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Piracy, the Sea, and Self-Determination in Early Modern English Writing

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Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
English and Humanities

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Declaration

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

Susan Jones

Abstract

This study investigates what it meant to choose to be a pirate in early modern England. It examines a range of texts primarily from the period 1580-1680 and explores how the choice to participate in piracy was perceived by participants, by the law and by wider society. The texts discussed include manuscript writings of seamen, legal and ecclesiastical texts, and popular literature including news pamphlets, travel writing, drama and ballads. The thesis reads these texts together to uncover the complexity of contemporary attitudes towards piracy.

Each of the chapters is structured around a pivotal moment of choice in the lives of seamen and pirates: choosing a career at sea, turning to piracy, becoming a renegade, and the final choice of how they represented themselves at execution. The focus on these moments of transition reveals how piracy and the sea were perceived by seamen, some of the aspirations they held, and how they were able to act on their choices. These decisions all placed seamen in conflict with authority – parental, legal, religious and state – and each evoked a wealth of textual responses from a range of perspectives which the study contrasts to illuminate wider social responses to piracy. Analysing this material together, the study unearths evidence of robust social networks which supported and sustained pirates.

The thesis argues that piracy was viewed as a means of achieving wealth and status outside orthodox social hierarchies and, as such, was variously perceived as both opportunity and threat.

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Abbreviations

BL British Library

CSPD Calendar of State Papers Domestic

CSPV Calendar of State Papers Relating to English Affairs in the Archives of Venice

CUP Cambridge University Press

ELH English Literary History

ESTC English Short Title Catalogue

HCA High Court of Admiralty

JEMCS Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies

JSH Journal of Social History

NMM National Maritime Museum

ODNB Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

OED Oxford English Dictionary

OUP Oxford University Press

TNA National Archive

Notes on Text

[1] Early modern spelling and formatting has been faithfully retained with the following exceptions: MHRA guidelines regarding the letters i and j, u and v, the long s, the ampersand and superscript letters in contractions are followed. All are therefore normalised according to modern spelling conventions. The titles of early modern works have been shortened following MHRA guidelines. For quotations from plays, speech prefixes in small capitals have been inserted.

[2] For primary texts that appear regularly throughout a chapter, the first reference is given in full as a footnote and subsequent references given in abbreviated form in parentheses after quotations within the text.

[3] All references to the Bible derive from the King James Version, unless otherwise stated.

[4] The names of ships will be given in italics in accordance with convention.

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Introduction

What did it mean to choose to be a pirate in early modern England? Responding to this question this thesis examines manuscript and print evidence primarily from the period 1580-1680 to explore how the choice to participate in robbery at sea was perceived in law, by the participants themselves, and by others. It contends that those involved in piracy perceived it as a means by which they might exert agency, but that in seeking to shape their own lives they found themselves criminalised as they troubled established social hierarchies. The study is structured around texts that delineate decisive moments of choice in the lives of early modern seamen from the initial choice of a career at sea, through to the decision to turn to piracy or become a renegade and the final choice of how to meet death. These pivotal moments of choice are examined through a range of texts including the manuscript writing of seamen, official and ecclesiastical texts, and popular literature including news pamphlets, travel writing, drama and ballads. The focus on these key moments of transition exposes how piracy and life at sea were perceived by these men, some of the aspirations they held, and, crucially, the extent to which they were able to act on these choices to exert a degree of agency over their own lives. This structure also usefully illuminates the responses these particular instances of self-determination elicited from those in authority and from wider society.

The thesis begins with an exploration of the intense desire expressed by some young men for a life at sea, focussing on the manuscript accounts of Edward Barlow (1642-1706), Edward Coxere (c. 1633-1694), and Richard Norwood (1590-1675). These three men left extensive accounts of their lives, each devoting a lengthy section of their writings to their youthful decision to go to sea and their struggle to realise this ambition. Analysis of these texts enables consideration of the motivations

behind the initial choice of a life at sea and contextualises other decisions which seamen made at key moments later in their lives. The accounts of these young men are examined in the context of texts such as popular ballads which reveal wider attitudes about the sea and those who chose to make their living on it. This examination of the decision to go to sea highlights the hopes and expectations invested in maritime expansion, along with the social anxieties it engendered. Continuing with a focus on the manuscript writings of Edward Coxere, set alongside the printed last testimony of another seaman, James Harris (d. 1609), we consider the transition from legality to illegality by analysing these texts for evidence of how the decision to turn to piracy was perceived by pirates themselves, their families and their broader social networks. These narrative accounts are read against contemporary legal texts setting out the definition and treatment of piracy in law. Such an approach highlights the contrasting perceptions of piracy in law and in practice, and exposes some of the ambiguities surrounding piracy during this period. The decision to renounce country and faith to become a renegade is examined through texts including travel writing and sermons. We also focus on the wealth of documentation and textual representations of the renowned renegade, John Ward (c.1553-c.1622). The mass of evidence about Ward's life, contained in sources as diverse as pamphlets, state papers and drama, allows us to explore attitudes towards those who made lives in Islamic societies. We finally follow pirates to the scaffold where we consider textual evidence of how they framed their own lives at the point of their execution, and how their deaths were represented by the state and in popular print.

Pirates are significant figures in our collective cultural imagination, but whereas attention has often been focussed on piracy during the early eighteenth century, in particular on piracy in the Caribbean, this thesis argues that the earlier

period of 1580-1680 deserves further attention. During this period, the act of piracy began to be both more closely defined in law and increasingly legislated against, resulting in the criminalisation of an activity in which thousands of English men and women participated. The connection of seamen and pirates to domestic networks of support is a relatively understudied area of scholarship. Analysis of seamen's own writings alongside printed texts of the period bear significant traces of the tensions which existed between the law and those which it labelled 'pirate' but also evidence reactions of both family and community. As such they merit scrutiny to discover what they can tell us about contemporary perceptions of piracy. Many existing studies consider the development of piracy over a wider period of time.¹ However, this thesis adopts a more synchronic approach to avoid some of the risks of longitudinal generalisation inherent in a longer period of study. The study draws on a breadth of textual evidence, including official documents, journals, popular print and drama. While some of these texts are much studied individually, they are rarely read together. When considered side by side, these otherwise disparate texts offer an insight into the distinct perceptions of piracy held by the state and by individuals. The wealth of material from this period is such that it allows us to map piracy in terms of life stages and to consider the perceptions of participants, the state and wider society together. By taking such an approach this thesis reveals the complexity of contemporary attitudes towards piracy, and based on this evidence argues that piracy was perceived by many as a means of exercising agency to achieve wealth and status outside of orthodox social hierarchies.

¹ These include Peter Earle, *The Pirate Wars* (London: Methuen, 2003); Peter Lehr, *Pirates: A New History, From Vikings to Somali Raiders* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2019); Marcus Rediker, *Outlaws of the Atlantic: Sailors, Pirates, and Motley Crews in the Age of Sail* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014); Janice E. Thomson, *Mercenaries, Pirates and Sovereigns: State-building and Extraterritorial Violence in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

The primary texts under consideration here fall into three main categories which combine to show the interaction of individual subjects, and to some extent community, with the forces apparently and actually driving the criminalization of their actions. Firstly, there are those such as legal documents, royal proclamations, sermons and state papers which are examined to uncover how authorities sought to assert an official narrative in which piracy was proscribed and participants would be punished, often either by execution or by divine retribution. These include texts such as *A Proclamation against Pirats* issued by King James I in 1609, sermons given by clergymen such as William Gouge and Henry Byam which called for the repentance of apostates, and legal texts by jurists including Sir Edward Coke who sought to define and codify the law. Set against these texts, which attempt to impose a legal and moral framework on maritime space, are accounts of seamen, including those who were categorized as pirates. These include manuscript accounts by the seamen Edward Barlow, Edward Coxere and Richard Norwood, along with testimonies of participants witnessed and recorded by others, such as ‘The discourse of Captaine Harris under his owne hand’ which appeared in print after Harris’s death in 1609. Although the lives and writing of ennobled early modern seafarers such as Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Francis Drake and Sir Kenelm Digby continue to receive much attention, the life-writing of poor seamen remains a rich but under-studied resource.² These accounts provide invaluable insight into the motivations of those seamen who turned to piracy and how in practice they navigated the landscape of maritime law, as prescribed in the first group of texts. They also reveal something of the literacy of seamen and their use of different literary forms to record their experiences. The final

² Publications include Anna Beer, *Patriot or Traitor, the Life and Death of Sir Walter Raleigh* (London: Oneworld, 2018); John Sugden, *Sir Francis Drake* (London: Pimlico, 1996); Joe Moshenska, *A Stain in the Blood: The Remarkable Voyage of Sir Kenelm Digby* (London: Penguin, 2016).

set of texts is comprised of popular literature, including pamphlets, ballads, poetry and drama. The figure of the pirate makes frequent appearance on page and stage throughout the period of this study attesting to the cultural fascination of piracy despite – or perhaps because of – its criminalisation. Considered alongside the first two groups of texts, which often provide opposed but closely interrelated views of piracy, this third category of texts offers evidence of how piracy was viewed in a wider social and cultural context. Taken as a whole, the breadth of textual evidence examined in this study enables us to recover something of the experiential narrative of maritime plunder and gain a richer and more nuanced view of contemporary perceptions of piracy than is more usually found in studies of the period.

Located at the intersection of literary criticism, social history and maritime history, this thesis draws on several fields of study. Pirates are often described as liminal and this study of piracy might also be described in similar terms, bordering, as it does, on the margins of these different disciplines. In considering texts seldom taken together, this thesis offers perspectives on pirate lives which have previously been missed. In doing so, it reveals that ‘pirate’ was rarely viewed as a fixed identity by those to whom it was attached but was more often a label of otherness or deliberate criminalisation attached by others. This, in turn, allows us to re-examine the complexity of relationships between piracy and wider society.

Claire Jowitt has suggested that if pirate lives and crimes are seen within cultural and literary contexts, ‘it becomes possible to see the ways representations of these figures and their activities express a range of polemical concerns’.³ Taken in this context, we consider what it might mean when the real-life pirates Purser and Clinton, hanged for piracy at Execution Dock in 1583, were portrayed as

³ Claire Jowitt, *The Culture of Piracy, 1580-1630* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), p. 16.

sympathetic characters in contemporary popular print, or when John Ward, very much alive and prospering as a Muslim convert and corsair, was seen to meet an ignominious fictional death on the London stage in Robert Daborne's 1612 play *A Christian Turned Turk*. In seeking to unearth something of the textual construction of pirate lives we therefore begin to expose the cultural work being performed by the representations of pirates. These men and their exploits were infamous and widely reported. Although frequently exoticised in print, piracy was a recognisable and integral part of the socio-economic structures of maritime communities supporting and supported by complex networks of financiers, receivers, friends, families and abettors.⁴ Many others suffered losses at the hands of pirates, as did Daborne's own father, the haberdasher Robert Daborne, Senior (1551-1612).⁵ That those individuals named as pirates in print would often have been familiar to many in the intended audience complicates the way in which piratical texts might be read. Whilst interrogating these diverse texts we must also be attentive to questions of authorship, form and motive. In considering these issues, this study draws on the work of scholars including James S. Amelang, Julie Sievers, Meredith Anne Skura and Adam Smyth who argue that studying the authorship, construction and audience of early modern life writing can illuminate previously neglected aspects of a text.⁶ The manuscript accounts of the seamen, Barlow, Coxere and Norwood, are read in the

⁴ John C. Appleby, *Women and English Piracy, 1540-1720* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013), pp. 4-7.

⁵ S. P. Cerasano, 'Daborne, Robert (c.1580-1628), playwright' in *ODNB* <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/6993>> [accessed 4 February 2018]

⁶ See James S. Amelang, *The Flight of Icarus: Artisan Autobiography in Early Modern Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Julie Sievers, 'Drowned Pens and Shaking Hands: Sea Providence Narratives in Seventeenth Century New England', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 63:4 (2006), 743-776; Meredith Anne Skura, *Tudor Autobiography: Listening for Inwardness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Adam Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010).

light of this body of work and of studies on the use of reading and writing by seventeenth-century tradesmen.⁷ Such a reading enables us to see something of the complex process by which these seamen sought to create identities through their writing.

Although the act of piracy is, at its most basic, robbery at sea, the definition of this act proved slippery and the label of ‘pirate’ was not applied universally to perpetrators of maritime robbery.⁸ The work of scholars including Lauren Benton, Daniel Heller-Roazen, Christopher Harding and Janice E. Thomson has grappled with the distinction between pirate, privateer and mercenary and how these terms were understood and applied in law.⁹ For the purposes of this study, piracy is defined as the act of robbery at sea without the authority of any state. However, as we will explore in more detail, similar acts were often legitimised. In times of peace letters of marque could be issued to enable an individual to seize shipping or cargo as reparations for losses suffered at the hands of a foreign vessel. During wartime, state licences were often issued authorising private individuals to seize enemy shipping. Such practices were known as ‘privateering’, and will be referred to as such

⁷ Brodie Waddell, “‘Verses of My Owne Making’: Literacy, Work and Social Identity in Early Modern England”, *JSH* (2020) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/jsh/shz011>> [accessed 11 July 2019]

⁸ Eugene Kontorovich, ‘The Piracy Analogy: Modern Universal Jurisdiction’s Hollow Foundation’, *Harvard International Law Journal*, 45 (2004), 183-92 (p. 187).

⁹ Lauren Benton, ‘Oceans of Law: The Legal Geography of the Seventeenth-Century Seas’, *Proceedings of the Seascapes, Littoral Cultures, and Trans-Oceanic Exchanges Conference*, 12-15 February 2003 <http://webdoc.sub.gwdg.de/ebook/p/2005/history_cooperative/www.historycooperative.org/proceedings/seascapes/benton.html> [accessed 15 December 2018]; Heller-Roazen, *The Enemy of All: Piracy and the Law of Nations* (New York: Zone Books, 2009); Christopher Harding, “‘Hostis Humani Generis’: The Pirate as Outlaw in the Early Modern Law of the Sea’ in *Pirates? The Politics of Plunder, 1550-1650*, ed. by Claire Jowitt (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 20-38; Thomson, *Mercenaries, Pirates and Sovereigns*.

throughout this study.¹⁰ Building on Heller-Roazen's idea that pirates are agents of the threshold, this thesis argues that during a period in which jurisdiction over the seas was fluid, the boundaries between activities which, although discretely defined in law, were often shifting in practice enabling seamless passage from the legal to illegal and back again, giving rise to ambiguities in the way piracy was perceived. In taking such an approach, the study departs from the idea of 'pirate' as a fixed identity to look at piracy as just a part of the economic activity that seamen might engage in at different points during their career, and seeks to have an understanding of how piracy was perceived, by considering how it was defined, by whom, and in what circumstances.

The issue of sovereignty over the seas is an important factor in this study as this investigation of piracy takes place within a mutable landscape of maritime law. During the period under consideration the space of the sea was in constant contestation by powers, including England, vying for expansion and control in both newly discovered territories and in home waters. Sir Walter Raleigh articulated the perceived importance of this struggle: 'For whosoever commands the Sea, Commands the Trade: whosoever Commands the Trade of the world: Commands the Riches of the world and consequently the world it selfe'.¹¹ David Armitage has argued that the origins of empire lay in the tensions arising from the two opposing ideas of free maritime trade and control of the seas.¹² Powers argued variously, and often opportunistically, for both freedom and control of the seas: during the sixteenth

¹⁰ Thomson, pp. 22-23.

¹¹ Walter Raleigh, *Judicious and select essayes and observations by that renowned and learned knight, Sir Walter Raleigh upon the first invention of shipping, the misery of invasive warre, the Navy Royall and sea service: with his Apologie for his voyage to Guiana* (London, 1650), B2v.

¹² David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), pp. 100-5.

century, John Dee argued that Elizabeth I held sovereignty over the sea for 100 miles off the coast of England and certain territories, yet conversely the idea of freedom of the seas was used by the English in the 1580s to dispute Spanish claims of maritime dominion over the West Indies, with William Camden claiming that ‘all are at liberty to navigate the vast ocean, since the use of the sea and the air are common to all’.¹³ The debate continued following the death of Elizabeth I and the accession of James VI of Scotland to the English throne in 1603. James favoured the Scottish maritime policy of ‘reserved waters’, a limited maritime exclusion zone around the coasts, and in 1609 extended this to ban unlicensed foreigners from fishing in reserved waters.¹⁴ In response to such maritime restrictions Hugo Grotius published *Mare Liberum* in 1609, arguing the seas were public property and therefore international territory and that ‘navigation, by the law of nations, is free to all persons whatsoever’.¹⁵ The years following the publication of *Mare Liberum* saw the appearance of numerous rebuttals to Grotius’s claims in works by legal scholars including those from Venice, Portugal, Spain and Scotland.¹⁶ However, the most extensive riposte to Grotius came from the English jurist, John Selden. Published in 1635, Selden’s *Mare Clausum* argued that English sovereignty should govern ‘British sea’, which he described as bounded to the south and west by neighbouring continental states and to the north and east by limits which were as yet undetermined.¹⁷ Grotius’s argument for freedom of the seas was a salvo in the political battle between nation states for control of

¹³ William Howard Sherman, *John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance* (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), pp. 148-201; William Camden, *Annales* (1580), quoted in Armitage, p. 107.

¹⁴ Jowitt, *The Culture of Piracy*, p. 4.

¹⁵ Hugo Grotius, *The Freedom of the Seas, or the Right to Which Belongs to the Dutch to take part in the East Indian Trade*, ed. by James Brown Scott (New York: OUP, 1916), vol. 1, p. 6.

¹⁶ For a wider discussion see Heller-Roazen, pp. 120-123.

¹⁷ John Selden, *Mare Clausum, seu De Dominio Maris Libri Duo* (London, 1635).

maritime space however, as we will see, the idea of the sea as an ungoverned space gained a hold on the early modern cultural imagination and those who lived and worked on the sea – particularly pirates – were re-imagined as unruly, oppositional and ‘other’.

One influential reading of pirates as unruly is Christopher Hill’s 1980 essay ‘Radical Pirates?’, which refocussed attention on piracy by arguing that it could be viewed as a radical intellectual choice made as a rejection of religious and political orthodoxies.¹⁸ Hill’s essay considers the period following 1640 and defines radicals as those who argued for religious tolerance and advocated democratic, communist or antinomian ideas. A body of scholarship subsequently built on Hill’s reading to explore pirates as revolutionaries and radicals in different ways. In *The Many-Headed Hydra*, Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker describe the pirate ship as ‘egalitarian in a hierarchical age’ and argue that during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries pirate communities attempted to put into practice some of the utopian and radical ideas which were being transmitted around the Atlantic.¹⁹ Rediker later extended this analysis to assert that in becoming pirates poor seamen dramatized concerns of class.²⁰ Others, such as B. R. Burg and Hans Turley, have focussed on pirates as sexually transgressive, living a lifestyle which enabled them to explore unorthodox sexual identities.²¹ The reading of piracy as radical has gained

¹⁸ Christopher Hill, ‘Radical Pirates?’ in Margaret Jacob and James Jacob, eds., *The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism* (London: Humanities Press International, 1984), pp. 17-32.

