakened and damaged fleet wrecked on the rugged coasts.<sup>89</sup>

Drake's role in these events has been mythologized more than any other episode in his life. As such, the truth is somewhat obscured behind centuries-worth of tall tales and stories. Popular culture would have reader believe that Drake single-handedly defeated the Armada or was at least the commander in charge of the English forces. In fact, Drake could not have acted as the sole leader because unlike Lord Howard, he was far too contentious to take advice or give orders without offense.<sup>90</sup> But his previous exploits and service to the crown demonstrated his leadership, tactical skills, and experience with naval battles, and he was still one of the most popular captains of his day. Lord High Admiral Howard treated Drake as his second in command, and made him one of three admirals in charge of his own squadron; the other two were Drake's cousin John Hawkins and the well-known explorer Martin Frobisher.<sup>91</sup> But in a fleet made up of men used to acting on their own, discipline was naturally lacking.

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<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*, 12-24.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.* and Fernandez-Armesto, Felipe, *The Spanish Armada: The Experience of War in 1588* (London: Oxford University of Press, 1988), 268.

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*, 24.

<sup>90</sup> Rodger, Introduction to *The Armada in the Public Records*, 10.

<sup>91</sup> *ibid.*, 16.

Prizes were a source of contention between the commanders, because in order to take a prize a captain had to ignore other orders he should have been following. For instance, one night Howard ordered Drake to light a stern lantern to guide the fleet through the nighttime murk so that the English ships would not simply crash right into the Spanish. Drake did this, but at some point he extinguished the light and sailed off in pursuit of a ship on the horizon. Drake later claimed that he thought the ship was a Dutch merchantman and he wanted to warn them to stay out of the way of the fighting fleets. The richly laden galleon Drake brought into Dartmouth harbor spoke to his piratical side; he could not resist a valuable Spanish prize. It also spoke to his reputation, since the crew surrendered when they heard that the approaching English ship was captained by the infamous *El Draque*.<sup>92</sup> Frobisher was furious with Drake for endangering the English fleet to catch a prize, but proved himself hypocritical when he, Hawkins and even Howard all made diversions to snatch other prizes from the Armada, and therefore Drake's image was not in the least damaged by these actions.<sup>93</sup>

The scope and importance of the Armada Campaign allows it to blend easily into the realms of myth and legend. The English were so proud that their brave seamen held the off the tyrannical Spanish and kept their island nation independent that the popular imagination reworked the events many times as they saw fit. Their pride in the navy only grew in subsequent centuries as naval warfare became more common and organized, and overseas expansion (which was predicated on England becoming a true power on the sea) increased. They looked back on and regarded the defeat of the Armada as one of the highest points in their history.

In the immediate aftermath of the great sea battle, most of the credit for the English victory was given to God. No one admiral was elevated over the others, except perhaps Lord

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<sup>92</sup> Childs, *Pirate Nation*, 146-47.

<sup>93</sup> Cummins, "'That Golden Knight'," 16.

Howard because he was, after all, the one in charge. The account of the Armada published by Hakluyt was written by one Emanuel van Meteran and is a simple report of events.<sup>94</sup> Drake is only singled out in ballads such as *Eighty-eight or Sir Francis Drake* in celebration of his individual contributions to the battles, not because he is portrayed as the sole victor.<sup>95</sup> But his existing status as a national hero and famous enemy of Spain combined with the power of local legend, and Drake got caught up in the constant rewriting of the Armada narrative.

The legend goes that Drake and his men were playing bowls on Plymouth Hoe when the news came in that the Armada was sailing up the Channel, at which point Drake calmly finished his game before going to deal with the enemy. One variation on the story is that at the end of the game, Drake called for a piece of wood which he chopped into pieces with an ax. As he threw the woodchips into the water, each became a fire ship bearing down on the Spanish. This legend seems to have originated in Drake's native Devonshire, but when it came into being is unknown due to the oral traditions of the region. The first inclusion of it in a purportedly factual source was in William Oldys' *Life of Raleigh*, published in the mid-1730s., in which the story is already labeled "tradition".<sup>96</sup> By 1821, tourist guide books indicated the spot on which the game of bowls was played, and a depiction of the scene was included in the commemorative stained glass windows of Plymouth's guide hall in the 1870s. Paintings, such as *The Armada in Sight* by John Seymour Lucas (1880) also represent the bowls game.<sup>97</sup> The Plymouth Hoe legend perpetuated and made its way into popular culture to the extent that it is often taken for fact, even though it was probably originally meant to illustrate Drake's gentlemanly conduct by showing that he

