



# BARTLEBY REVIEW

Issue 11 - November 2013

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Where Do I Sign Up?! ..... Mitch Speed

Lecture and Screening

**Matthew Taylor Raffety** 'Lecture'

**Thymaya Payne** 'Stolen Seas: Tales of Somali Piracy'

**Tobias Lindholm** 'A Hijacking'

*Vancity Theatre*

*1181 Seymour Street*

*October 24*

*In conjunction with The Voyage, or Three Years at Sea Part VI, Charles H. Scott Gallery*

This event had one expansive story – the perennial hijacking of shipping vessels by Somali Pirates – told in three forms: documentary, dramatic feature, and lecture. *Stolen Seas: Tales of Somali Piracy*, 2011 – the documentary – seeks to picture psychological, economic and political complexity, whereas *A Hijacking*, 2012 – the feature – is essentially a sketch of psyches under duress. There are no eyepatches in either film. Nor parrots or peg legs. Instead we are given new motifs, which here, by way of juxtaposition, began to appear as their more complex selves; facts

shaded and emphasized in order to carefully calibrate affect.

Predictably, the latter film's principle subject is a Danish CEO named Peter C. Ludwigsen. In a consonant feedback loop between author and subject, Ludwigsen is carefully presented as an unflappable Danish suit. As such, when one of his ships is hijacked, he indignantly rejects a trained negotiator. Eventually, under threats to the life of the ship's cook, Ludwigsen's cool is broken, and he is shown roaring over the phone at Omar, the pirate's hired negotiator. Shortly, there is screaming, and a gunshot. Is the cook dead? Probably not. We know from the documentary that pirates often falsify injury and death in order to ratchet psychological pressure.

In the pirates, stress manifests as brutal irrationality. As they leave the ship with their ransom, one notices a wedding ring hanging from the cook's neck. Having bagged his portion of several million dollars, the pirate obliges a deplorable demand of the thriller genre, by stealing the diminutive scrap, and then depositing a bullet in the frontal lobe of the ship's captain. Mostly, *A Hijacking* seems to be modelled after a specific incident featured in *Stolen Seas*. This murder is an exception, and so seems like an indulgence.

As scolding for this execution, the gunman receives a few open palmed slaps. That's pretty soft stuff compared to the standard punishment that a man named Ishmael – the star of *Stolen Seas*, and the real life Omar – describes for attempting to murder a hostage, which is death. For the actual pirates, hostages are closely guarded currency.

When the cook is forced to slaughter goats, we see him petting the animal as wheezing gasps escape

its severed neck. All of this is shown. In contrast, a quick cut prevents us from seeing the back of the captain's head explode. So at the exact moments that viewers are manipulated by extreme violence, they are protected from its image. Then the goat's neck is offered as an appeasement to macabre appetites.

*A Hijacking* is gripping. Its shots are rigorously composed, and in collaboration with exceptional writing, the Danish actors dissolve into their characters. Likewise their Somali counterparts, although for different reasons. They are conveniently buried behind facewraps and spastic orations that hang in the imagination as perfectly unintelligible rage.

In *Stolen Seas*, legal and maritime experts chart a variegated context. While some deliver patriarchal wisdom about moral vacuity and strong backbones, most are either empathetic or disinterestedly engaged. At one crucial point, a historian describes the pushing of Somalians away from their camel herds, following famine, and into a fishing lifestyle that was subsequently crippled by unbridled commercial trawling.

Following all of this, Raffety gave a casual but enlightening presentation. He described Disney's voracious appetite for pirates, and also the voracious appetite for destroying those who pirate them. He also offered compelling descriptions of things such as the flag of convenience industry, and the irresolvable legal tangles that hamstring prosecution. Over and again, Raffety referred to the sea as a radically free space. Coupling freedom with tragedy, that phrase served as a fitting emblem for the subject's binding complexity.