¹⁹ Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (London: Verso, 2000; repr. 2007), p. 163.

²⁰ Marcus Rediker, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (London: Verso, 2004), p. 6.

²¹ B. R Burg, *Sodomy and the Pirate Tradition: English Sea Rovers in the Seventeenth Century Caribbean* (New York: NYU Press, 1995); Hans Turley, *Rum, Sodomy, and the Lash: Piracy, Sexuality, and Masculine Identity* (New York: NYU Press, 1999).

significant cultural purchase resulting in the frequent fictionalisation of pirates as attractive anti-heroes.²² Viewing piracy through the prism of radicalism can usefully provide valuable social context, but to do so without specificity runs the risk of anachronism and mythologisation. This study tests such approaches by examining piracy in the context of contemporary regulation, practice, and social perception and, in doing so, acts as a starting point for revealing a more nuanced view of pirates during the period under study as figures who were only rarely overtly political yet in their struggle for self-determination did indeed often disrupt societal norms.

The texts examined, including manuscript accounts, legal texts and popular ballads, reveal that issues of authority, ownership and mobility arose repeatedly as part of the process of exploration, discovery and colonisation integral to maritime expansion. In considering how these issues influenced the individual lives and writings of those involved in piracy, this thesis draws on the work of social historians such as A. L. Beier, Craig Muldrew and Alexandra Shepard, whose studies shine a light on the lived experience of the early modern period.²³ Beier has demonstrated that, during the period of this study, England was a country in which the able-bodied poor would be labelled as vagabonds unless they had a master; to be ‘masterless’ was to break with the conventions of social order, place and family.²⁴ Considered to have no stake in society, such men were perceived as a danger to

²² Examples of this include the film series *Pirates of the Caribbean* (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2003-2017), and the TV network series, *Black Sails* (Starz Original, 2014-2017). For a wider discussion of pirates in popular culture see Neil Rennie, *Treasure Neverland: Real and Imaginary Pirates* (Oxford: OUP, 2013).

²³ A. L. Beier, *Masterless Men: the vagrancy problem in England 1560-1640* (London: Methuen, 1985); Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998); Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: OUP, 2003).

²⁴ Beier, p. xix.

social order. This work has been extended by others who argue that pirates, distanced from the authorities of church and state, were able to construct their own culture of masterless men which gave voice to the collective aspirations of the labouring poor.²⁵ The work of Patricia Fumerton considers seamen as part of the mobile and frequently vagrant early modern poor who became a focus for anxieties about the mobile worker. She further argues that seamen, perhaps more than any other group, were both occupationally and psychologically unsettled, continually displaced and detached from place and family.²⁶ This thesis, however, argues that such a focus on the 'outsider' or socially detached nature of seamen, and pirates in particular, often neglects the family ties and social networks which the texts, such as those by Coxere and Harris, reveal that many possessed and continued to nurture throughout their lives at sea. Whilst this study engages with the work of Beier, Fumerton and Rediker, it departs from a focus on studies which consider pirates as solitary and detached by using contemporary texts, including the hitherto often under-utilised writings by seamen themselves, to disclose the existence and significance of social and familial networks, and pays particular attention to the ways in which these networks supported and were supported by piracy.

As part of the examination of the family background and social ties of seamen and pirates, this thesis explores the expectations placed on young men during this period by family and wider society. The textual evidence reveals that when young men chose a career at sea these relationships came under immense strain, but, rather than rupturing, in many cases were able to recover and remain intact or even

²⁵ Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987), p. 286.

²⁶ Patricia Fumerton, *Unsettled: The Culture of Mobility and the Working Poor in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) pp. xix-xx.

strengthen. In considering these issues, this study draws on the work of those including Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, Paul Griffiths and Alexandra Shepard, who have explored what it meant to come to manhood in early modern England and exposed the tensions within the relationship between early modern youth and authority.²⁷ That the familial networks and emotional and social ties of seamen continued despite separations lengthy in both time and distance is a subject which scholars have begun to explore but which remains understudied in respect of the early modern period.²⁸ Influenced by the work of John C. Appleby on the role women played in supporting piracy, and that of Craig Muldrew which has illuminated the construction of early modern social networks, this thesis argues that the supporting networks of those involved in piracy were constructed from ties of obligation - emotional, reputational and financial – which in many cases remained strong despite prolonged separation.²⁹ In beginning a discussion of the networks and connections of early modern seamen this study serves to highlight the necessity for further investigation of this subject, but at the same time is able to draw comparisons and find evidence in the life-writing by Barlow, Coxere, and Norwood.

Much of the evidence considered in this study is concerned with activities in and around the Mediterranean, and the thesis interrogates textual representations of English seamen, including John Ward and James Harris, who made the seemingly radical choice to make new lives as corsairs on the Barbary Coast. Scholars have

²⁷ See Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Paul Griffiths, *Youth and Authority: Formative Experiences in England, 1560-1640* (Oxford: OUP, 1996); Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England*.

²⁸ For work on the cultural construction of Jack Tar as a family man see Isaac Land, *War, Nationalism, and the British Sailor, 1750-1850* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) and Joanne Begiato, 'Tears and the Manly Sailor in England, c.1760-1860', *Journal for Maritime Research*, 17:2 (2015), 117-133.

²⁹ Appleby, *Women and English Piracy*; Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation*.

begun to turn attention to the cultural space of the ocean and refocus on it as a trans-national space of contact, co-operation and conflict, in which piracy was a conduit of trade and cultural connection.³⁰ As England sought to expand trade in the Mediterranean increasing numbers of seamen were brought into contact with the Islamic societies of the Barbary States and, as we will explore, the evidence suggests that many found a market for their skills in these differently-structured societies and were able to thrive. In focussing on the place of their experience in the life cycle, this thesis extends the work of those such as Linda Colley, Gerald MacLean, Nabil Matar and Daniel J. Vitkus which constitutes a detailed exploration of the changing relationship between England and the Islamic powers of the Ottoman Empire and the Barbary Coast during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.³¹ Focussing on the Mediterranean as a nexus of cultural interchange, this study explores evidence that the success of men such as John Ward, who prospered as a corsair on the Barbary Coast, exacerbated domestic anxieties about the breakdown of social order.

Anxieties concerning mobility are particularly evident in depictions of the figure of the pirate in popular ballads and drama, such as Daborne's *A Christian Turned Turk* and Heywood and Rowley's *Fortune by Land and Sea*. In considering these wider cultural responses to piracy, this thesis draws on the work of literary

³⁰ See Bernhard Klein and Gesa McKenith eds., *Sea Changes: Historicizing the Ocean* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Steve Mentz, *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean* (London: Continuum, 2009); Mark G. Hanna, *Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire, 1570-1740* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Jerry Brotton, *This Orient Isle: Elizabethan England and the Islamic World* (London: Allen Lane, 2016).

³¹ Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World 1600-1850* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002); Gerald MacLean, *Looking East: English Writing and the Ottoman Empire before 1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Nabil Matar, *Turks, Moors and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Daniel J. Vitkus, 'Introduction' in *Three Turk Plays from Early Modern England*, ed. by Daniel J. Vitkus (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

scholars who have begun to emphasise the pivotal role which pirates and piracy often played in early modern drama and popular print. Both Barbara Fuchs and Claire Jowitt have emphasised the centrality of piracy in early modern drama, with Fuchs contending that pirates were portrayed simultaneously as the vanguard of the Empire and an increasingly unruly cause of anxiety.³² In *The Culture of Piracy*, Jowitt scrutinises the multivalence of the term ‘piracy’ and highlights the polemical purposes to which the term was used and refashioned to reflect changing political agendas.³³ The work of Laurie Ellinghausen has exposed the tensions inherent within early modern writings of the figure of the renegade.³⁴ This thesis extends this body of work through analysis of the written lives of pirates which evidence that piracy was perceived as breaching boundaries of social class in addition to those of law and nation.

The approach taken in this study is to interrogate textual representations of pirate lives as indicators of cultural tension from two angles. On the one hand, the chronological framework of the thesis based around life choices allows us to construct an assessment of piracy as a means by which seamen attempted to breach the gulf between their hopes and expectations, and practical realities. On the other, it provides a view of piracy in the cultural imagination of a period marked by mobility, expansion and the fluidity of its maritime jurisdiction, against a backdrop of previous fixed certainties. Each chapter examines a particular decisive moment in the lives of individual seamen as described in narrative accounts and reads these in dialogue with texts which place them in the wider social and cultural context. By doing so, we can

³² Barbara Fuchs, ‘Faithless Empires: Pirates, Renegadoes, and the English Nation’, *ELH* 67:1 (2000), 45-69, p.45.

³³ Jowitt, *The Culture of Piracy*.

³⁴ Laurie Ellinghausen, *Pirates, Traitors and Apostates: Renegade Identities in Early Modern English Writing* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018).

attend to how individuals chose to textually construct their lives whilst gaining a better understanding of the cultural work performed by depictions of piracy. Each chapter uses examples of real men's lives to show how they negotiated critical moments of choice which brought them into conflict with authority: Edward Barlow, Edward Coxere and Richard Norwood chose to make careers at sea against the wishes of their families; Coxere and James Harris turned to piracy, with very different consequences; in choosing to 'turn Turk', John Ward chose to forsake both his country and his religion; Harris, Purser and Clinton, and William Fly all chose to use the scaffold as a space to articulate their own stories in ways that challenged orthodox expectations of death.

We begin by considering how young men made the decision to go to sea; how they wrote about that choice and how the decision to choose such a life was perceived more widely. Taking the life writings of Edward Barlow, Edward Coxere and Richard Norwood as a starting point, this chapter focusses on youthful choice of occupation and discusses how these texts reveal the aspirations of these young men and their perceptions of the sea. It explores the shift in social relations indicated by their willingness to defy parental authority and abandon apprenticeships in order to realise their chosen career. The chapter shows how these texts disclose the ways in which these men chose to construct the narrative of their decision-making processes. This, in turn, provides insight into wider attitudes towards the sea and those who derived a living from it. The chapter begins with a close examination of Edward Barlow's extensive journal and how he describes his overwhelming desire to go to sea and, in defiance of his family, he set about realising his choice. This work explores how Barlow's writing reveals a shift in the perceptions of the sea as he began to view it as a route to transform his life for the better. The second section of this chapter builds this argument further by analysing the writings of Edward Coxere

and Richard Norwood who both recounted their youthful departures for sea, again in defiance of parental wishes. Their narratives are read against the fictional account of Robinson Crusoe's departure for sea. Thus, the chapter highlights the challenge which maritime expansion posed to hierarchical social norms. As the chapter explores, these texts by men who had chosen a life at sea, along with tales of their fictional counterparts, such as Crusoe, served as guidance to help other young men navigate the new world of exploration, adventure and opportunity and make choices which had the potential to transform their lives.

Chapter two considers how piracy was defined and perceived, focussing on the contrast between the cultural construction of pirate identity and real 'pirate' lives. The chapter begins with an exploration of how piracy was defined in law as *hostis humani generis*, the enemy of all mankind operating outside the jurisdiction of all nations, yet in practice was treated with considerably more equivocation. The chapter traces changing attitudes towards piracy, in particular between the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I, from one of useful tool of maritime expansion to that of criminalised hindrance to trade and diplomacy, and the co-existence of the practices of illegal piracy and legitimate privateering. The chapter explores the equivalence between piracy and privateering, and the ambiguity with which piracy was frequently treated. In the second part of this chapter we return to the written life of Edward Coxere, focussing on his account of participating in robbery at sea. Coxere's manuscript account is considered alongside the printed final testimony of James Harris who was executed for piracy. The detailed accounts of their piracies are analysed in this chapter, and we consider how, within these texts, they framed their activities for their audience. Engaging with scholarship which casts seamen as interpersonally disconnected, this chapter attends to evidence of family and social networks revealed in these texts. Analysing legal texts and participant narratives

together, this chapter considers attempts to enforce an official narrative against piracy and how this influenced the practise and wider perceptions of piracy.

Chapter three examines textual representation of seamen who made the choice to turn renegade and make new lives as corsairs on the Barbary Coast. This chapter focusses on the life of John Ward, perhaps the most famous, and richly documented, renegade of the period. The chapter sets Ward's life in context by analysing texts such as travel narratives which give accounts of men who had chosen to 'turn Turk', rejecting their countries and often converting to Islam. It then turns to consider the response of the Church, as evidenced in sermons, to renegades who subsequently requested re-admittance to the Christian faith. This chapter contends that despite an outward show of revulsion by many against renegades, evidence reveals a certain level of equivocation with many texts alluding to the possibility of financial reward or a better life available to those who made the choice to turn Turk. Having considered the wider context, the chapter turns to examine how the life and piracy of John Ward were represented in contemporary texts, examining 'place' as a multivalent descriptor. Seen thus, the chapter explores the unease evident within these texts concerning Ward's ascent from poverty to success which co-exists with an acknowledgement of his skill as a seaman. The chapter offers a reading of this considerable body of texts concerning Ward as a public discussion about social advancement, one which perhaps reaches its apotheosis in Robert Daborne's drama, *A Christian Turned Turk*. The chapter ends with an examination of *A Christian Turned Turk* examining the anxieties surrounding mobility evident within the play, which concludes with the fictional death of Ward. Building on the argument made in chapters one and two, that texts reveal the choices to go to sea and to turn to piracy were perceived as means of social mobility, this chapter contends that the

opportunities available to skilled seamen who chose to become renegades posed a challenge to early modern orthodoxies of social hierarchy.

Chapter four explores how pirates chose to articulate their lives and deaths at execution, and how the state attempted to define them. This chapter reads Execution Dock, the site of pirate executions, as a performative space in which both the state and the condemned could construct a narrative. The first section of this chapter is an investigation of pirate executions as ritualised enactments of power by the state informed by Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*.³⁵ Through contemporary textual descriptions of the highly prescribed ceremony for hangings at Execution Dock we consider the alterity – both ceremonial and spatial – of pirate executions. The chapter then moves on to examine texts describing the executions of James Harris and of Purser and Clinton, all hanged for piracy, attending to the ways in which the condemned chose to respond to their imminent deaths. Finally, this chapter discusses the legacy of the scaffold performances of those such as Purser and Clinton on subsequent cultural depictions of pirates, and contends that textual evidence reveals the gallows as a stage where pirates might choose how they responded to official versions of their lives and deaths.

Each of these chapters illuminates a conscious choice on the part of seamen which often placed them in conflict with authority and led to criminalisation. The textual evidence explored in these chapters reveals a perception of the sea as an alternate space in which lives could be reshaped. The chapters investigate turning points, often named as such, where men consciously moved from one identity to another: the age of fourteen years old, when most of our subjects began life at sea

³⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Allen Lane, 1977).

was seen as the ‘choosing time’, and men chose to ‘turn pirate’ or ‘turn Turk’.³⁶ The use of the term ‘turning’ applied to poor seamen, by themselves and by others, indicates a deliberate rejection of landed social hierarchies and values and, this thesis argues, a move towards something new and different. Seamen were at the vanguard of an expansion of maritime trade which made hitherto unimaginable possibilities available to men of humble origins. We now turn to consider young men whose imaginations were fired by tales of adventure at sea, and how they wrote about this.

³⁶ Griffiths, p. 392.

Chapter 1: Wanderlust and Wayward Youth

Introduction

Edward Barlow (1642-1706) was from a young age possessed by an urge to go to sea. He devoted a significant part of his journal to an account of his boyhood and youth, and this is saturated with what he described as his ‘longing desire to go to sea’.¹ These writings primarily describe his struggle to become a mariner.

Throughout his narrative Barlow stresses that the life of a seaman is one that he chose and took some pains to seek out. In this he was unusual, though – as we will see – by no means unique. This chapter asks what it meant to choose a life at sea, and how such a choice was perceived. Although seldom examined by scholars, the decision to go to sea was a significant choice for many young men which set them in opposition to their families. The chapter considers the choice to turn to a life at sea and examines evidence which seems to suggest that seamen often steered an oppositional course emboldening them to assert their agency and make other risky life choices. For most seamen, the early modern sea was a dangerous place. Though England sought to rapidly expand maritime trade and influence during this period, the sea was generally viewed with fear and suspicion. Under the legal jurisdiction of

¹ The manuscript of Edward Barlow’s Journal, London, National Maritime Museum Greenwich, MS JOD/4 was unavailable to the public for a number of years due to ongoing conservation works. In 2019, during the final phase of writing this thesis the manuscript was made available to the public once again but not in time to amend the thesis. The journal has been published as *Barlow’s Journal of his Life at Sea in King’s Ships, East and West Indiamen, and other Merchantmen from 1659 to 1703*, ed. B. Lubbock, 2 vols. (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1934). All subsequent references in this thesis are to this published version unless stated otherwise. Prior to any publication, this thesis will be amended to reference the manuscript directly. The quotation in this paragraph is on p. 34 and further references to this edition will be made as ‘Barlow’ with the appropriate page number.

no nation it was, in the main, a lawless space. Culturally, it remained the Biblical sea, strange, fearful, and teeming with monsters.² What textual evidence then exists to tell us more about the lives of these young men and the motivations which drove adolescents such as Barlow, who had no previous connections to the sea, to actively choose this harsh life?

Seafaring itself was a hazardous occupation with a constant risk of injury or disease, the possibility of capture, enslavement or shipwreck, and a high mortality rate. Few sailors would achieve old age. There was no specific route into the career of mariner, although seamen's guilds which licensed apprenticeships did exist.³ In general, the elite came to a life at sea through the apprenticeship system, the unlucky were kidnapped or pressed into service, and the majority were recruited by officers for a particular voyage.⁴ For those who signed on voluntarily, financial remuneration was the primary attraction of maritime life. Though the wage of a seaman was less than that of a labourer ashore the pay was relatively regular, the seaman was provided with food rations, and there was often a chance for financial profit in other ways – either by receiving shares from the voyage or by shipping and trading goods of their own.⁵

This chapter considers the manuscript accounts of men who described a compulsion towards a life at sea despite, in most cases, having other safer options by which they could have made a living. Rather than going to sea for purely financial

² For examples of Biblical sea-monsters see Daniel 7.3.; Jonah 1.17.; Revelation 13.1.

³ David Loades, 'The English Maritime Community, 1500-1650' in *The Social History of English Seamen, 1485-1649*, ed. by Cheryl A. Fury (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), pp. 10-11.

⁴ J. D. Davies, *Gentlemen and Tarpaulins: The Officers and Men of the Restoration Navy* (Oxford: OUP, 1991), p. 77.