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<sup>94</sup> Emanuel van Meteran, "The miraculous victory achieved by the English fleet under the discreet and happy conduct of the Right Honorable [...] Lord Charles Howard..." in *The Tudor Venturers*, 225-53.

<sup>95</sup> See Wathen, *The Construction of a Hero*, 16 and The York Waits, performers, *1588: Music from the Time of the Spanish Armada*, (Saydisc Records, 1988), compact disc.

<sup>96</sup> William Oldys, *The Life of Sir Walter Raleigh* (London, 1740): 87.

<sup>97</sup> Wathen, *The Construction of a Hero*, 78-79 and 123-26.

wasn't ruffled by the sudden appearance of the Armada. Other local Drake legends tell of how he prevented his wife (who assumed he had died at sea after years of absence) from remarrying by shooting a cannon ball through the earth, or how he created the waterway known as Plymouth Leat by enchanting the water to follow his horses' hooves as he rode into town.<sup>98</sup> These stories were based on older tales about Drake possessing a familiar or demon which helped him track Spanish treasure ships in the open ocean or showed him what his wife was doing.<sup>99</sup> Attributing supernatural powers to Drake to explain his miraculous luck was common among both his Spanish opponents and his fellow English sailors.

Drake rode high on his repeated successes from 1585 through 1588, but in 1589 the tables turned. The queen sent Drake and John Norris as co-commanders to make good on the English success against the Armada by ensuring that Philip couldn't attempt another invasion in the foreseeable future.<sup>100</sup> But disaster and misfortune plagued them, and Drake and Norris never managed to work together effectively, which put them in conflict with each other. Drake was in some disgrace for the next couple of years since many of the things Norris blamed him for, such as not showing up with the ships when the land forces needed him, turned out to be undisputed. Drake lived for a time as a country gentleman in Plymouth, and became active as a local landowner and patron.<sup>101</sup> It was during this period that he employed Philip Nichols to compile the accounts of his previous voyages which eventually became *Sir Francis Drake Revived* and *The World Encompassed*.

Curiously, the disgrace of 1589 is not commonly brought up in discussions of the Drake mythos. The 'skeletons in his closet' of the execution of Thomas Doughty or his intense conflict

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<sup>98</sup> Wathen, *The Construction of a Hero*, 79-86.

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*, and Cummins, "That Golden Knight," 15.

<sup>100</sup> Camden, *The History of the Most Renowned*, 429-32.

<sup>101</sup> Hampden, *Francis Drake: Privateer*, 254-55.



with Borough were and are both used by those who wish to discredit him, but this disastrous expedition seems to be conspicuously left out. Perhaps that's because it is relatively unimportant in the long run, especially when compared to his last voyage in 1595. This was to be the final expedition for both Drake and John Hawkins, and it was just as unlucky as that of 1589. They went back to the West Indies, but this time they were not able to take the Spaniards by surprise. New forts, fortified military outposts and more alert guards had been implemented in the Spanish colonies since Drake's last visit ten years before, and these proved too hard for the English to breach.<sup>102</sup> Hawkins died after the first resounding defeat, some said of grief, and Drake died only a few months later of dysentery off Portobelo, Panama and there he was buried at sea.<sup>103</sup> It seems oddly fitting that he died doing what he was best known for, sacking Spanish towns and ships, so close to the area in which he had first achieved success in the 1570s.

Local myths about Drake originated and stayed within Devonshire until they were written into history books or novels. But cultural memory nevertheless began to change. English overseas expansion in the eighteenth century was intimately connected to the growing importance and strength of the Royal Navy. Newly formed or acquired colonies needed to be protected against other nations as well as against piracy.<sup>104</sup> The navy made colonization possible by providing transportation, communication, and protection. "Piracy" was redefined during this time as undoubtedly criminal.<sup>105</sup> In this climate, well-known Elizabethan figures whose piratical actions were variously celebrated or reshaped in previous periods had to be reassessed. In Drake's case, that reassessment took the form of a shift in focus from the circumnavigation, which included too many occasions of piracy to sit well with eighteenth century society, to his

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<sup>102</sup> Waters, Introduction to *The True and Perfecte Newes*, 42.

<sup>103</sup> Camden, *The History of the Most Renowned...*, 501. .

<sup>104</sup> Wathen, *The Construction of a Hero*, 51-53.

<sup>105</sup> Jowitt, *The Culture of Piracy*, 8-9.

role in the defeat of the Armada. Sir Francis Drake the pirate was reconstructed as Sir Francis Drake the admiral. He was still revived in literature and naval histories as a role model or moral exemplar of what the English should aspire to be. But it was revival of the man himself as opposed to publications of accounts of his exploits. For instance, when Vice Admiral Vernon captured Portobelo (the very location of Drake's death) from the Spanish during the War of Jenkins' Ear, a poem published upon his return compared him to Drake.<sup>106</sup> By drawing connections between naval heroes of different periods, authors and historians were creating a national mythology based on England's sea power.

But as historian W. T. Jewkes notes, there has never been a major literary work on Drake. The literature written after his death is primarily either folklore or a revival of the Drake legend with some ulterior motive.<sup>107</sup> Even Charles Fitzgeffrey's commendatory epic poem, "Sir Francis Drake, his honorable life's commendation and his tragical death's lamentation" cannot be considered a major work of literature. This is perhaps due to the tensions between the style of epic or heroic literature, which is most often used for aristocratic characters or romantic stories, and a subject like Drake. A life full of maritime adventures seems uniquely suited to the epic form, but the association between privateering and mercantilism kept the heroic apart from the ordinary.<sup>108</sup> Once piracy was officially deemed a crime in the eighteenth century, the nobility of Drake's patriotism would have felt at odds with the vulgarity of piracy. But Drake's version of piracy was quite different from the Golden Age piracy in the Caribbean recognized in the eighteenth century. Unlike those plundering for personal gain, as historian David Cordingly points out, Drake plundered in the name of his queen and his faith (even when he did not have letters of reprisal) and he always brought his plunder back to the royal treasury, rather than

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<sup>106</sup> Wathen, *The Construction of a Hero*, 55.

<sup>107</sup> Jewkes, "Sir Francis Drake Revived," 119.

<sup>108</sup> Jowitt, *The Culture of Piracy*, 49 and Nelzoff, "Sir Francis Drake's Ghost," 141.

keeping it all for himself.<sup>109</sup> In Drake's mind he was a privateer enacting retribution on the Spanish for the losses he and his cousin John Hawkins suffered in San Juan de Ulua. As David Childs put it, piracy was in the eye of the beholder.<sup>110</sup>

During the Victorian era, when the creation of the Empire was complete, the English looked for explanations and justifications for their world dominance. Historians like James Anthony Froude reshaped the Elizabethan maritime past by claiming that it was the efforts of seamen like Drake that made the Empire possible. Their exploration was the precursor to colonization and the defeat of the Armada marked England's permanent break with Catholicism.<sup>111</sup> At the same time, Drake was being revived to inspire patriotism and daring less and less often during this period. Gone were the days of England relying on the merchant marine to protect the coasts. Admirals and captains began to be revered as upstanding figures in society, and no one embodied the ideal of the English naval hero better than Admiral Lord Nelson. The Battle of Trafalgar surpassed the fame and importance of all sea battles since the Spanish Armada, and this significance led to the mythologizing of Trafalgar just as it had the conflict of 1588. Plus, Nelson didn't have any skeletons in his closet, like the Doughty Affair or a piratical past. The literary outpouring of writings inspired by Nelson wouldn't halt until over a century after his death, but two poets are significant because they drew connections between Nelson and Drake. They also signify the shift in focus from the Armada towards the mystery surrounding Drake's burial place.