⁵ Loades, p. 14. The issue of seamen's private trade will be discussed in further detail in chapter two.

reasons – though there may have been financial considerations included in their decision-making processes – they went to sea because they felt drawn to it. The evidence often describes the decision to go to sea as being taken in opposition to the wishes of the family of the adolescent protagonist. The story of the boy who ran away to sea is an ancient one, containing echoes of both the biblical story of the prodigal son and of the penitent gallows speech, and this trope can be found within journals, spiritual biographies and ballads throughout the period, reaching perhaps its most sophisticated form in 1719 with Defoe's fiction, *Robinson Crusoe*. Patricia Fumerton has studied the journal of Edward Barlow in some detail in the context of vagrancy, but all of these manuscript accounts are perhaps better placed in the context of other life-writings and texts concerning manhood.⁶ Informed by the work of scholars such as Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos and Paul Griffiths on early modern adolescence, and of Alexandra Shepard on masculinities, this chapter explores these works as a genre of writing which describes the attempts of young men to construct an alternative form of masculinity contesting the codes of manhood, based on patriarchal attributes of marriage and status as house-holder, which were hegemonic in early modern England.⁷

The lives of these young men can be pieced together by the examination of their own accounts alongside the evidence of lives at sea found in other writings. Analysis of signed and marked depositions has revealed that most early modern

⁶ Patricia Fumerton, *Unsettled: The Culture of Mobility and the Working Poor in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

⁷ Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Paul Griffiths, *Youth and Authority: Formative Experiences in England, 1560-1640* (Oxford: OUP, 1996); Alexandra Shepard, 'From Anxious Patriarchs to Refined Gentlemen? Manhood in Britain, circa 1500-1700', *Journal of British Studies*, 44 (2005), 281-295 (pp. 290-291) and *The Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England, 1560-1640* (Oxford: OUP, 2003).

seamen had at least a functional level of literacy in that they could sign their name.⁸

However, many seamen exceeded this basic level of literacy and were able to read complex texts, as disclosed by the work of Margaret E. Schotte, which reveals that the circulation and readership of early modern navigation manuals was not restricted to the elite.⁹ Many seamen had either been taught to read and write as part of their apprenticeship, or in some cases picked up these skills during their travels.¹⁰ Edward Barlow, a seaman whose extensive journal invites detailed examination, had some very basic schooling: ‘My father and mother took care to keep us in school till I learned as far as the Ordenance once through’ (Barlow, p. 16). He continued to improve his literacy throughout his career at sea, and indicates that although he had learnt to read at school he did not learn to write until later in life:

I had but little learning, and could not write before I came to sea, having learned that since, which was all that I did learn, which did me but small good, for I minded the things which I should not have minded. (Barlow, pp. 29-30)

Barlow’s education was typical of that for poor schoolchildren who would rarely learn to write at school but were often taught rudimentary reading skills enabling them to read a Catechism, Psalter or a collection of prayers, usually printed in Gothic or ‘black letter’ type which was easier to read.¹¹

During the seventeenth century these literate seamen began to write records of their own lives. Some, like Barlow, kept journals over many years, others wrote

⁸ Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987), p. 307.

⁹ Margaret E. Schotte, *Sailing School: Navigating Science and Skill, 1550-1800* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2019), p. 10.

¹⁰ Loades, p. 14.

¹¹ Keith Thomas, ‘The Meaning of Literacy in Early Modern England’ in *The Written Word: Literacy in Transition*, ed. by Gerd Baumann (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 97-131 (pp. 99-100); David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge: CUP, 1980), p. 21.

and published pamphlets, accounts of exceptional events – shipwreck, enslavement, piracy. Other lives, such as that of Alexander Selkirk, thought to be the real-life inspiration for the character of Robinson Crusoe, were, as we will discuss in more depth later in this chapter, so extraordinary that they were retold by others and widely published.¹² Some life stories were revealed at the Admiralty court and set down in their records; and more would only come to light as gallows speeches in the guise of final words published and sold to the crowd of onlookers. It is these writings that supply traces suggesting that the act of going to sea was, for some men, a choice to follow an impulse in defiance of family and friends. This chapter's main evidence, Edward Barlow's journal, is the most detailed of its kind extant and, setting it against accounts left by two other men of their going to sea, this chapter interrogates the narratives these men left behind, their descriptions of the urge they felt towards the sea, and how they construct their stories. By closely reading the way these accounts are shaped and placing them in a literary and cultural context, this chapter reveals something of the aspirations of these young men, their perceptions of the sea, and how they fashioned alternative identities for themselves within this maritime space.

1. Edward Barlow: 'My longing desire to go to sea'

The manuscript journal of Edward Barlow is 225,000 words long and tells the story of his life from 1656, when he was fourteen, until 1703, just three years before his death. It is one of the most extensive autobiographical accounts we have of the life of a seventeenth century seaman. Meredith Ann Skura, in her study of Tudor life-writing, describes early modern secular autobiography as a relatively new form with no typical structure, and Adam Smyth has observed that individuals seeking to

¹² James William Kelly, 'Selkirk, Alexander (1676-1721)' in *ODNB* < <https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.bbk.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/25053> > [accessed 20 February 2019]

produce textual records of their lives experimented with form.¹³ By the late seventeenth century there were still many ways to construct a written life, although the diary or journal would eventually achieve pre-eminence as the form in which to arrange life-writing, and authors such as Barlow were acutely aware of their audience and of their own role as both narrator and narrated. It is, then, worth taking the time to examine how Barlow constructed his journal. By the strictest definition this is not a journal, in the sense of an account where entries were made at regular intervals, as at least part of it was written retrospectively. The journal begins by describing events in 1656, yet Barlow did not begin writing it until 1672 and those entries dated prior to 1672 at least must therefore have been recalled and written from memory. It is likely that even entries subsequent to that date may not have been written as discrete entries. The manuscript has the appearance of something which has been reworked from previous drafts into a final or fair copy with little evidence that entries were made individually over time. A National Maritime Museum archivist observed of the manuscript:

There is little to suggest that the manuscript was produced at intervals during the course of thirty years. There are no obvious breaks in the text...and there is practically no alteration of anything that has been set down. I think that this indicates that the sections of the manuscript were all based on earlier drafts, even the first hundred and sixty or so pages, which deal with the period before the capture of the *Experiment*. In support of this, one has the remarkably high standard, both in planning and in execution, which supports that Barlow had had a good deal of experience before he started to write and that he knew exactly how he was going to arrange his book.¹⁴

Barlow's writing was likely produced retrospectively and over a long period of time, perhaps following the revision and reworking of pre-existing texts.¹⁵ Samuel Pepys

¹³ Meredith Anne Skura, *Tudor Autobiography: Listening for Inwardness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 8; Adam Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), p. 2.

¹⁴ Notes appended to London, National Maritime Museum, MS Barlow JOD/4 quoted in Fumerton, *Unsettled*, p. 66.

¹⁵ Smyth, pp. 2-3.

alludes to a similar creative process of writing up his journal into a fair copy from notes or other documents in his diary entry for 10 August 1662: ‘And so good night, and I to my closet in my office to perfect my Journall and to read my solemn vows, and so to bed’.¹⁶ Barlow himself creates the impression of a temporal disjunct, as he describes how and why he began writing his life in 1672 whilst captured and imprisoned by the Dutch off Sumatra:

I having a great deal of spare time, which I thought might be worse spent than in declaring of what I have here in this book, and thus I thought good to describe to my friends and acquaintance and to any which might take the pains to read it over, and here they may understand in part what dangers and troubles poor seamen pass through, and also of the manner and situation of most places which I have been at since I first went to sea. (Barlow, p. 228)

He is writing about an event in the past when the book is written. The book, ‘this book,’ already exists, it is ‘here’ – the reader is reading it – yet Barlow is still writing it, there, in his present as he speaks to the reader.

Patricia Fumerton, who has written extensively on Barlow’s unsettled subjectivity, calls his writing a ‘journal in retrospect’ which combines the immediacy of the moment with retrospective reflection.¹⁷ However, in form and structure Barlow’s account bears traces of a range of writings more varied than just that of the journal. Some of those forms of writing, such as that of travel writing, might perhaps be more expected than others to be reflected in Barlow’s writings. Indeed, much of the later part of Barlow’s journal, in which he gives detailed accounts of the countries which to which he travels, resembles many of those descriptive accounts found gathered together in Hakluyt’s *Principal Navigations*, some of which – like

¹⁶ Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, vol. III, ed. by Robert Latham and William Matthews (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), p. 162. For further discussion on the temporality of Pepys’ composition see Smyth, pp. 210-11.

¹⁷ Fumerton, p. 67.

that of Miles Philips – were written by ordinary seamen.¹⁸ In other parts though, Barlow's journal recalls forms as diverse as the spiritual autobiography, such as that of his contemporary, John Bunyan, and – particularly in his use of illustrations – navigational aids and maps.¹⁹ This is a more sophisticated and complex text than the word 'journal' initially suggests, although it will be referred to as such throughout this study.

Barlow developed fluent writing skills whilst held in captivity by the Dutch, and seems to have had the materials and space to both write and illustrate the journal. Crucially, he had plenty of time in which to reflect on how he wanted to present himself in his writings to the world.²⁰ James S. Amelang has described the process of autobiographical writing as an authorial positioning:

A practice, or process, uniting authorial decision, reflection, and affirmation...consciously choosing to write, locating a viewpoint from which to situate oneself in the world, and taking some sort of stance in one's public and personal realms.²¹

In considering the evidence of the text we examine traces of the conscious decisions Barlow made about how to present himself to the world, and how he would perform Edward Barlow the narrated character. It is not just the form of Barlow's journal of which we must be wary, but also the 'facts' as he presents them. The journal remained unpublished until 1934, yet it was for him 'public' and indicates he was acutely aware of the reader and appears to be writing for an audience, not using the

¹⁸ Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, 12 vols (Glasgow: MacLehose, 1903-1905), IX, pp. 398-445.

¹⁹ John Bunyan, *Grace abounding to the chief of sinners, or, A brief and faithful relation of the exceeding mercy of God in Christ, to his poor servant John Bunyan* (London: 1666). For an example of such illustrated navigational texts see William Hack, *A Waggoner of the South Sea describing the sea coast from Acapulco to Albermarle Isle* (London, 1685).

²⁰ Michael Mascuch, *Origins of the Individualist Self: Autobiography and Self-Identity in England, 1591-1791* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 96.

²¹ James S. Amelang, *The Flight of Icarus: Artisan Autobiography in Early Modern Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 6.

journal solely as a record or reminder of his private thoughts. The readership was possibly those ‘friends and acquaintance’ to which he refers, or he may have had aspirations to circulate his manuscript more widely with a view to publication, but everything in the journal has been carefully selected by Barlow in order to show a particular version of both himself and his life to these unknown readers (Barlow, p. 228). Though the actual facts and events of Barlow’s life are undoubtedly fascinating, the way he frames his story and the words he chooses are in themselves also revealing.

Barlow gives a particularly detailed and vivid account of the events which led up to his eventual career at sea. He was baptised on 6 March 1642 in Prestwich, Manchester. His parents, George and Ann, were poor people and had six children including Edward. His father was a husbandman with a meagre living of about £8 or £9 a year.²² The question of what trade Barlow would take up begins to exercise him very early in the narrative, and immediately he begins to articulate his yearning for travel:

I, having no mind to any trade from a child, always having a mind to hear our neighbours and other people tell of their travels and of strange things in other countries, and of their manners, and having always a mind to see fashions, was forced to go to work with our neighbours sometimes when they had any need of me. (Barlow, p. 15)

Barlow describes himself as unable to fix on a particular trade from a young age. He is possessed of a wanderlust, wanting to hear about ‘travels and of strange things’.

Though at this point it is more likely he is considering domestic rather than overseas travel, the strange holds an allure for Barlow who is seemingly unable to write a

²² J. D. Davies, ‘Barlow, Edward (1642–1706?)’, *ODNB*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/50179>> [accessed 15 January 2016]. In 1660, £9 would have had the same spending worth as £946 in 2017 according to the National Archives currency converter: <<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/>> [accessed 10 September 2019]

sentence about his future life and career without linking it to the thought of travel.

This one particular sentence immediately gives us an insight into Barlow's character and his disposition towards mobility, but is also a sophisticated authorial device, setting up the opposition between desire and duty which, as we will see, frames this first part of the narrative.

Barlow tells us that it was very difficult for his father to place the children into apprenticeships due to the poverty of the family:

My father being a husbandman and for work about the ground, which he could do himself for it was not much, was unable to put us, his children, all to trades by reason the tradesmen would not take us without money or unless we would serve eight or nine years, which is usual for tradesmen in this country. (Barlow, p. 15)

It was common practice during the seventeenth century for masters to charge a fee to take on an apprentice. The family of the apprentice was required to make this payment as a bond guaranteeing good behaviour and honesty. In some cases board and lodging were also required to be subsidised by parents. The bond could be waived in exchange for extension of the term of apprenticeship beyond the required seven years.²³ Barlow explains this in some detail to his reader, the final part of the sentence written in the descriptive style of travel writing, which perhaps indicates his hope that the audience for his writings might include those who were unfamiliar with either the intricacies of the apprenticeship system or the people of Lancashire. As he set out in his journal to help readers 'understand in part what dangers and troubles poor seamen pass though', he may also have wanted them to understand the tribulations of the rural poor (Barlow, p. 228). As a consequence of his family's poverty Barlow was 'forced', as he terms it, to work carrying out small jobs for neighbours until he is finally sent for a fortnight trial apprenticeship, known as 'a-

²³ Patrick Wallis, 'Apprenticeship and Training in Premodern England', *Journal of Economic History*, 68:3 (2008), 832-861 (pp. 833-835).

liking', to a bleacher or 'whitester' working in the manufacture of fustian, a cloth woven from linen and cotton threads, which was widely produced in Lancashire. Barlow was reluctant from the outset, complaining of the difficulty of the work: 'The trade was that of a "whitester", to "whit" yarn and "ffustians", and a hard-working trade' (Barlow, p. 16). Meanwhile, his brother had been sent to work for his uncle, an innkeeper in London – a job which Barlow says he would much rather have done as it would have given him the opportunity to travel:

Then I should have seen some strange things which I always had a desire to see, and to travel from one place to another. For if any of our neighbours had any business in any of the next shires and wanted anyone to go along with them, or if they would send me by myself, I was always ready to go and serve them to the utmost of my small power in any journey, thinking by going I should see some town or place which I had not seen before. (Barlow, p. 17)

Again, Barlow stresses his innate desire to travel – he has 'always' had this longing – and provides clear examples of how, even on a very small scale he has always taken pains to follow this urge. Though the apprenticeship is not a success, while there Barlow does befriend a fellow journeyman and together they pass the time discussing the glamour of travel:

We would often tell what a fine thing it was to travel, and how many times they that had gone a long time returned very gallant with good store of money in their pockets; which made me think that they got their money very easily with a great deal less trouble than I was likely to get any, which made me resolve not to tarry long. (Barlow, p. 18)

Although writing retrospectively, Barlow is able to effectively voice his youthful self. For the young Barlow the length of absence from home is equated with financial gain. At this point in his life he sees a life of travel as a means to make money easily – a view he comes to change later when he bemoans the difficult life of the mariner. He finally tells his father that he does not want to continue with the apprenticeship once the trial is ended, citing the poor food and unfair treatment by his master as the reason. Though these kinds of complaints were commonly made by

apprentices against their masters, to the extent that those masters with a reputation for better treatment of their apprentices were able to charge higher fees to take on an apprentice, Barlow has an ulterior motive and confides in the reader his real reason for terminating the apprenticeship: ‘for my mind being given to see places more remote I could not settle myself to stay at my masters’ (Barlow, p. 19).²⁴

On returning home, Barlow describes feeling uneasy that his family and neighbours would think disapprovingly of him for not persisting with the apprenticeship, ‘saying I would never stay anywhere, for I was given to wandering’ (Barlow, p. 20). The neighbours had noticed this peculiar trait of being ‘given to wandering’, which marked him out as different. In an age where the ideal for a young man was to be subordinate – either to his father within the family, or to a master within an apprenticeship or service – Barlow would neither comply with his father’s wishes nor be bound in an apprenticeship which could be a route out of poverty and into a settled place within the social and economic life of the community.²⁵ Perhaps Barlow felt guilt in attracting this negative attention toward his family in a time when stability of employment was the norm. Where an apprenticeship failed, parents were often condemned in contemporary literature and blamed for paying insufficient heed to the moral qualities of the master with which they had placed their child.²⁶ Whether the disapproval of his neighbours actually existed or was merely conjecture on Barlow’s part, it provided him with the excuse to finally act on his desires and leave home to travel the world.

²⁴ Steven R. Smith, ‘The London Apprentices as Seventeenth-Century Adolescents’, *Past & Present*, 61 (1973), 149-161 (pp. 152-153); and ‘The Ideal and Reality: Apprentice –Master Relationships in Seventeenth Century London’, *History of Education Quarterly*, 21:4 (1981), 449-459 (p. 452).

²⁵ Griffiths, *Youth and Authority*, pp. 1-10.

²⁶ Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England*, p. 13.

Despite Barlow's many hints to the reader that he is 'given to wandering', his decision to leave home appears startlingly abrupt, seemingly made on his way back from the bakers where he had been sent by his mother to buy bread:

Coming home I went up to the chamber where I lay, and put on my best clothes, which were but ordinary in the country... So coming down the stairs, my mother and one of my sisters being in the house and not knowing my intent, marvelled to see me put on my clothes that day. Passing by them, not staring at all, I bid them farewell, and came out of the house. They sat still a while to see whither I would go, and by and bye when I was gotten almost out of call, my mother came out, and seeing that I did intend to go, called to me in the manner you see here drawn, beckoning her hand to come again, and willing me not to go I could not tell whither, and if I would go, to stay till my father came home and see what he would say to it. Yet with all her persuasions she could not entreat me to stay. (Barlow, p. 21)

He describes this scene in such detail that one cannot help but think that the event held great significance for him even with the distance of years. He puts on his best clothes to mark the departure, clearly an extraordinary event for a weekday as his mother and sister marvel at the goings on. The scene described is shaped as one of adolescent departure, a test of nerve for both mother and son. Barlow says goodbye without looking at his mother or his sister, as though he may waver in his resolution if he meets their gaze. They in turn, speechless, sit waiting to see if he will follow through on his threat to leave. When it becomes clear that he is actually leaving, his mother rushes after him, calling out, entreating him to stay. But the moment in which she could detain him has passed and he is on his way.