The myth of Drake's Drum is a more recent addition to the Drake mythos than the local Devonshire legends such as the bowls game, and its origins are less nebulous. Drake kept a drum aboard for use during every voyage, which was used to make noise during battles or to

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<sup>109</sup> David Cordingly and John Falconer, *Pirates: Fact and Fiction*, 28.

<sup>110</sup> David Childs, *Pirate Nation*, 9.

<sup>111</sup> Wathen, *The Construction of a Hero*, 103-09.

keep rhythm for the crew. It was brought back to Plymouth after his final voyage to the West Indies.<sup>112</sup> Until the late nineteenth century, the drum had no special significance apart from having once belonged to Drake.<sup>113</sup> Then Henry Newbolt claimed that Admiral Nelson was the reincarnation (or the ghost) of Drake in his 1895 poem "Drake's Drum." With his dying words, Drake instructs his men to, "Take my drum to England, hang et by the shore, / Strike et when your powder's runnin' low; / If the Dons sight Devon, I'll quit the port o' Heaven, / An' drum them up the Channel as we drummed them long ago."<sup>114</sup> His patriotism may outlast his life, but Drake promises to come to England's aid as he did in 1588. Not only does this illustrate the altered cultural memory in which Drake became the only naval commander fighting the Armada, but it marks the beginning of the new construction of Drake as the spectral protector of England.

Alfred Noyes published his take on the new legend as "The Admiral's Ghost" in 1917. Noyes' narrator, an old mariner, says that Drake told his crew in 1596 to take his drum back to Plymouth, hang it on the sea wall, and bang it if he was needed to fight for England. Two hundred years later, as "England was fighting hard for her life," and beginning to despair the chances of victory, the figure known as Nelson showed up to win the day. But the mariner claims that the Devonshire men know that "Nelson" was really Drake in disguise. He concludes, "Nelson - was Francis Drake! / O, what matters the uniform, / Or the patch on your eye or your pinned-up sleeve, / If your soul's like a North Sea storm?"<sup>115</sup> Noyes' mariner does not diminish any of Nelson's greatness; rather he embellishes on Nelson's reputation by connecting him to the previous most famous and successful English admiral. Drake just becomes a more potent guardian spirit. The myth of the Drum from these two poems permeated

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<sup>112</sup> See E.M.R. Ditmas, *The Legend of Drake's Drum* (Toucan Press, 1973).

<sup>113</sup> E.M.R. Ditmas, "The Way Legends Grow," *Folklore* 85, no.4 (1974): 247.

<sup>114</sup> Henry Newbolt, "Drake's Drum," in *Poems: New and Old* (London: John Murray, 1912), 16.

<sup>115</sup> Alfred Noyes, "The Admiral's Ghost," in *Collected Poems, Vol. 2* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company Publishers, 1913): 29.

popular culture to the extent that during both of the World Wars, some soldiers who came from Devonshire swore that they could hear the beating of a drum during or after particular maritime events, such as Dunkirk.<sup>116</sup> But more important than the beating of the drum is the resurrection of Drake. The one time pirate turned admiral has become a guardian spirit. His unexpected death was devastating for England—the people of Devon in particular—but his burial at sea and thus the lack of a body to bury for closure facilitated the development of ghost myths.<sup>117</sup> More significant still is the way in which Drake comes back to England from another realm, not as a ghost haunting a particular building but as a warrior spirit ready to do battle. It is this parallel to King Arthur, the "once and future king" that led historian Mark Netzloff to designate Drake as "the once and future pirate."<sup>118</sup>

Narratives and constructions of Sir Francis Drake are reshaped by every era for its own needs, but the continual use of Drake as a symbol for one thing or another illustrates a constant nostalgia for the Elizabethan age inherent in English identity. Drake represents a spirit of chivalry, patriotism and perseverance against the enemy. To understand the construction of Drake within history, literature and myth is to understand the construction of cultural memory. That is to say, how we view and understand the past informs us about how that past shapes the present and the future.

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<sup>116</sup> Cummins, "That Golden Knight," 20 and Ditmas, "The Way Legends Grow," 251-52.

<sup>117</sup> Ditmas, "The Way Legends Grow," 247-48.

<sup>118</sup> Netzloff, "Sir Francis Drake's Ghost," 138.

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