Barlow's written description of the departure of his youthful self is very moving. His hesitancy is reflected in the structure of his prose which is broken into short phrases, more so than is usual in his writing. This leaves the impression of a wealth of words unspoken – by both himself and his mother – in the spaces between the phrases. The hesitancy may be a reflection of the emotions which the older authorial Barlow felt. He left his family home for London in 1657 and did not see his mother again until 1669, one of only two visits he made back to Prestwich after

leaving, the second being in 1690 (Barlow, p. 412).²⁷ We know that he began writing his account retrospectively while imprisoned in 1673. Perhaps the relatively recent visit to his mother loomed large in his mind at the time of writing and gave him pause to reflect on the impetuosity of his younger self. The description of his leaving is rendered doubly moving by his accompanying illustration of the event, ‘in the manner you see here drawn’ (Figure 1). As Fumerton notes, out of 147 existing sketches in Barlow’s journal this is the only one to feature a human relationship, the majority of them being of ships, coastlines, harbours and animals.²⁸ Gaston Bachelard has written that ‘when we dream of the house we were born in, in the utmost depths of reverie, we participate in this original warmth’.²⁹ Barlow’s family dwelling appears vast in his illustration, much larger than the poverty of his family would suggest, indicative of the centrality of home and of family to him up until this pivotal moment in his life. It is clearly labelled and emplaced: ‘My fathers house in the whitfield’. The house is solid, fixed, his mother the dominant figure in the foreground stretching out her arm to her son, ‘beckoning her hand to come again’, calling for him not to go. But Barlow is gone, moving across the wheatfield, having almost walked off this page of his journal. Although he turns to glance back at his mother, his movement is forward – he is about to step onto another page. And yet the manuscript bears the faintest suggestion of another, kinder, departure. There appears to be the outline of an original sketched left arm raised in a wave. In this version Barlow still grips his staff with his right hand, but has bodily turned to face his mother and has raised his left arm in answer. By choosing not to use this conciliatory

²⁷ Although Barlow’s father had died by the time of his visit in 1690 his mother was still alive, although he says she ‘at first did not know me’.

²⁸ Fumerton, p. 64.

²⁹ Gaston Bachelard and Maria Jolas, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1994), p. xxxvii.

gesture in the final version Barlow sets himself resolutely on the road, his body moving forwards, with only his head turned towards his mother. But the traces of his almost erased attachment to home remain in the phantom raised arm – the gesture which may or may not have existed – and the touchingly detailed portrait, both written and visual, which remains.

Barlow stops to tell his father who is working in the fields that he is leaving for London, and then sets out with eight shillings in his pocket. He pays six of these to the carrier, Thomas Haye, who takes him to London (Barlow, pp. 21-22). Despite his often professed desire to travel Barlow does not describe his journey to London, the first substantial journey he had undertaken, perhaps because he was writing with hindsight after he had experienced many more exotic voyages. However, he wrote at some length about his time in London and how he finally came to go to sea, indicating that this was a time of some significance for him. His writings about this period of his life reveal much about his authorial intent to create a particular version of his life for the reader. Though he depicts his leaving home as a severance of family ties this was far from the truth and his journal shows that he maintained links with his family throughout his life. As was the case with many of those seeking their fortune in London, family connections were crucial to Barlow finding lodgings and employment (Barlow, p. 23).³⁰ Once in London, he immediately went to see his sister Anne, who was working as a servant. She could not help him to secure work and advised him to go and seek out his uncle, landlord of the Dog and Bear in Southwark, the post house for Kent where Barlow's brother was also employed (Barlow, p. 23). Barlow described his journey to the Dog and Bear – and his first sight of the river and sea-going ships:

³⁰ Ben-Amos, p. 160.

First inquiring the way to the Bridge and coming there I looking below the bridge upon the river, and seeing so many things upon the water with long poles standing up in them and a great deal of ropes about them, it made me wonder what they should be, not knowing that they were ships, for I had never seen any before that time. (Barlow, p.23)

Though a striking description, it seems somewhat disingenuous for Barlow to claim that he did not know what the ships were. Even though he may never have seen a large ship before he must have seen smaller river boats and barges and therefore been able to recognise a ship. The River Irwell, a navigable river, runs close by Barlow's childhood home and was used as a major trade route in the area. It is hard to believe that the young Barlow had no notion of a ship. The language Barlow uses describes his 'calling' to the sea in mystical terms, inferring that even though he had no idea of what a ship even looked like he was somehow drawn towards them. In his use of such language, Barlow reveals the conscious shaping of his text create writing to create a particular impression of his decision.

Barlow began working as a servant in his uncle's inn but wrote that he did not get on with his uncle's wife, 'a woman very hard to please and mistrustful' (Barlow, p.25). His journal for this period recounts his discontent with his treatment, in particular by his aunt, and about the work he is asked to do. Steven R. Smith comments that a high number of complaints were brought by apprentices concerning their treatment by women in the household of the masters, to whom they were often subordinate, which might indicate a level of confusion about gender roles in early modern adolescents.³¹ Barlow certainly recorded disagreements with the wives of all the masters to whom he was apprenticed, a factor which may have played a part in his choice of career – at sea there was little likelihood that he would have to be subordinate to a woman. Following a particularly vicious argument, Barlow refused

³¹ Steven R. Smith, 'The London Apprentices as Seventeenth-Century Adolescents', p. 61.

to work under his aunt's supervision inside the inn and would only work in the stables (Barlow, p. 25). He wrote that he constantly returned to the river, perhaps to escape his unhappy situation (Barlow, p. 26). The absences in his descriptions of this time can be seen as significant as the details he includes. Barlow was a boy from a rural background and on his arrival in the capital must have seen many strange new sights at which to marvel. Isabella Whitney, similarly born in Cheshire but living in London, described the city in vivid terms in her 'Wyll and Testament', yet Barlow writes nothing of life in London beyond his miseries at the inn, and the respite afforded him by his visits to the river.³² We can infer that Barlow has chosen to omit details of the wonders of London in order to deliberately frame his life story as a dichotomy between the dull everyday labours on land and the exoticism and allure of a life at sea.

He was however captivated by an event which took place on June 3 1658, when a fifty-eight foot whale ran aground at Greenwich, on land belonging to John Evelyn, attracting crowds of onlookers.³³ Barlow joined the spectators at Greenwich and described the scene:

I found the people so thick about him that I could not in a long time come near him; some giving twopence and threepence the piece to have a bit cut off him about the bigness of a man's finger, that they might show it to their friends (proving) that they had both seen and felt him. Although the crowd was so thick, nevertheless at last, it being low water and the tide was gone out, I crowded amongst the thickest of them to see him, and through great difficulty came to have a sight of him; and still crowding amongst the people I was all over with dust and mud, for he was lying in the river when the water ebbed from him, and it was very dirty: but still pressing amongst them at last I got

³² Betty S. Travitsky, 'Whitney, Isabella (fl. 1566-1573)' in *ODNB*: <<https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.bbk.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/45498>> [accessed 26 April 2019]; Isabella Whitney, 'The maner of her Wyll, and what she left to London: and to all those in it: at her departing' in *A sweet nosgay, or pleasant posye containing a hundred and ten phylosophicall flowers &c.* (London, 1573), C3r.

³³ John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, ed. by William Bray (New York & London: M. Walter Dunne, 1901) p. 323.
<<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/41218/41218-h/41218-h.htm>> [accessed 23 May 2015].

upon the back of him, which lay along in the mud like some great rock in the seas: and having viewed him as much as I thought good I returned home.
(Barlow, p. 25)

It was not enough for Barlow to see the whale, he had to climb onto him so they almost became as one. The appearance of this whale in Barlow's life is perhaps prophetic, as prodigious fish so often were believed to be in early modern England.³⁴ In medieval bestiaries the aspidochelone is a whale-like creature that takes on the appearance of an island when it surfaces (figure. 2). Unwitting sailors anchored themselves to its back believing they had found land but were lost when the aspidochelone dived to the bottom again, dragging their ship with it. This was a commonly understood reference in early modern literature, the creature also being used as a metaphor for Satan by Milton in *Paradise Lost*:

...that Sea-beast
Leviathan, which God of all his works
Created hugest that swim th'Ocean stream:
Him haply slumbring on the *Norway* foam
The Pilot of some small night founder'd Skiff,
Deeming some Island, oft, as Sea men tell,
With fixed Anchor in his skaly rind
Moors by his side under the Lee, while Night
Invests the Sea, and wished Morn delays.³⁵

Barlow's whale, like the aspidochelone, was 'like some great rock in the seas'. He saw himself as compelled to the sea by a power he was unable to resist and at this point in his story the whale can perhaps be seen as representing this force, drawing him inexorably seawards.

Barlow was sent for another trial apprenticeship at a tavern in Dartford, Kent, which he did not like, and returned to his uncle's inn where he said he would stay

³⁴ Joseph P. Ward, 'The Taming of the Thames: Reading the River in the Seventeenth Century', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 71.1 (2008), 55-75.

³⁵ *John Milton: The Major Works*, ed. by Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg, (Oxford: OUP, 2008), p. 361.

and work until he found an occupation he wanted to pursue. He wrote of regularly going to the river to watch the ships, as if mesmerised by them:

And still my mind was to see ships and boats upon the River Thames; and sometimes I would stand where I could see the river for half an hour to see the ships and boats sail along, taking great pleasure therein. (Barlow, p. 26)

Just the mere sight of ships affords him pleasure, whereas any other work was done grudgingly under sufferance. Eventually he was approached by a man who was about to sail for Barbados and offered to take Barlow with him. Barlow accepted but his uncle refused his permission, suspecting that Barlow was being tricked by a ‘sperite’, a type of kidnapper active in luring men on to ships and forcing them to serve as crew (Barlow, pp. 26-27).³⁶ Barlow describes how this episode finally prompted him to voice his longing to his uncle:

[I] told my uncle sometimes that I had a great mind to go to sea: but my sister was against it and my uncle not very willing to it, knowing how many ill husbands and drunken fellows used to go to the sea, and it was a place where many ill vices were in practice. (Barlow, p. 28)

The attitude of Barlow’s uncle and sister towards his chosen occupation reflects the popular perceptions of the sea and of seamen which often featured in contemporary ballads, such as ‘The Mariner’s Delight, or, The Seaman’s Seaven Wives’, which frequently related tales of the scurrilous behaviour of sailors.³⁷ In writing his narrative Barlow is in a sense defining himself in opposition to these stories of the ‘bad’ sailor which were collective knowledge amongst his family. However, despite his misgivings about the immorality of a seaman’s life, Barlow’s uncle eventually relented and agreed to help him find an apprenticeship. In 1659, Edward Barlow was

³⁶ “spirit, n.”. *OED Online*. December 2015. OUP.

<<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.bbk.ac.uk/view/Entry/186867?redirectedFrom=sperite>> [accessed 17 January 2016].

³⁷ Anon, ‘The Mariner’s Delight, or, The Seaman’s Seaven Wives’ (c.1662-1691), *ESTC R227294* in *Broadside Ballads Online* <<http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/view/edition/23423>> [accessed 10 October 2015].

at last able to fulfil his longing desire to go to sea, and was taken on as an apprentice in the Navy by the Chief Master's Mate of the *Naseby*, proudly described by Barlow as 'the third best ship in England' (Barlow, p. 29). It is indicative of the strength of Barlow's desire to go to sea that he signed the indentures for this seven year apprenticeship without even having met his master, although he had complained bitterly about the two masters on his previous trial apprenticeships and constantly quarrelled about work with both his uncle and aunt (Barlow, p. 25).

Barlow relates that on setting sail he immediately suffered a terrible accident – he was struck on the head by the capstan, used for hauling ropes, and knocked unconscious into the hold sustaining an injury which troubled him for more than a year (Barlow, p. 33). Although he does not explicitly name it as such, the highlighting of this incident at this specific point in his story leads the reader to view it as providential. Providential sea stories were common during the seventeenth century, and were anthologised in publications such as *Mr. James Janeway's Legacy to his Friends* (1674) a collection of maritime stories featuring shipwrecks and storms in which God was always the central actor. Such providential narratives could be read in different ways – as a punishment from God; an expression of God's divine deliverance; or a trial or test of resolve.³⁸ Barlow imputes no specific interpretation to his accident. It could be a punishment for his going to sea in defiance of his uncle's wishes – like Jonah, Barlow defied authority by running away to sea and only catastrophe might bring him to order. It could, however, be interpreted as one final trial of his resolve. As shown later in this chapter, Barlow was not alone amongst mariners in describing such seemingly punitive warning incidents as

³⁸ Julie Sievers, 'Drowned Pens and Shaking Hands: Sea Providence Narratives in Seventeenth Century New England', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 63:4 (2006), 743-776 (pp. 750-754).

occurring shortly after they embark on life at sea. However, the accident did not cause Barlow to return to land and reconsider his decision. Anxious to start his new life he continued his journey on the *Naseby* and they sailed to the Sound of Elsinore to assist the Swedes in their war with Denmark. At this point the narrator, 'Barlow', breaks into verse:

... And here I thought good to insert the following lines concerning my
 longing desire to go to sea:-
 I know not by what Diety incited
 To see the Ocean-seas I was delighted,
 Or for to take Delight in such a way
 Where many men and ships have lost their way,
 In such a Dangerous watery Element,
 Where many times both ships and men are sent
 Unto the bottom of those gulfey waves,
 Not knowing how their ships or lives to save.
 At first beginning I am sure I felt great pain
 Of that mischance or fall which to me came;
 Where many times such sudden accidents
 Bereave men of their lives or limbs or sense,
 And many times I after did sustain
 A hungry belly and a thirsty brain.
 And also of great storms are blown
 Unto such places as are not known,
 And near to Rocks and Sands which lie
 Where we expect to die most suddenly;
 And in times of war and Bloody fight
 Great dangers then are at the height.
 I also did Imprisonment endure,
 Which was to me more grief than came before;
 Yet I always put my trust in God and will
 Whatsoever to my fortune will come still. (Barlow, p. 34)

This is a remarkable intervention for Barlow who expressed his intense feelings at that time by using a completely different literary form, something which he repeated at only one other point in his journal: when his ship, the *Experiment*, is almost lost off the Cape of Good Hope (Barlow, pp. 196-197). Both instances in which he uses verse are in response to an intensely emotional event, but these are also among the few times when Barlow explicitly makes reference to God. Looking back on his life at sea, and acknowledging that the life of a seaman was one of great peril and the sea

a ‘Dangerous watery Element’, the poem also strongly indicates that he believed his ‘calling’ to be divinely inspired. In the opening line he described being ‘incited’ to go to sea, but rather ambivalently, ‘I know not by what Diety’. Is this deity God, or Barlow’s own Imp of the Perverse? Barlow himself is unclear, yet by the end of the poem and after all of his travails it is God in whom he put his trust and whom he believed would yet guide him to his fortune.

We must then ask what the use of verse might have meant to Barlow. Verse was widely used as a form for telling providential sea narratives. In his ‘Address to the Reader’ of the 1684 text, *A Monumental Memorial of Marine Mercy*, Richard Steere gives his reason for using verse rather than prose:

I Here present thee with an Impartial Narrative, Collected from a Diurnall, and other Credible Informations of some Persons who had a share in this so never to be forgotten a Deliverance, and at whose Importunity it was Reduced into this small Tract, and shrouded in the modern Attire of Measure and Cadency, whose even and easie pace being more Alluring and Captivating (Especially with youth, or the Crittically Ingenious of this Age) than the Elaborate Volumns of Prose left to us by our Worthy Ancestors, may probably the sooner Decoy or Invite thy Perusal.³⁹

Verse was, then, seen as a fashionable option, but was also more ‘Alluring and Captivating’ than prose, thus would attract readers and, perhaps, would render the telling as unforgettable as the story it conveyed. This quality of memorialisation may have been the appeal of the form to Barlow. Arthur F. Marotti has described how verse, often used to mark a specific occasion, was intercalated within early modern manuscript texts.⁴⁰ With the benefit of hindsight Barlow could see that the moment

³⁹ Richard Steere, *A Memorial of Marine Mercy being an acknowledgement of a high hand of Divine deliverance on the deep in the time of distress, in a late voyage from Boston in New England to London* (Boston, New England, 1683).

⁴⁰ Arthur F. Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 1-9. Evidence of the intercalation of different forms of writing can be seen in contemporary texts such as *Book M* (BL, Add. MS 4454), the manuscript journal of Katherine Austen (1629 – c.1683).

of him leaving for sea was a crucial turning point in his life and wanted to commemorate that in some way. Similarly, his deliverance from shipwreck merited special treatment.

The verse appears to have been composed by Barlow himself rather than copied from elsewhere. It is apparent from his use of verse that he was aware, to some extent, of diverse forms of writing and felt that poetry was more appropriate to convey heightened emotion. Perhaps he felt the prose and illustrations which characterise the rest of the journal could not adequately express his joy at the achievement of his 'longing desire to go to sea', but this use of a quite distinct genre also announces a certain literary ambition for the journal. It is not a mere record of the events of daily life, but a creative endeavour.

Barlow tells us that he had some basic education and could read before he could write. However, he elaborates no further on his reading matter within his journal. We cannot know with any certainty to what models he looked for his literary form. There are no books mentioned in his will and we have no record of the texts to which he had access and might have used as a model for his writings.⁴¹ Margaret Spufford has argued that during the seventeenth century 'illiteracy was everywhere face to face with literacy, and the oral with the printed word,' and Barlow would have been presented not only with a range of texts, but also ballads and songs from which he could draw inspiration.⁴² His contemporary, John Bunyan, who came from a similarly poor family background, described his own reading habits as a youth: 'Give me a Ballard, a News-book, George on Horseback or Bevis of Southampton,

⁴¹ Will of Edward Barlow, Commander of the *Liampo*, 1708, TNA, PROB 11/500/352.

⁴² Margaret Spufford, 'First Steps in Literacy: The Reading and Writing Experiences of the Humblest Seventeenth-Century Spiritual Autobiographers', *Social History*, 4:3 (1978), 407-435 (p. 427).

give me some book that teaches curious Arts, that tells of old Fables; but for the Holy Scriptures I cared not'.⁴³ Though Bunyan has selected these texts as examples to support his own very specific argument they give an idea of the breadth of popular print, both prose and verse available to Barlow. He may have looked for inspiration to other popular plebeian writers such as John Taylor, the self-styled 'Water Poet' (1578-1653), who wrote prolifically in a mixture of prose and verse, or turned to more learned books owned by his master on the *Naseby*. Barlow places 'A hungry belly and a thirsty brain' on an equal footing in his verse. His knowledge of poetry suggests that he had spent some time reading in an attempt to slake his thirst for knowledge.

The tension between his calling to a life at sea and the hardships he endured as a consequence is present throughout Barlow's journal. He complained bitterly and often about the difficulties of the life of a mariner, 'the dangers and troubles poor seamen pass through', and often spoke of being 'compelled' or 'bound' to a life at sea, 'I had bound myself to a hard and miserable calling and there was no way for me but I must endure it' (Barlow, p. 228 and p.112). Barlow was bound for the term of his apprenticeship, but continued to refer to himself in this way even after the apprenticeship has ended. Nevertheless, even in the midst of danger and misery Barlow recalled that he had been called to this vocation: 'But I had always a mind to see strange countries and fashions, which made me bear these extremities with the more patience' (Barlow, p. 61). This compulsion was something which he could never fully explain but which drove him to pursue a life at sea regardless of the protests of his family. Barlow had chosen a life at sea yet consistently described himself as being 'bound', 'called' and 'incited'. It is possible that he hoped to deflect

⁴³ John Bunyan, *A few sighs from hell* (London: 1658), pp. 156-157.

incipient criticism from his readers by implicitly ascribing his actions to a mystical or divine source.

Fumerton persuasively argues that in England during the seventeenth century there existed an ‘economy of unsettledness’ that was no longer anchored in traditional notions of placed markets or labour. In this economy the poor were transient, often itinerant labourers, sometimes vagrant, and estrangement from place caused them to be both physically and psychologically unsettled. For Fumerton, the seaman epitomized the seventeenth century economy of unsettledness that capitalized on wage labour.⁴⁴ The act of going to sea was an occupation, but also a displacement.⁴⁵ She contends that Barlow took up the occupation of seaman as a response to this: ‘When Barlow does eventually settle upon the calling of seaman, he does so to try to stabilize or make legitimate his strongly felt but unsettled subjectivity’.⁴⁶

However, as we have seen, for Barlow a career at sea was not the means to an end – a way of legitimising his unsettled state of mind – it was an end in itself. Barlow rejected an initial offer by his uncle to apprentice him to a waterman as he believed that watermen never left the river and he wanted to go to sea (Barlow, p. 28). The sea was always in his sights and he would not settle for just any occupation that might legitimise his mobility. Whilst he remained on land, Barlow could possibly be considered ‘unsettled’ in terms of Fumerton’s description of the occupationally unsettled poor, although he is always housed with family or prospective employers and was never vagrant or destitute. But once at sea he was not

⁴⁴ Fumerton, p. 31.

⁴⁵ Fumerton, p. 83.

⁴⁶ Fumerton, p. 82.

unsettled. Whether he liked it or not – and frequently he did not – he had answered his calling and had found his place, even if it condemned him to be forever placeless.

Barlow's occupation as seaman eventually led to him gaining a significant measure of success, and his eruption into verse can perhaps be attributed to a retrospective recognition of the obstacles he had overcome in pursuit of his career. Although for many men the occupation of seaman would be one which they moved in and out of, Barlow chose to remain a seaman for the rest of his life.⁴⁷ He played a small part in the restoration of the monarchy by sailing in the *Naseby*, in which Pepys also sailed, to return Charles II to England; he travelled the world sailing to the Barbary Coast, Africa, and the Far East. Though infrequently ashore he married his wife, Mary, in 1678 and they went on to have children, though only two survived beyond infancy (Barlow, pp. 309-310).⁴⁸ Gradually, Barlow worked his way up through the ranks of the merchant navy, eventually achieving his ambition of becoming a captain on the East Indiaman, the *Liampo*. By defying his family's wishes and following his 'calling' Barlow had become successful, an establishment figure. He had far exceeded the financial circumstances of his parents and the expectations they might have held for him had he continued as an apprentice whitester. At his death he had the means to leave bequests of silver goods to his wife, daughter and son. Although Barlow's own defiance of familial authority had led him to success he would not tolerate it in his family. A clause in his will

⁴⁷ Fumerton, p. 92; Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, pp. 82-83.

⁴⁸ During conservation a page of Barlow's journal which had been pasted over was revealed to contain his confession of raping Mary Symons, a servant in his lodgings, who became pregnant with his child. Barlow subsequently married her. For further information see this interview with Robert Blyth, Senior Curator at National Maritime Museum, Greenwich in Maev Kennedy, 'Sailor's Rape Confession Uncovered in 17th-Century Journal', *Guardian*, 18 September 2018 <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/sep/18/secret-unearthed-sailor-17th-century-journal-edward-barlow-national-maritime-museum>> [accessed 20 September 2018]

specified that financial penalties would be incurred by disobedience from his daughter – though not his son:

I give to my daughter Anne Barlow at her coming to age of 21 years and the same to my son Edward but with the proviso to my daughter that if she is not obedient, obliging and willing to take her mother's advice in all things for her good and show herself loving and in all things dutiful as a child ought to be to a parent, that then I give her no more than one quarter of what estate I might appear to be worth at my decease in moneys or goods as aforesaid [...]. But if she proves dutiful and obedient as a child ought to be that then [she] shall have a third as aforesaid but not otherwise.⁴⁹

Barlow himself had been neither obedient nor dutiful but his will is evidence that at the end of his life Barlow had fully assumed a role of patriarchal authority – one which he had, to a certain extent, contested in his youth. His journal ends in 1703, but there was at least one further journey. On 7 January 1706 the *Liampo*, with Barlow as captain, sailed from Portsmouth en route to Mocha but was lost off the coast of Mozambique. Here Barlow's story ends. There is no evidence that he survived the wreck of the *Liampo*. The whale to which he had anchored himself on the banks of the Thames in 1658 had finally dived and dragged him to the depths.

Edward Barlow's writing tells the story of a young man who saw the sea as a way to transform his life. He rejected all other avenues of stable employment that were offered to him – he would not be a bleacher, nor work in an inn, nor be a waterman. He expressed a 'longing desire to go to sea' and, in defiance of his family, refused to accept anything less (Barlow, p. 34). He was vindicated in pursuing his ambition by achieving both financial and social status which far surpassed that of the rest of his family. He related his story – and his subsequent success – in his journal, which appears likely to have been written with a public readership in mind. Although Barlow is worth particular attention because of the length and detail of the journal he

⁴⁹ Will of Edward Barlow, Commander of the *Liampo*, 1708, TNA, PROB 11/500/352.

left behind, he was by no means the only man to leave such a record. Other young men who embarked on a life at sea also left journals or records of their lives and we will now turn to their writings in order to place Barlow's account in context and to further examine the decision to go to sea as a break with authority.

2. 'Bad companie and libertie': Defiance of Authority

Edward Barlow was perhaps unusual in commencing the story of his life with an account of his youth but, as we have seen, in choosing to do so he emphasises events recounted in the early part of his journal as a turning point. Although many accounts exist of the lives of early modern sailors they mostly relate travels and adventures at sea; few recount their initial decision to go to sea. However, Barlow was not entirely unique in writing his youth, and we now focus on two further manuscript accounts of adolescent sailors and consider them alongside other texts, in order to ask whether Barlow's experiences of choosing and subsequently realising his ambition to go to sea were exceptional. How did these other young men shape their recollections of their decision to go to sea, and what can we learn from their accounts about their lives as they chose to tell them?

The expansion of maritime trade during the reign of Elizabeth I provided hitherto unimaginable opportunities for young men to seek their fortune at sea, by means that were not always legal, and something of their lives is captured in the writings of the period. Raphael Holinshed recorded in his *Chronicle* the hanging of the pirates Purser and Clinton which took place in 1583. He appends to this a description of the upbringing and family life of Clinton Atkinson (known as Clinton):

He descended of honest parents, his father speciallie being a man of verie honest name, one that loved the truth, for the testimonie whereof he forsooke

his owne native countrie, leading a hard life with his familie beyond the seas in queene Maries daies: & returning to England in the inthronization of our gracious queene Elisabeth in the seat roiall, was made minister, in which vocation he died in Gods favour, and the good opinion of his neighbors.⁵⁰

Holinshed took pains to stress to the reader that Clinton met his end at Execution

Dock because he did not follow the example of his father.

We are to marke that it is not alwaies true, that good parents have good children: for here is an example of degeneration, procured not by evill education (for this Clinton wanted no good bringing up) but by bad companie and libertie, the verie spoile of many a one that might otherwise live and thrive. Wherin by the way we are to woonder at the counsels of God, who suffreth children so much to varie from their parents in qualitie, as if they had not received their birthright, but were bastards & changelings.⁵¹

Clinton's father was seen as a perfect moral example – a minister, and of good standing with his neighbours. Yet despite this Clinton chose not to follow his father's course. He chose the outside influences of 'bad companie and libertie' over the righteous life of his parents. For Holinshed, to 'varie' from one's parents was to behave unnaturally – any legitimate son would claim their birthright and follow in the footsteps of their righteous father. Holinshed implies that Clinton's refusal to do this sealed his fate and set him on his inexorable journey to Execution Dock. We will return to look in more detail at the lives and deaths of Purser and Clinton in later chapters, however Holinshed's remarks are important in that they demonstrate a perception of pirate origins as being rooted in the youthful choice to defy authority.

Defiance of parental wishes is a topic which hangs heavy in the writings of many of those drawn to the sea, such as Edward Coxere (c. 1633-1694), who left a

⁵⁰ Raphael Holinshed, *The Third volume of Chronicles, beginning at duke William the Norman, commonlie called the Conqueror; and descending by degrees of yeeres to all the kings and queenes of England in their orderlie successions* (London, 1586), p. 1354.

⁵¹ Holinshed, p. 1354.

vivid manuscript account of his life at sea.⁵² Edward Coxere was born in Dover to John Coxere, a sailor, and his wife, Wealthan. His father died when Edward was just five months old, and his mother quickly remarried to Robert Hayward, a cordwainer.⁵³ Coxere's account, which he calls a 'relation' of his adventures, is modest in size in comparison to that of Barlow, yet in it he recounts his life between the ages of fourteen to fifty-one, ending it ten years before his death in 1694. Coxere experienced many dramatic events during these years including shipboard explosion, piracy, enslavement and finally religious conversion.

In form, his account is quarto sized, bound in vellum and stitched together. It is not professionally bound and has the look of something which may have been initially put together by the author himself. It has eighty-seven leaves with writing on both sides and fourteen drawings, one of which is situated within the text and thirteen are separate inserts. His handwriting is clear and confident and although there are some corrections and crossings out they are relatively few in number. Some evidence of Coxere's handwriting practise can be seen on the reverse of some of his illustrations, demonstrating his efforts to make as fair a copy as possible (Figure 3). We can infer from this that he may have been constructing this finished version from notes or records he had made earlier. His writing and his drawings are quite spare in style yet Coxere manages to convey great humour and character in his work.

Although we cannot date the writing of this account with any certainty it can be placed as having been written after his release from Dover town prison in April

⁵² The manuscript of Edward Coxere's account, London, Library of the Society of Friends, MS VOL S 281 is currently unavailable due to ongoing conservation works. The journal has been published as *Adventures by Sea of Edward Coxere* ed. by E. H. W. Meyerstein (Oxford: OUP, 1945) All subsequent references are to this published version and further references to this edition will be made within the text as 'Coxere' with the relevant page number.

⁵³ Bernard Capp, 'Coxere, Edward (*bap.* 1633, *d.* 1694)', *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/64878>> [accessed 21 January 2016].

1685.⁵⁴ He was writing retrospectively and recalling the events from memory or reconstructing them from earlier records. Coxere had converted to Quakerism in 1661 and spent lengthy periods in prison for his faith. He gives no indication of why he began to write this account of his life other than the signed inscription he gives on the first page:

A Relation of the Several Adventures By Sea with the Dangers Difficulties and Hardships I met for Several Years as also the Deliverances and Escapes Through Them for Which I Have Cause to Give the Glory to God. For Ever.
(Coxere, p. 1)

It is possible he saw it as a type of spiritual autobiography in the vein of Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* (1666), or the first Quaker autobiography *A Journal of the life of that faithful servant and minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ Will. Caton*, published in 1684. Although there is no evidence that Coxere had read Caton's work, he and Caton had been prisoners together in Yarmouth in 1664 and had both signed a petition against their poor treatment in gaol.⁵⁵ However, Coxere's writing bears little resemblance to the conventional form of spiritual autobiography – there is no mention of Quakerism, and little talk of God, until he is 136 pages into his narrative where he reaches the point of his conversion.

The absence of religion through the greater part of Coxere's writings suggests that they should not be considered solely through the lens of his conversion to Quakerism. 'Adventure', a term in use from at least 1300, is defined by the *OED* as 'A course of action which invites risk; a perilous or audacious undertaking the

⁵⁴ E. H. W. Meyerstein, 'Introduction', in Edward Coxere, *Adventures by Sea of Edward Coxere*, ed. by E. H. W. Myerstein (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), p. ix.

⁵⁵ Meyerstein, p. xi; *A Collection of the Sufferings of the People Called Quakers for the Testimony of a Good Conscience, Vol. I*, ed. by Joseph Besse (London, 1689), pp. 491-492.

outcome of which is unknown; a daring feat of exploit'.⁵⁶ It was a term often applied to travel and sea narratives, but was also frequently used in the title of tales of chivalric romance.⁵⁷ Although Coxere relates his conversion, he situates it chronologically rather than giving it privilege over other events in his life. His account can perhaps be more accurately described as a chronological telling or, as he terms it, a 'relation' of his life story, with his conversion as the climactic adventure. His use of this term 'adventures' signifies an awareness of the extraordinary nature of his life and raises the possibility that he was writing for a readership broader than that of a conventional conversion narrative.

Like Barlow, Coxere opens his account with a brief but detailed description of how he initially became a seaman. In 1647, aged about fourteen, Coxere was sent by his parents to live in France for a year in order to learn French and prepare himself for a life in trade.⁵⁸ He marks this event in his text by observing this journey 'was the first of my crossing the seas' (Coxere, p. 3). After returning to England, his parents, satisfied with the standard of his French, then sent him to Middleberg in Zeeland to be apprenticed to a wine cooper. Coxere remained in Middleberg for just a week before returning home (Coxere, p. 4). He described the reception on his return thus:

I being sent over, was not there above a week. I met with one of my countrymen who asked me if I would go home again. I consented to it. I

⁵⁶ "adventure, n". *OED Online*, OUP
<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.bbk.ac.uk/view/Entry/2923?rskey=kVYaUk&result=1> [accessed 11 February 2016].

⁵⁷ Examples of these chivalric romances include Anon, *The famous history of Montelion knight of the Oracle, son to the true mirror of princes, the most renowned Persicles, king of Assyria, shewing his strange birth, unfortunate love, perilous adventures in arms, and how he came to the knowledge of his parents* (London, 1668) and Anon, *The Adventures of the Helvetian Hero, with the young Countess of Albania, or, the amours of Armadorus and Vincentina a novel* (London, 1694).

⁵⁸ For further discussion of Coxere's linguistic skills see John Gallagher, 'Language-learning, Orality, and Multilingualism in Early Modern Anglophone Narratives of Mediterranean Captivity', *Renaissance Studies*, 33.4 (2019), 639-661.

steered my course for England again. My friends wonder to see me, asked the reason why I came back. I could give little account but 'did not like'; so got no credit by that voyage. (Coxere, p. 4)

His friends are surprised to see him returned to Dover. When asked the reason for his return he offers the standard answer of the taciturn youth: 'did not like'. He feels unable to give an account for his actions to his friends and offers no further explanation to the reader. The motives of Coxere and the mysterious countryman are lost. Coxere had chosen to return to England, but could not, or would not, articulate his reason for doing so.

Though Coxere gave scant indication of his parents' reaction he clearly felt that his actions had done his reputation no good and he had, 'got no credit by that voyage'. Coxere does not state the circumstances of his apprenticeship in Middleberg or if his family had to pay a bond to place him there. It may have been a trial apprenticeship, or 'a-liking' similar to that experienced by Barlow however this seems less likely in a placement made at such a distance. Although Coxere does not tell us these details, his writings betray a sense that his actions were slightly shameful and attracted a certain amount of disapproval.⁵⁹ Like Barlow, he felt obliged to find another trade quickly, although he seems to have had no appetite for commerce, and could not decide what trade to enter, He wrote, 'I not settling my mind to a trade, my lot fell to the sea. I was sent with James Moran in the *Malaga Factor*, a new ship on trial to be his prentice if I liked the sea' (Coxere, p. 4). As Coxere describes it, he was entirely passive regarding this initial voyage. His words offer two conflicting explanations, that his 'lot fell to the sea' and he 'was sent'. In either case it was not an active choice on his part. He did not enjoy this first voyage. The weather was bad, he was very sea-sick and tyae master of the ship was brutal

⁵⁹ Griffiths, pp. 1-10; Ben-Amos, p. 13.

towards him, constantly threatening to beat him with the end of a rope. At the end of the voyage Coxere said that he was ‘gladly received by my mother again’. He did not stay on as Moran’s apprentice (Coxere, p. 5).

Coxere’s parents hoped this experience would lead him to settle on a safer and more lucrative trade but this was not so, as he wrote:

I was not long at home but the old tiresome tone was sounded in my ears again: ‘What trade now?’ which grew unpleasant to me, for I was to seek then as at the first. I could never settle my mind to any particular trade, so that I was like one who was neither at sea nor ashore. My life began then to be uncomfortable. (Coxere, p. 5)

It is unclear if the ‘old tiresome tone’ of what trade to take up came from Coxere’s parents or is his own inner voice. He writes that his life became uncomfortable but again does not cite the source of this discomfort however his writing betrays the pressure he felt to decide. The reader is left to speculate that his behaviour in rejecting a second apprenticeship was perceived as transgressive. The imagery which he uses to describe his indecision is poetic yet acutely accurate – he is caught between sea and shore, seemingly reluctant to choose either option. His stated inability to settle on a trade is a trait he shares with Barlow.

Eventually, Coxere made his decision and, at the age of fifteen, he signed on as ‘boy’, an apprentice on the *Saint George*, a flagship of the English Navy:

A new master presented, one of our neighbours, William Tatnoll, who was Lieutenant of the Admiral in the Downs, he being willing to have me as his boy, which took very well with me for three reasons: – first, I considered the ship was very great, one of the second rate called the *Saint George*, and that the sea would not toss her as I was tossed before in seven weeks to the Straits and back again; secondly, the lieutenant’s son was my fellow playmate, and my brother John Coxere was then a seaman in the ship. (Coxere, p. 5)

Coxere is clear in his reasons for making this choice, in contrast to his inability to articulate the reason for his return from Middleburg. Despite his unpleasant first voyage, a life at sea still appears to have been preferable to the safer mercantile pursuits which his parents wanted for him. Although Coxere provided little

information about why his previous apprenticeships failed here he offers two cogent arguments for accepting employment on the *Saint George*: firstly, the ship was large which he hoped would make him less susceptible to sea-sickness; secondly he would have familiar companions sailing with him. Safety and security were the paramount concerns for the young Coxere. He is no Barlow seeking the strange and exotic. His argument is clearly coloured by his harsh experience on the *Malaga Factor*, but his preference to have family and friends about him also suggests loneliness and homesickness as a possible explanation for his swift return from Middleburg – the catalyst for which was the appearance of a fellow Englishman.

Whilst anchored off Portsmouth and waiting to set sail the *Saint George* was badly damaged by fire and an explosion, suffering heavy loss of life. Both Coxere and his brother survived and returned home to Dover (Coxere, pp. 6-7). Although Coxere described the explosion in detail and writes movingly of his fears for himself and his brother, accompanying his text with a vivid illustration of the *Saint George* aflame, he ascribes no moral meaning to it (figure 4). Undeterred by this dramatic event after briefly returning home Coxere embarked upon life as a seaman in earnest.

Although Coxere and Barlow both focus on the moment of choosing their career at sea, their writings convey different experiences of choice. Coxere's writings indicate that he pursued a career at sea less from the 'longing desire to go to sea' experienced by Barlow, than as a way of evading the course of life his parents had chosen for him. He did 'not like' his time in Middleberg, the idea of fixing on a trade was 'unpleasant' to him. Like Barlow, Coxere noted the disapproval of his family and friends when he returned from his failed trip to Middleberg and was perhaps keen to deflect any further condemnation for choosing a career at sea. He framed his decision within the text less as a choice than as fate – 'my lot fell to the sea' – but Coxere was a young man of good standing who possessed language skills.

He had been given, and rejected, other much safer and more lucrative options which would offer him a respected position in the community. He was making a choice, using the failed apprenticeships to define what he did not like, until he was finally able to identify and choose what he did like – safety and companionship. Coxere's refusal to persist with his first two apprenticeships, in Middleberg and on the *Malaga Factor*, can be read as a form of negotiation. He would not refuse an apprenticeship *per se*, but would only finally accept one on his own terms. Coxere continued to try and determine his own course throughout his life in the face of capture, enslavement and religious persecution. We will return to Coxere's life again in chapter two as we consider his participation in robbery at sea, but we now turn our attention to the journal of another man who in his writings focussed on his youthful choice to go to sea.

Richard Norwood (1590-1675), was born in Stevenage, Hertfordshire, the son of Edward Norwood, a gentleman farmer.⁶⁰ He began writing about his life in 1639 at the age of 49 after becoming a devout Puritan. He explained that he wrote what he termed his 'confession' as a spiritual exercise: 'I endeavoured to call to mind the whole course of my life and how the Lord had dealt with me'.⁶¹ His confession was by way of an account or a reckoning of his sins and the mercies of God, and his recollections are shaped by his conversion and his religious beliefs. In form, his account loosely follows the structure of the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, a

⁶⁰ Sarah Bendall, 'Norwood, Richard (1590-1675)' in *ODNB* <<https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.bbk.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/20365>> [accessed 28 January 2018]

⁶¹ The manuscript Confession of Richard Norwood is held in the Bermuda National Archive, MS BNT/03/0118. A printed edition has been published for the Bermuda Historical Monuments Trust as *The Journal of Richard Norwood*, ed. by Wesley Frank Craven and Walter B. Hayward (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1945). All future references are to this published edition. This reference is to page 3. Subsequent references in this text will be made as 'Norwood' followed by the page number.

popular model for Protestant life-writing, with a description of three stages: a childhood and youth of sin; repentance but with the prevalence of sin; and full conversion.⁶² Written over the course of just over a year, his account was based on previously made notes:

I had also by me some catalogues as of my sins so also of the mercies of God towards me through the whole course of my life, which I had made shortly after my conversion, and these things were ever a great help to my memory in many things. (Norwood, p. 3)

Norwood wrote in some detail about his method of writing and routine:

I perceived that some things began to grow out of memory, which I thought I should scarce ever have forgotten; and considering that as age came on, forgetfulness would increase upon me, I determined then to set them down in writing. And accordingly I did, spending some time every Saturday in the afternoon for that purpose when other necessary occasions did not hinder me, which oftentimes they did, and so it was the longer ere I had finished it (I think above a year). (Norwood, p. 3)

This passage provides a strong sense that Norwood felt his life and the events which happened to him were important enough to be recorded in writing. His writing betrays the preoccupation of the middle-aged with failing memory, and he may have had some cause for concern as his writings meander, events are often recalled out of chronological sequence, sometimes he has to bring himself back to order following a digression with a ‘but to proceed’ or ‘now I proceed where I left off’ (Norwood, p. 55; p. 14). His account bears scant trace of editing, yet he declares it to be finished, and there is little sense that it was created with a public readership in view.

As with the journals of Barlow and Coxere, Norwood’s was written retrospectively. He begins his account with the year of his birth, 1590, writing that this was ‘the second year after the great overthrow of the Spanish Armada which came to invade England’ (Norwood, p. 4). The very first words of his account are thus linked to the maritime and the great victory about which he must have heard

⁶² Ben-Amos, p. 185.

tales as a child. These words foreshadow Norwood's future career and indicate that, although he may not have written his account for a public readership, he was actively shaping his own narrative. He recounts that he was 'born of Christian parents and under them educated till I was about fifteen years of age' (Norwood, p. 4). His father, Edward Norwood, was a gentleman farmer in Stevenage, Hertfordshire. Norwood wrote that despite his parents and school teachers' efforts to 'plant in my heart some seeds of religion and the fear of God' he had 'excessive vanity and wickedness of my heart and mind even then', and illustrated this with anecdotes of his youthful pride and arrogance (Norwood, pp. 5-14). He questioned the existence of God; drank and fought; had a brief attempt at coining, and, intriguingly, a flirtation with the acting profession:

At Stratford when I was near fifteen years of age, being drawn in by other young men of the town, I acted a woman's part in a stage play. I was so much affected with that practice that had not the Lord prevented it I should have chosen it before any other course of life. (Norwood, p. 6) ⁶³

By 1639, the time of writing, Norwood had travelled to many exotic lands, consorted with pirates, invented the diving bell, become the Surveyor of Bermuda, and undergone religious conversion, and yet his fleeting experience as an actor stayed with him into adulthood as the profession he 'should have chosen before any other', indicating that a life at sea may not have been his first choice of career had he been able to pursue acting (Norwood, p. 6).

Norwood describes his home town of Stony Stratford as 'much given over to deboistness, to swaggering, brawling and fighting, to swearing and drunkenness' (Norwood, p. 14). These youthful excesses by groups of young men occupied a central place in male youth culture, and Norwood seems to have been an active

⁶³ The Stratford to which Norwood refers is Stony Stratford in Buckinghamshire, not Stratford-upon-Avon.

participant.⁶⁴ He writes of his relief when, in an attempt to settle him in a trade, his father finally apprenticed him, at the age of fifteen, to a fishmonger in London, ‘who also dealt in sea-cows’ (Norwood, p. 14). Norwood seems to have been worried about his own capacity for these drunken activities, although this may have been the older Norwood, the narrator, censuring his younger self. Few young men went to London for a quiet life and Norwood was not easily settled. He writes that after a time in London he ‘fell into that sin again’ – referring to his previous drinking habits. But his new environment offered temptations of a different kind. His master’s house was often visited by mariners:

I heard them sometimes discourse of their sea-affairs and of the art of navigation, wherewith I was so much affected that I was most earnestly bent to both understand the art which seemed to me to reach as it were to heaven, and to see the world. And so eagerly were my affections bent upon it that having prefixed to myself a time when [...] I resolved to go to the East Indies. (Norwood, pp. 14-15)

Norwood’s description of his desire to go to sea hints at overreaching ambition. He resolved to travel and to master the art of navigation, reaching to heaven and perhaps, like Icarus, too close to the sun. Norwood writes that he was afflicted with the plague immediately after he made the decision to travel to the Indies, ‘But before that time was fully come I was visited with the plague as aforesaid, which was like to have put a period to all’ (Norwood, p. 15). That he situates this incident within his narrative adjacent to his decision to go to sea, leads the reader to conclude that Norwood viewed his illness as in some way providential although he noted that, ‘The Lord in mercy spared me then also and restored me to health’ (Norwood, p. 14). This suggests that, in retrospect, Norwood views his recovery from the plague as evidence of God’s good favour. He may have interpreted this as a sign of God’s intervention to deliver him from his debauched life and set him on the path which led

⁶⁴ Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England*, pp. 96-113.

to his eventual conversion.⁶⁵ Despite this incident, and the disagreement of his friends who Norwood wrote were ‘utterly against my going to sea’, he persisted with his ambition (Norwood, p. 15). Although his master, the fishmonger, finally agreed that he could serve out his apprenticeship with a kinsman, a seaman who had a coastal trading ship, Norwood’s desire for foreign travel was not satisfied:

I seeing that I was like to gain little or no skill in navigation by his means and to have only short and toilsome voyages as to Newcastle especially, I refused to be bound to him. (Norwood, p. 15)

Norwood overtly refuses to acquiesce to the wishes of his parents or his master and provides justification for this by articulating his refusal as a fully-formed choice to learn navigation, a skill which could improve his circumstances, and a desire for long-distance voyages. He believed that he would not acquire these skills in his apprenticeship. Although an element of instruction was required as part of an apprenticeship, little documentary evidence exists about the specific details of the training provided. Some apprentices did complain about a lack of training from their masters, but we cannot know if this was a deficiency in Norwood’s particular apprenticeship or something which would not have been taught in these circumstances.⁶⁶ Norwood left the apprenticeship in the hope of finding a position where he could travel to far off lands and further these ambitions and was promptly imprisoned, at the instigation of his master, for breaking the terms of his apprenticeship. Norwood later viewed this as a direct consequence of disobeying the wishes of his parents, his master and his friends:

Thus having forsaken the calling wherein my parents had placed me, and betaken myself to another course of life without and against their liking and without any due calling or encouragement from God or men, I met with many troubles. (Norwood, p. 16)

⁶⁵ Sievers, p. 753.

⁶⁶ Wallis, pp. 847-848.

His telling of events is one in which his natural place was to be subject to his parents, unless called by a higher authority – God. The structure of the sentence places Norwood’s ‘troubles’ at the end of this chain of events. His troubles are a consequence of his choice.

Norwood spent the next eighteen months wandering around Europe in poverty. He was shown kindness by Catholic pilgrims travelling to Rome and fell in with them, embracing their religion (Norwood, pp. 22-32). Writing with hindsight, Norwood described this as a period when he had succumbed to temptation. He explicitly linked his behaviour to a fall from grace, describing himself as prey to the devil: ‘Now Satan was leading away in triumph his poor vanquished vassal’ (Norwood, p. 22). He had forsaken the trade in which his parents had placed him, disobeyed his master, ignored the entreaties of his friends and had turned to Catholicism. As a consequence he was an outcast, wandering and destitute.

Norwood’s reneging on his apprenticeship in defiance of his parents’ wishes, and his subsequent adventures and tribulations, can be read as a clear presentation of himself as the prodigal son, a parable which was a popular model for spiritual autobiographies.⁶⁷ He styles his time in Europe as a period in the wilderness. On his return to England, he remained briefly estranged from both Protestantism and his parents. They were reconciled after Norwood received a letter from his father in which he acknowledged and agreed to Norwood’s desire to go to sea. On receipt of this letter Norwood was reunited with his parents, and also returned to Protestantism. He described how his father came to an acceptance of his choice:

Before, he was against my going to sea because he had never been acquainted with seafaring men, was altogether ignorant of that course of life, and thought it the worst of all others, none of our kindred or acquaintance taking that course. He and my mother had often laboured to discourage me by showing me some seafaring men in the city, how raggedly and slovenly they went and

⁶⁷ Ben-Amos, pp. 17-18.

sometimes debauched and drunken, but now having dwelt some years in London he understood it better and was content to further me in it. (Norwood, p. 31)

Norwood's father had initially held the same attitude to sailors which Edward Barlow's uncle and sister displayed – that sailors were an unruly lot. Norwood wrote that his father had come to understand seafarers better, but we can also speculate that this understanding may have been borne out of fear of losing his son. Although Norwood offered repentance for some of his wayward behaviour and he was subsequently reconciled with his father, he never repented of his desire to go to sea and, in fact, it was his father who gave way on this point. This troubles the traditional telling of the prodigal son narrative as, despite his defiance of all authority, Norwood got what he originally wanted. At the age of almost twenty he was finally bound for five years to the master's mate of a ship bound for the Mediterranean (Norwood, p. 35). Norwood's presentation of himself as the returning prodigal does not quite fit and it appears as if the older Norwood is trying to mould the telling of his early life to his later religious sensibilities.

Norwood went on to have a career that took him far from his provincial roots. He studied mathematics and navigation, and tutored the pirate Henry Mainwaring in the art of navigation. Norwood's adventures took him to Bermuda where he made the first survey of the island. He published widely read books on navigation and mathematics. He married and had four children, to whom he left much of his property.⁶⁸ At his death in 1675 his estate was worth £487.13s.11 1/2d (Norwood, p. 142).⁶⁹ Though in his 'Confession' Norwood counted his defiance of authority

⁶⁸ Sarah Bendall, 'Norwood, Richard (1590–1675)'.

⁶⁹ £487.13s.11 1/2d in 1675 was equivalent to approximately £55,489.30 in 2017 according to according to the National Archives currency converter: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/> [accessed 10 September 2019].

amongst his youthful misdeeds, that defiance had shaped his life and he had profited from his choices.

The disobedience to parents in the choice of life path on which Edward Barlow, Edward Coxere and Richard Norwood all focus is more widely articulated in fiction and popular culture, and most significantly finds powerful cultural expression in the early eighteenth century in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* which uses the trope to explore themes of choice and temptation. In *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner* (1719), Crusoe, the narrator and protagonist of the tale, tells us that he was born in 1632, making him a contemporary of Edward Barlow. Crusoe also shares Barlow's longing for the sea, which was much against the wishes of his family:

Being the third Son of the Family, and not bred to any Trade, my head began to be fill'd very earnestly with rambling Thoughts: My Father, who was very ancient, had given me a competent Share of Learning, as far as House-Education, and a Country free-School generally goes, and designed me for the Law; but I would be satisfied with nothing but going to Sea, and my Inclination to this led me so strongly against the Will, nay the Commands of my Father, and against all the Entreaties and Perswasions of my Mother and other Friends, that there seem'd to be something fatal in that Propension of Nature tending directly to the Life of Misery which was to befall me.⁷⁰

We can see many similarities in this account by the fictional Crusoe and the writings of Barlow, Coxere and Norwood. Crusoe's story perhaps most closely resembles that of Richard Norwood in terms of his family status, education, and his overt defiance of the 'Commands' of his father and the entreaties of family and friends. Norwood's spiritual 'confession' is also the closest in form to that of Crusoe, who – writing retrospectively, as do his real life counterparts – asks his reader to see his 'Life of Misery' as a direct consequence of this initial act of filial disobedience. Like Barlow, Coxere and Norwood, Crusoe will be 'satisfied with nothing but going to Sea'.

⁷⁰ Daniel Defoe, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner* (1719), p. 2.

When Crusoe initially voices his ambition to go to sea his father, described as ‘a wise and grave man’, attempts to dissuade him from this course. He urges Crusoe to instead raise his fortune through application and industry and warns him that deviation from the path chosen from him by his parents will upset the natural social order:

He told me it was for men of desperate fortunes on one hand, or of aspiring, superior fortune on the other, who went abroad upon adventures, to rise by enterprize, and make themselves famous in undertakings of a nature out of the common road; that these things were all either too far above me, or too far below me; that mine was the middle state, or what might be called the upper station of low life, which he had found by long experience was the best state in the world, the most suited to human happiness.⁷¹

Crusoe’s father firmly argues for the maintenance of the status quo, as do the parents of all the men whose accounts we have considered. Clinton, Barlow, Coxere and Norwood all rejected their fathers’ wishes and abandoned apprenticeships. In doing so they rejected the patriarchal norms for young men, who would often be subject to the authority of their fathers or their masters until such time as they married and settled into their own households.⁷² These men took to the seas in pursuit of an alternative code of manhood, to make their own way in the world. In Robinson Crusoe, Defoe has taken the essential stories of these men and distilled them down to a morality tale. Crusoe is headstrong and subject to his passions and it is only by undergoing his great trials that he comes to repentance and finally submits to the will of God.

Critical studies have offered a number of readings of Crusoe’s decision to give himself over to this fatal ‘Propension of Nature’ and leave his settled home for the sea. These range from it being a decision made on a purely economic basis, through to it being a consequence of original sin, or indeed a completely inexplicable

⁷¹ Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, p. 2.

⁷² Shepard, ‘From Anxious Patriarchs?’, (p. 293).

act lacking any logical basis.⁷³ The authors of these studies locate Crusoe's decision within Defoe's religious and moral landscape, often considering *Robinson Crusoe* as a response to spiritual texts such as Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. However, they have rarely considered accounts of Crusoe's real-life precursors. A further strand of Defoe studies has long been fascinated with the possible sources for *Robinson Crusoe*, such as the story of the castaway Alexander Selkirk, and much has been written on this subject, with the search for the 'real' Robinson Crusoe continuing up to the present day.⁷⁴ The majority of these works focus on Crusoe's travels, shipwreck, his life on the island, and subsequent rescue. Though many of these studies look at Crusoe's family background, in an effort to identify him, few examine his decision to go to sea. Yet in his recounting of Crusoe's wayward desire to go to sea, Defoe placed his protagonist within a recognisable genre of life-writing by seamen. Stephen H. Gregg, a scholar who has considered Crusoe's rambling thoughts, describes him thus:

Caught between agency and passivity, his will to escape the domestic sphere of rational parental concern is balanced against a seemingly irresistible enslavement to an irrational temptation. It seems a classic "choice" for a youth starting out on the path to manhood.⁷⁵

In many senses, this was indeed a classic choice. Defoe was employing a trope which would be very familiar to his readers. However, for Crusoe's real life counterparts this was no irrational temptation. Their writings reveal that all had a

⁷³ For a summary of critical responses to Robinson Crusoe's departure see Geoffrey Sill, *The Cure of the Passions and the Origins of the English Novel* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), p. 86.

⁷⁴ Writings on the possible sources for *Robinson Crusoe* are extensive and include Arthur Wellesley Secord, *Studies in the Narrative Method of Defoe* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963); David Fausett, *The Strange Surprising Sources of Robinson Crusoe* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994); Tim Severin, *In Search of Robinson Crusoe* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

⁷⁵ Stephen H. Gregg, *Defoe's Writings and Manliness: Contrary Men* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 60.

rationale for their decision to go to sea, although they may often have found it difficult to articulate. Crusoe stood in the footprint of Barlow and many other young men who had made that choice before him and who had, crucially, left a record of how and why they came to that decision.

All of the narratives so far discussed initially subscribe to a format similar to that of the spiritual autobiography, though perhaps only Norwood's journal could accurately be described as such. When looking back on their decision to go to sea each author portrayed their youthful rebellion against parental authority as transgressive. In each case, defiance is swiftly followed by a disaster such as accident, tempest, or illness – an act of God – in accordance with the conventions of spiritual autobiography. Yet despite the misfortunes which befall them, none of these men recanted their decision to go to sea and all went on to have long careers as seamen. Although they defied the authority of their parents and the masters to whom they were apprenticed none of these men experienced a permanent rift with their families. In each case, the parental figure eventually acquiesced to their son's choice of career. Barlow, Coxere, Norwood, and Crusoe, certainly Clinton, found the thought of following in their fathers' settled footsteps dull. None of them could 'settle' on a career on land, even one which might bring them stability and prosperity. Each of these men hoped for social transformation, something which would elevate them beyond the experience and social status of their parents. As Norwood termed it, 'The Lord had given me occasion to hope for better things' (Norwood, p. 45). Relating to the texts given we can now examine what might have led to the formulation of these aspirations.

3. 'Stories of that Sort'

What motivated seamen such as Barlow, Coxere and Norwood to write their lives? Barlow stated that he did so in order that his friends might, 'understand in part what dangers and troubles poor seamen pass through, and also of the manner and situation of most places which I have been at since I first went to sea'; Coxere's account was a relation of his adventures, the dangers and difficulties he experienced, and his deliverance from them; Norwood's an attempt to 'call to mind the whole course of my life past, and how the Lord had dealt with me'.⁷⁶ Many accounts written by, and about, early modern seamen – including those examined earlier in this chapter – recount the significance of storytelling in the lives of sailors. Little investigation has been made into the role of storytelling in shaping the ambitions of young men or how this oral tradition informed written narratives, yet the frequency with which it is mentioned – often at decisive points in men's lives – shows its significance.

On the twenty-first of July 1721, Walter Kennedy, aged twenty-six years old, was hanged for piracy at Execution Dock. His story is told in the anonymously authored *Lives of the most Remarkable Criminals* (1735), a sensational publication which claimed to be based on an original collection of papers and memoirs.⁷⁷

Though his piratical career had taken Kennedy to the Caribbean and Africa he had returned home to be executed – he was born at Pelican Stairs in Wapping, adjacent to Execution Dock. Like all the young men discussed in this chapter, Kennedy came from a family who had respectable aspirations for him: 'His Father was an Anchor-Smith, a man of good reputation, who gave his son, Walter, the best education he

⁷⁶ Barlow, p. 228; Coxere, p. 1; Norwood, p. 3.

⁷⁷ Anon, *The Lives of the most Remarkable Criminals, who have been Condemn'd and Executed; For Murder, Highway, House-Breakers, Street-Robberies, Coining, or Other Offences; From the Year 1720 to the Present Time*, (London, 1735), Vol. I, pp. 51-62.

was able'. When old enough, Walter was bound to his father as an apprentice, but his life was irrevocably changed when his father died before the apprenticeship ended. Kennedy 'then followed his own roving Inclinations and went to Sea'. He served in the Royal Navy during the War of Spanish Succession where he 'often had occasion to hear of the Exploits of the Pyrates, both in the East and West-Indies, and of their having got several Islands into their Possession, wherein they were settled, and in which they exercis'd a Sovereign Power'.⁷⁸ Kennedy shared the 'roving Inclinations' of Coxere, Barlow and Norwood but was explicitly motivated further in his own exploits by these stories of pirates:

These Tales had a wonderful effect on Walter's disposition, and created in him a secret Ambition of making a Figure in the same Way; he became more than ordinarily attentive, whenever Stories of that Sort were told, and sought every opportunity of putting his fellow Sailors upon such Relations. Men of that profession have usually good Memories with respect (at least) to such Matters; and Kennedy, therefore without much difficulty, became acquainted with the principal Expeditions of these Maritime Desperado's; [...] His fancy insinuating to him continually that he might be able to make as great a Figure as any of these thievish Heroes, whenever a proper Opportunity offered.⁷⁹

This short passage imparts a wealth of information about the oral culture of early modern sailors. The author notes that Kennedy was 'more than ordinarily attentive whenever Stories of that Sort were told'. These pirate stories were told frequently enough to be typified as 'that Sort' – there must therefore have been other sorts from which they needed to be distinguished, hinting at a vibrant story-telling culture. This account indicates that even without the attendance of the eager Kennedy these tales would draw an attentive audience; and there is an inference that it was common practice for sailors to request the telling of particular stories – Kennedy 'sought every opportunity of putting his fellow Sailors upon such Relations'. We are also told that mariners could remember stories easily: 'Men of that profession have

⁷⁸ *Lives of the most Remarkable Criminals*, p. 53.

⁷⁹ *Lives of the most Remarkable Criminals*, pp. 53-54.

usually good Memories with respect (at least) to such Matters'. Seamen memorised these stories in order to circulate them.

Sailors became consummate storytellers through the practice of relating their extraordinary experiences. Although there was a degree of literacy amongst early modern seafarers, with almost two-thirds of common seamen able to sign their name by 1724, a strong oral tradition persisted among sailors.⁸⁰ The mariners' story is borne of a captive audience of men aboard ship, who have a rhythm of work and boredom in common. Walter Benjamin described this storytelling as 'an artisan form of communication' woven into the milieu of work and evokes the seafarer's experience well.⁸¹ The story was entertainment during those long periods when there might be nothing to do, or to help the equally long periods of tedious work pass quicker. The sailor fits a particular category in Benjamin's taxonomy of storytellers as 'someone who has come from afar' with something to tell.⁸² Yet storytelling had a function beyond mere means of entertainment or pastime. In his study of nineteenth century French soldiers' and sailors' memoirs, David M. Hopkin demonstrates that 'storytelling was a means by which soldiers and sailors made sense of their experiences, expressed their understanding to others and devised strategies to cope with the circumstances of their lives'.⁸³ Although the story is not directly a report it contains something of the essence of the storyteller's experience and as such was a useful method for passing on knowledge. Through the circulation of stories sailors could convey details about work conditions, navigation, and tips about how to

⁸⁰ Marcus Rediker, *Outlaws of the Atlantic: Sailors, Pirates and Motley Crews in the Age of Sail* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014), p. 9.

⁸¹ Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 83-109 (p. 91).

⁸² Benjamin, (p. 84).

⁸³ David M. Hopkin, 'Fairytale and Autobiography: Some Observations on Eighteenth- and Nineteenth Century French Soldiers' and Sailors' Memoirs', *Social History*, 29:2 (2004), 186-198 (p. 188).

negotiate the new and dangerous situations they often found themselves in. Much of the early scientific knowledge gained by those explorers such as William Dampier was gleaned from those stories which sailors told.⁸⁴ Stories became embedded within a sailor's life to be recalled, like a work song for heaving ropes, by the rhythm of work, or to be performed and used as a form of social capital to impress audiences.⁸⁵

Stories were also thought to be used to attract young men to the sea. They emphasised the adventurous, exotic, and sometimes heroic, aspects of life at sea and could potentially motivate young men to choose a career as a seaman.⁸⁶ The author of *Lives of the most Remarkable Criminals* relates that Kennedy was captivated by the stories, seeing in them a model by which he might fashion himself a different life, and that these inspired his subsequent actions. In 1718, Kennedy joined a ship captained by Woodes Rogers, who was sailing to the Bahamas on a commission to hunt pirates. On reaching the Caribbean, he immediately jumped ship and joined the pirates. *Lives of the most Remarkable Criminals* reported that Kennedy was not only inspired by stories, but told them himself: 'Kennedy took a particular Delight in relating what happen'd to him in these Expeditions, even after they had bought him to Misery and Confinement'.⁸⁷ Kennedy was depicted awaiting execution in prison but still telling stories of his time as a pirate. The text evidences an anxiety about information and knowledge circulating freely amongst networks of potentially criminal seamen.

Walter Kennedy is presented as tempted towards a life of crime by imagining himself as the hero of tales he had heard about pirate kings. Other seamen, too, recalled the influence of stories in their lives. Richard Norwood had set his face

⁸⁴ Rediker, *Outlaws of the Atlantic*, pp. 16-17.

⁸⁵ Benjamin, p. 92; Rediker, *Outlaws of the Atlantic*, p. 12.

⁸⁶ Hopkin, p. 197.

⁸⁷ *Lives of the most Remarkable Criminals*, p. 56.

towards the sea after hearing mariners ‘discourse of their sea-affairs and of the art of navigation’ (Norwood, p. 14). These mariners overheard by Norwood met together to exchange information about their profession, crucially, technical information about navigation. As Dampier had gathered scientific knowledge, so much about the art of navigation was passed on by word of mouth between sailors despite the existence of printed maps and navigational aids. Edward Barlow recounted how as a child he had sought out stories and had always had ‘a mind to hear our neighbours and other people tell of their travels and of strange things in other countries’ (Barlow, p. 15). These stories ignited in him the desire to travel, to ‘see some strange things which I always had a desire to see, and to travel from one place to another’ (Barlow, p. 17). As we saw, Barlow wrote that during his trial apprenticeship with the bleacher he and his fellow journeyman often passed the time by telling stories about how they might become rich through travel, ‘We would often tell what a fine thing it was to travel’ (Barlow, p. 17). The telling of stories influenced these young men, made them want to experience similar things themselves, and planted or nurtured seeds in their minds of other possible lives.

Just as Walter Kennedy is painted as disseminating information through his stories to the very end of his life, we can argue that Barlow, Coxere and Norwood similarly told their stories through their writings. All of these written life stories bear within them traces of both the form and function of the sailor’s art of storytelling. Primarily, all of these autobiographical accounts are entertaining. Each of the authors has an engaging conversational style of writing and the scenes they describe can be easily visualised, such as Barlow’s account of his departure from home or Coxere’s description of himself as a boy asleep: ‘When I would go to sleep I would shut my eyes and lay my head on my hand’ (Coxere, p. 4). They tell tales of wonder to dazzle their reader and exotic lands, sea battles, pirates and strange creatures feature

heavily. But these stories are not merely to entertain. As with the spoken story, each incident in the written accounts of these men imparts knowledge and information.

Norwood tells of his cure for sea-sickness, and the edible berries of Bermuda

(Norwood, pp. 39 & 56). Barlow's journal is a wealth of information about everything from the apprenticeship system in Lancashire to the quality of shipboard rations:

We had nothing but a little bit of Irish beef for four men, which had lain in pickle two or three years and was rusty as the Devil, with a little stinking oil or butter, which was all the colours of the rainbow. (Barlow, p. 68)

His account is full of warnings for the unwary traveller, such as about sharks:

They are so hungry and ravenous, and will seize upon any man if he should be swimming in the water, so that in some places men, as they have been swimming for recreation, have had their legs bitten off and also have been carried away and never seen more, so that great heed must be taken to them when anyone is swimming where any of these fish are. (Barlow, p. 82)

These stories are entertaining for the general reader, possibly friends or family who might never travel, but they also closely follow the function of the oral tradition in acting as a tool by which to impart knowledge to the readership.

In the preface to his *General history of the robberies and murders of the most notorious pyrates* (1724), the pseudonymous author, Charles Johnson, assures his reader that his pages contain the truth:

Those Facts which he himself was not an Eye-Witness of, he had from the authentick Relations of the Persons concerned in taking the Pyrates, as well as from the Mouths of the Pyrates themselves, after they were taken, and he conceives no Man can produce better Testimonies to support the Credit of any History.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Captain Charles Johnson, *A general history of the robberies and murders of the most notorious pyrates, and also their policies, discipline and government, from their first rise and settlement in the island of Providence, in 1717, to the present Year 1724* (London, 1724), A4^r.

Johnson's words demonstrate that stories told by sailors were being gathered for publication, and that, as first-hand accounts they were valued and believed to have the authority of truth.

We can read the accounts of Barlow, Coxere, and Norwood's youthful decisions to go to sea within this framework of the story as a conduit of truth, information and experience, but also of fantasy and projection. All of the men here discussed began their life stories at the age of fourteen. This was seen as 'the choosing time' for many young people in the seventeenth century, the time when they would decide which path in life they would take.⁸⁹ Most would take the middle path, the safe path well-trodden by their fathers, as the fictional Crusoe's father implored him to do. But stories fuelled ambitions for a different way of life, ambitions which in detail differed from man to man but which could not be fulfilled without a sea-change. Foucault wrote that ships were 'the greatest reserve of imagination' and that 'in civilizations without boats, dreams dry up'.⁹⁰ England was in the process of constructing a maritime empire and was fecund with dreams. Those of Barlow, Coxere, Norwood, and Kennedy were populated by ships and the stories they had heard from other sailors. By setting out their own stories of filial disobedience, which resulted in both adventure and success beyond that of their parents, the real-life men we have discussed were offering a model of manhood which was an alternative to that middle state, the status quo.

⁸⁹ Griffiths, p. 392.

⁹⁰ Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics* 16 (1986), 22-27, p. 27.

Conclusion

Throughout the seventeenth century a number of men recorded their youthful experiences of defying parental wishes and abandoning apprenticeships on land in order to go to sea. This defiance of authority, which finds echoes in wider literature of the period, is indicative of a shift in social relations. Young men were now exercising a degree of independence and choosing a different career from that dictated by their parents. The men themselves struggled to make sense of this situation, often attributing it to a compulsion, such as Barlow's 'longing desire to go to sea'.

Most of the men describe having had their ambitions stoked by hearing stories, either from sailors themselves or from neighbours who passed on stories they had picked up on their travels. The stories told by sailors, to which the errant apprentices responded, are in sharp contrast to those which were heard by their families. These stories represent a dichotomy in the perception of the sailor during this period. For some – the sailors themselves, and those adventurous youths their lifestyle appealed to – sailors were brave, honest, adventurous and industrious. For others, such as Norwood's father and Barlow's uncle, they were a drunken and immoral rabble. Benjamin defines two different types of storyteller: someone who has come from afar, and the man who has stayed at home.⁹¹ For Benjamin, the man who has stayed at home passes on local tales and traditions, the man who comes from afar tells stories of the strange and exotic. The stories and ballads denigrating sailors may have held a truth about the behaviour of seamen, but they also serve the function of rendering the idea of a life at sea unsavoury and morally questionable. In the case of Barlow, Norwood and, reportedly, Kennedy, the tales of the sailor, the

⁹¹ Benjamin, p. 92.

archetypal man from afar, acted as a siren song disrupting the continuity of place and tradition told in stories by the men who stay at home. For such wayward youths the sea became a place where they might realise possibilities – Norwood could learn the art of navigation, Barlow would see ‘strange things in other countries’, Kennedy might, albeit fleetingly, find liberty.

All of the journal writers, like the fictional Robinson Crusoe, argue with their families over their choice to go to sea. These often bitter and protracted disputes are described in some detail by the authors. Although initially appearing to mimic the prodigal son narrative by relating providential events which befell them subsequent to their parental defiance, these accounts disrupt the traditional arc of this narrative. The authors never repent their decision. These small acts of defiance signify a change of wider societal significance. Expansion of trade into the New World offered young men the opportunity of experiences which were previously inconceivable. It seems that the stories they heard made it possible for them to imagine a life that was different from that of their parents. Although each hoped for quite different outcomes for their life of travel, they shared the experience of having ambitions and exercising choice. More than merely running away to escape the type of lives their parents led, they could also conceive of a new sort of life and were running towards it. As Norwood termed it, he had ‘occasion to hope for better things’ (Norwood, p. 45).

None of these men published their journals during their lifetime. Although we cannot know what their intentions were in writing the stories of their lives at sea it is possible that they intended them to be circulated and read by others. In this sense, though the authors were translating the traditional telling of sailor stories into a new medium, they were themselves storytellers. Their manuscripts fulfil all the functions of traditionally told sailor stories – the text, diagrams and illustrations all

impart the knowledge and wisdom gained from their extraordinary experiences to anyone who might consider a life at sea. Their descriptions of the manner of their leaving home also offer an invaluable insight into conflicting perceptions of England's rapidly expanding seaborne workforce, and a window into the minds of young men whose world had expanded far beyond that of their parents. In chapter two, we pursue the question of a seafaring life being one of choice and we turn to consider how some of these men continued to fashion their own lives whilst grappling with the constantly shifting boundaries between legality and illegality on the early modern seas and, in doing so, became pirates.

Chapter 2: Turning Pirate

Introduction

In chapter one we saw how, in choosing a life at sea, young men began to determine their own lives. In this chapter we move on to ask what made men – often the same men – turn to robbery at sea, how they wrote about this choice, and how it was perceived by others. Examination of the manuscript accounts of these seamen, alongside texts such as official records, pamphlets and popular print may reveal something of the complexity of attitudes towards piracy in early modern England and develop a more nuanced understanding of the choices, aspirations, and lives of those who turned to it, in the context of their social world. This chapter considers two key areas in which perceptions of piracy are textually manifest, beginning with an exploration of the shifting early modern landscape of maritime law to help us more accurately locate the experience of those seamen who turned to piracy. We then turn to discuss piracy in the social sphere, focussing on textual accounts of participants: the seamen Edward Coxere and James Harris. Read together, this breadth of textual material may provide evidence that social attitudes towards maritime crime were more complex than the narrative provided in official documents suggests.

The figure of the pirate is often depicted in twentieth and twenty-first century popular culture as having no other identity than that of pirate; pirates have no past, no family, no life other than that of piracy. They will be pirates until they are killed in battle or hanged for their crimes.¹ Yet for the sixteenth and seventeenth century mariner, identities were more fluid and maritime plunder was both occupation and

¹ For example see the character of Jack Sparrow in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* film series (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2003-2017).

occupational hazard. During the course of a single voyage a man might become both robber and robbed. Although outright piracy was frequently and vigorously denounced in official literature, in practice the distinction between licit trade and illicit piracy was often opaque and difficult to navigate. Seamen frequently veered back and forth across the permeable boundary which separated privateering and piracy. Many seamen, their families and social networks, derived an income from plunder, suggesting a level of acceptance which complicated the official narrative against piracy. How, then, was piracy perceived, both by early modern seamen and by wider society?

If we are to discover more about the motivations of those who turned to robbery at sea and social attitudes towards them we must examine the textual evidence, including textual accounts of participants. This chapter further interrogates the manuscript account of Edward Coxere, who we first encountered setting out to sea in chapter one. We will see how, as his career at sea developed, Coxere described ‘plunder’ as just one among a number of income streams from which he hoped to profit. In addition to Coxere’s manuscript, we will also consider the final testimony of James Harris, reportedly written in his own hand and printed on the occasion of his execution for piracy in 1609, in which Harris relates his journey from respected merchant to the gallows at Execution Dock. We attend to these two different types of participant accounts to discover the insights they reveal about attitudes towards piracy.

Contemporary perceptions of maritime plunder deserve further attention, not least because pirates hold such a significant place in our own imagination and culture. By interrogating early modern piratical texts we may gain a deeper understanding of the breadth of contemporary attitudes towards maritime plunder and avoid projecting anachronistic views onto the figure of the pirate. As Mark

Hanna has described, the modern historiography of piracy has categorised pirates as detached from human society and in rebellion against landed norms.² Writers such as B.R. Burg, Christopher Hill and Marcus Rediker have argued that many chose to turn pirate as the result of a coherent radical ideology which caused them to rebel against landed authority.³ Others, such as David Cordingly and Peter Earle suggest that pirates were little more than criminals motivated by greed.⁴ In either description, pirates are outsiders. However, as we will see, many men involved in piracy retained close connections to family and landed society and were not necessarily career criminals.

Investigation of the blurred boundaries between piracy and privateering yields further evidence regarding the social acceptance or rejection of the label of 'pirate'. Historically, piracy has been viewed as an exceptional form of crime with pirates considered, since the classical era, to be the 'enemy of all humankind' – '*hostis humani generis*' – one of the first defined international crimes subject to universal justice.⁵ The word 'plunder', often used in contemporary accounts to describe these activities, refers to the systematic pillage, despoilment or forcible robbery of goods or valuables, typically in a time of war or civil disorder. Yet during the seventeenth century the word was also used as a variant of 'blunder', meaning to

² Mark Hanna, *Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire, 1570-1740* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), p. 7.

³ See B. R Burg, *Sodomy and the Pirate Tradition: English Sea Rovers in the Seventeenth Century Caribbean* (New York: NYU Press, 1995); Christopher Hill, 'Radical Pirates?' in Margaret Jacob and James Jacob, eds., *The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism* (London: Humanities Press International, 1984); Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987).

⁴ See David Cordingly, *Pirate Hunter of the Caribbean: The Adventurous Life of Captain Woodes Rogers* (New York: Random House, 2011); Peter Earle, *The Pirate Wars* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003).

⁵ Christopher Harding, "'*Hostis Humani Generis*': The Pirate as Outlaw in the Early Modern Law of the Sea' in *Pirates? The Politics of Plunder, 1550-1650*, ed. by Claire Jowitt (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 20-38 (pp. 20-24).

confuse, confound or muddle.⁶ This second usage may register some of the confusion which existed between piracy and privateering. Given a certain amount of equivalence between piracy and privateering – both in the nature of the activity and the identity of the perpetrators – the co-existence and definition of these two activities shaped contemporary perceptions of piracy.

1. ‘Water thieves’: The Law of Maritime Plunder

Our exploration of contemporary perceptions of piracy begins by considering how piracy was characterised and defined in law. What made piracy a distinctive crime? In Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*, Shylock describes to Bassanio the potential disasters lying in wait for early modern trading vessels: ‘There be land rats and water rats, water thieves and land thieves – I mean pirates – and then there is the peril of waters, winds, and rocks’.⁷ Piracy is portrayed by Shylock as robbery at sea perpetrated by ‘water thieves’ who are equated with their terrestrial counterparts, ‘land thieves’. Piracy is listed along with the elements, water, wind and rocks, as though it, too, is an ever-present natural phenomenon beyond the control of man. Eugene Kontorovich has similarly observed that piracy is, by definition, simply robbery at sea, adding that robbery itself has never been considered a particularly depraved crime.⁸ However, historically piracy has been legally categorised as a heinous crime which attracts special opprobrium and severe penalties: the death sentence for attempted murder during an act of piracy remained in English law until

⁶ “Plunder, v.1”.in *OED Online*
 <<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.bbk.ac.uk/view/Entry/146167>> [accessed November 24, 2018].

⁷ William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. by Jay L. Halio, 4th edition (Oxford: OUP, 2008), I.3.23.

⁸ Eugene Kontorovich, ‘The Piracy Analogy: Modern Universal Jurisdiction’s Hollow Foundation’, *Harvard International Law Journal*, 45 (2004), 183-92 (p. 187).

1998.⁹ Piracy is regulated by international law which confers universal jurisdiction over acts of piracy committed at sea outside of national jurisdiction.¹⁰ Universal jurisdiction also applies to other crimes such as torture and crimes against humanity which are generally understood to exceed the limits of acceptable human behaviour. To understand early modern perceptions of piracy, we must first make a more detailed exploration of how it was understood in law and why, if it was merely robbery at sea, it was treated quite differently to robbery on land.

In 1609, James I issued a proclamation against piracy which set out the penalties those engaged in piracy, or aiding pirates, would incur. The reasons for the proclamation were stated thus:

The Kings Majestie, having bene informed through the manifold complaints made to his highnesse by his owne Subjects as others, of the many depredations and Piracies committed by lewd and ill disposed persons, accustomed and habituated to spoile and rapine, insensible and desperate of the peril they draw upon themselves, and the imputation they cast upon the honour of their Sovereigne so precious to him, as for redresse thereof he is forced to reiterate and inculcate his loathing and detestation not onely of the crimes, but also to manifest to the world his sinceritie and exceeding desires for the due & speedy suppressing of the delinquents.¹¹

Here piracy is a loathsome act carried out by lewd and ill-disposed persons. It is abhorred by the King and, seemingly, the whole world. A failure to address the issue of piracy would see the reputation of James besmirched: he must be seen to tackle the problem in order to ‘manifest to the world his sinceritie’. Piracy affected trade and was a depredation which had international implications at the highest level. This proclamation was in part performative, intended to placate the Venetians who, as we

⁹ Abolition of death penalty for treason and piracy can be found in section 36 of the *Crime and Disorder Act 1998*:
 <<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/37/section/36>> [accessed June 7, 2019]. George James Davis and William Watts, the last men executed for piracy in the UK, were hanged for piracy at Execution Dock in London on 16 December 1830: ‘Execution of the Pirates at Execution Dock’, *Evening Mail*, 17 December 1830, p. 4.

¹⁰ Harding, p. 21.

¹¹ *A Proclamation against Pirats* (London, 1609).

explore in more detail in chapter three, had sustained considerable losses at the hands of the English pirate, John Ward; but it also reflected a continuing debate about how piracy, given its international nature, should be tried and punished.¹² This debate is evident in early modern legal texts.

In the third part of his *Institutes of the Laws of England*, the jurist Sir Edward Coke defined a pirate: ‘A pirat is called a Rover and a Robber upon the Sea’ and further that ‘*Pirata est hostis humani generis*’.¹³ In labelling pirates as the enemy of all humanity, Coke drew on his interpretation of Roman law, in particular the writings of Marcus Tullius Cicero. In his political and legal work, *De Officiis*, an English translation of which was printed in 1556, Cicero argued that societal norms did not apply to pirates as they stood outside of lawful society which was held together by ties of mutual obligation:

As if you bring not the sume of money, ye promised rovers for your life: there is no deceiving in it: no, though, beyng sworn thereto, ye do it not. For a pirate is not counted in the noumber of enemies to ones country, but a common enemy to all men. With such a one neither promes, neyther othe ought alike, as with us to be kept.¹⁴

According to Cicero’s definition, the pirate stands outside the law of his own nation, indeed any nation, and as such is punishable by all. Affixing the label *hostis humani generis* inferred that piracy was a singular and particularly egregious crime yet, as Christopher Harding persuasively argues, the application of universal jurisdiction to the crime of piracy has a functional rather than imperative basis.¹⁵ Piracy is

¹² ‘Venice: March 1608’, *CSPV*, Volume 11, 1607 – 1610, pp. 101-104
<<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/venice/vol11/pp101-114>>
[accessed 15 December 2018]

¹³ Sir Edward Coke, *The Third Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England: Concerning High Treason; and other Pleas of the Crown, and Criminal Causes* (London, 1680). ‘*Pirata est hostis humani generis*’ is translated as ‘the pirate is the enemy of the human race’.

¹⁴ Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Thre bokes of duties to Marcus his sonne, turned out of latine into English*, trans. by Nicholas Grimalde (London, 1556), 151v-152r.

¹⁵ Harding, p. 22.

distinctive because it takes place at sea; geographically it takes place beyond normal territorial jurisdiction. As international maritime trade, and consequently piracy, increased nations struggled to control a crime which took place outside national boundaries.¹⁶ In 1676 the writer and lawyer, Charles Molloy, described the effects of piracy on trade:

A Pyrat is a Sea Thief, or *Hostis humani generis*, who for to enrich himself, either by surprise or open force, sets upon Merchants and others trading by the Sea, ever spoiling their lading, if by any possibility they can get the mastery, sometimes bereaving them of their lives, and sinking of their Ships; the actors wherein Tully calls Enemies to all, with whom neither Faith nor Oath is to be kept.¹⁷

Molloy describes the pirate as having made a choice to set themselves against all others, particularly merchants, trading by sea, and, like Coke, imbues his definition with classical authority by referencing Cicero as a source. Universal jurisdiction, whereby all states were able to apprehend, try and punish piracy, was a response which provided a solution to a common threat to trade. As Harding argues, ‘special jurisdiction over piracy was a matter of optimizing law enforcement rather than a response to any special heinousness inherent in piratical conduct’.¹⁸ The attitudes of seamen and wider early modern society towards piracy are illuminated by understanding the relationship between the globalising forces of trade which attempted to impose regulation and jurisdiction on the seas, the actual practices of mariners, and the way in which people wrote in different genres about plunder, piracy and the sea.

That the substance of the act of piracy – robbery at sea – failed to attract particular opprobrium is apparent in the fact that similar strategies were employed

¹⁶ Bryan Mabee, ‘Pirates, privateers and the political economy of private violence’, *Global Change, Peace & Security*, 21:2 (2009), 139-152 (pp. 144-148).

¹⁷ Charles Molloy, *De jure maritime et navali, or, A treatise of affairs maritime and of commerce in three books* (London, 1676), p. 34.

¹⁸ Harding, p. 23.

during the course of both mercantile trade and warfare. Pirates committed their acts of plunder without the authority of any state, but throughout the early modern period those same acts were often legitimised by state license both in times of war and of peace. During peacetime, individuals who had suffered depredations at the hands of a foreign vessel could seek reparations by obtaining a letter of marque which permitted them to seize goods of an equivalent value from any vessel of the same nationality of their attacker. Another practice, ‘privateering’, took place during times of war when states would authorise private individuals to attack and raid enemy shipping, allowing the privateer to keep a portion of the prize money.¹⁹ How these coexistent forms of maritime plunder were defined and differentiated separated lawful trade from illegal piracy.

Although easily defined in theory, the boundaries of piracy and privateering were much less distinct in practice, as a closer look at how the terms were applied will reveal. State-sanctioned raiding had existed in England since at least the thirteenth century, but it was not until the mid-seventeenth century that this was termed ‘privateering’.²⁰ That such a widespread behaviour continued undefined for four centuries suggests that it was not considered as an entirely discrete practice which could easily be separated from other forms of maritime raiding. This lack of clarity can be seen in an example from the origins of the Anglo-Spanish War which began as acts of reprisal following the seizure of English ships in Spanish harbours in May 1585. The crew of the seized vessels were imprisoned and their cargoes confiscated. On 25 June 1585 Sir George Carey offered to fit out privateers at his

¹⁹ Janice E. Thomson, *Mercenaries, Pirates and Sovereigns: State-building and Extraterritorial Violence in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 22-23. This practice is referred to as ‘privateering’ throughout this thesis.

²⁰ Thomson, p. 22; “privateer, n.” in *OED Online*, OUP, March 2019, <www.oed.com/view/Entry/151605> [Accessed 22 March 2019]

own expense to make reprisals against the Spanish for their actions, although England was not yet at war with Spain. Carey further offered the services of ‘one Flud, a valiant and skilful pirate, to survey the coasts of Spain, and bring intelligence what preparations were making’.²¹ Not only did Carey suggest privateering voyages in a time of peace but he appeared to have no qualms about employing an outright pirate in the service of the country, indeed he praises Flud as being skilful and valiant. The boundaries between reprisal, privateering and piracy are blurred, and those labelled as pirates could be simultaneously viewed as a potentially useful national resource.

This potential was widely acknowledged and equivocal attitudes towards piracy prevailed even at the highest levels. When advising Queen Elizabeth I on the construction of a standing navy, John Dee acknowledged the large number of pirates operating out of England and recognised their abilities:

By this Navy, also, all Pyrats, our own Cuntrymen (And they to no small number) wold be called, or constrained to come home. And then (upon good Assurance taken of the reformable, and men of choice, for their good Abearing, from hence forth) all such to be bestowed, here and there, in the forsayd Navy. For, good accownt is to be made of their bodyes, (already hardened to the Seas) and chiefly, of their Courages and Skill, for good Service to be done at Sea.²²

It had long been recognised that pirates had many skills which might be useful if pressed into the service of the country. For Dee, pirates were not Cicero’s stateless men but ‘our own Cuntrymen’. Far from disowning them he praised their courage and skill and sought to harness their talents for the good of England. Dee’s description of these pirates shares something of the elemental nature of Shylock’s

²¹ ‘Queen Elizabeth – Volume 179: June 1585’, in *CSPD Elizabeth: 1581-90*, ed. by Robert Lemon (London: HMSO, 1865) pp. 244 - 249 < <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/domestic/edw-eliz/1581-90/pp244-249> > [accessed 20 October 2018]

²² John Dee, *General and rare memorials pertaining to the perfect arte of navigation annexed to the paradoxal cumpas, in playne: now first published: 24. yeres, after the first invention thereof* (London, 1577), p. 6.

description. They are ‘hardened to the seas’ and appear to be timeless. There are also ‘no small number of them’. Harnessed by the state, pirates might prove a significant force if their putative criminality were to be overlooked or neutralised.

Acting on Dee’s advice, the Queen began to put these skilled men to service. Lagging behind Spain and Portugal, who already held established trade routes to the New World, England sought during the late sixteenth century to increase her overseas trade and territories. Elizabeth approved privateering expeditions and attacks on the Spanish, with at least a hundred privateering voyages a year taking place during the period 1589-91.²³ Pirates, now transformed into privateers, became agents of England’s newly-forged mercantile identity with men such as Sir Francis Drake and Sir Walter Raleigh cast as national heroes. Experienced pirates and privateers with their knowledge of navigation became indispensable with the launch of the Levant Company, founded in 1581 to trade with Turkey and the Levant.²⁴ Texts such as Richard Hakluyt’s *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, first published in 1589, encouraged and inspired ambitions for further expansion into the emerging global market.²⁵ As Daniel Vitkus argues, with capitalism’s emergence in England ‘new roles and new models of identity and action arose from these changes in the economic system’.²⁶ John Hooker, the Devon antiquary, described how reports of Drake’s 1585 voyage and sack of the Indies affected the country:

²³ Kenneth R. Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering: English Privateering During the Spanish War 1585-1603* (Cambridge: CUP, 1964), pp. 32-33.

²⁴ Andrews, pp. 230-232.

²⁵ Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, 12 vols (Glasgow: MacLehose, 1903-1905).

²⁶ Daniel Vitkus, ‘Adventuring Heroes in the Mediterranean: Mapping the Boundaries of Anglo-Islamic Exchange on the Early Modern Stage’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 37:1 (2007), 75-95 (p. 77).

[It so] inflamed the whole country with a desire to adventure unto the seas, in the hope of like good success, that a great number prepared ships, mariners and soldiers and travelled every place where any profit might be had.²⁷

Men were inspired to emulate Drake when it became apparent that fortune and reputation could be made through overseas trade. That this often involved an element of maritime plunder added a further layer of complexity to perceptions of piracy.

James I's ascension to the throne following the death of Elizabeth in 1603 marked a significant change in foreign policy. The new king pursued peace with Spain and in 1604 signed a peace treaty ending the conflict in which the two countries had been embroiled since 1585. In June 1603, whilst peace negotiations with Spain were taking place, James issued 'A Proclamation concerning Warlike ships at Sea', in which he clearly signalled a break with the tolerance and even licence of maritime plunder which had characterised Elizabeth's reign:

We are not ignorant that our late deare sister the late Queene of England, had of long time warres with the King of Spaine, and during that time gave Licences and Commissions to divers of her, and our now Subjects, to set out and furnish to Sea, at their charge, divers ships warlikly appointed, for the surprising and taking of the said Kings subjects and goods, and for the enjoying of the same, being taken and brought home as lawful prize.²⁸

Privateering against Spain is firmly located as an Elizabethan practise. The proclamation continued, setting out the new policy:

We further will and command, That all such our men of warre, as be now at Sea, having no sufficient Commission as aforesaid, and have taken or shal go to Sea hereafter, and shal take any the ships, or goods of any Prince in league, or amitie with us, shall bee reputed and taken as Pirates, and both they and all their accessories, maintainers, comforters, abettors, and partakers, shall suffer death as Pirates.²⁹

²⁷ Walter J. Harte, *Gleanings from the Commonplace Book of John Hooker, Relating to the City of Exeter. 1485-1590* (Exeter: A. Wheaton & Company, 1926), p. 39.

²⁸ 'A Proclamation concerning Warlike ships at Sea', 23 June 1603, in *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, ed. by J.F. Larkin and P.L Hughes, 2 vols (Oxford: OUP, 1973), 1, pp. 30-31.

²⁹ 'A Proclamation concerning Warlike ships at Sea', in Larkin and Hughes, I, p. 31.

With this proclamation, James attempted to bring some clarity to the issue of privateering and piracy. He acknowledged Elizabeth's practice of issuing licenses to privateers, but stressed that this was a wartime practice and such privateers were 'warlikly appointed'. As England was at peace there were now no valid licences and any Englishmen who attacked shipping of a friendly nation would be acting unlawfully and tried for piracy. In declaring privateers as 'warlike', James differentiated his reign from that of his politically aggressive predecessor who had sanctioned such practices. Between June 1603 and July 1605 he issued six increasingly prohibitive proclamations against piracy, including measures against those who profited from these activities or harboured those involved.³⁰ However, the problem of piracy increased, ironically fuelled by James's own pacific policies.³¹ The end of the war with Spain led to the demobilization of thousands of highly skilled English seamen with little prospect of any legitimate work to replace their previous occupation.³² Poverty amongst seamen was such that sailors, along with soldiers, were the occupational group which showed the greatest increase in vagrancy during the period 1560 to 1640.³³ This provoked a certain amount of unease concerning James's pacific policies. Writing in 1630, Captain John Smith, a former pirate, described the increase in piracy as a direct consequence of James's decision to sue for peace:

After the death of our most gracious Queene Elizabeth, of blessed memory, our Royall King James, who from his infancie had reigned in peace with all

³⁰ Mikkel Thorup, *An Intellectual History of Terror: War, Violence and the State* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010) p. 179.

³¹ John C. Appleby, 'The Problem of Piracy in Ireland, 1570-1630' in *Pirates? The Politics of Plunder, 1550-1650*, ed. by Claire Jowitt (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 41-55 (p. 54).

³² J.C. Appleby, 'Jacobean Piracy: English Maritime Depredation in Transition, 1603-1625' in *The Social History of English Seamen, 1485-1649*, ed. by Cheryl A. Fury (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2012) pp. 277-300 (p. 278); C.M. Senior, *A Nation of Pirates* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1976), pp. 9-11.

³³ A.L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England, 1560-1640* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 93-95.

Nations, had no employment for those men of warre, so that those that were rich rested with what they had; those that were poor and had nothing but from hand to mouth, turn'd Pirats; some, because they became sleighted of those for whom they had got much wealth; some, for that they could not get their due; some, that had lived bravely, would not abase themselves to poverty; some vainly, only to get a name; others for revenge, covetousness, or as ill; and as they found themselves more and more oppressed, their passions increasing their discontent, made them turne Pirats.³⁴

Smith's eloquent expression of sympathy depicts the various reasons men, driven by poverty and discontent, might have for turning to piracy. He explicitly distances himself from the monarch, arguing that many of these men 'had lived bravely', often in the service of their country, and implicitly blames James for their turn to seaborne crime. Despite repeated reinforcement, anti-piracy legislation was not entirely successful in setting the tone of the wider social debate.

The king himself also demonstrated a certain degree of inconsistency in his treatment of pirates despite his professed hatred of piracy. Unable to deploy a naval force strong enough to eradicate the increasing numbers of pirates, in 1612 James I offered a General Pardon in an attempt to reduce the problem. At least twelve pirate crews surrendered under the terms of the pardon which allowed them to keep their plunder and return to settle in England without redress.³⁵ James continued to offer pardons to those involved in piracy, even after the General Pardon had expired. The pragmatic realities of practical maritime governance proved too complex to be resolved solely by proclamations against piracy.

James I's seemingly paradoxical attitude towards piracy can be placed in the context of a consolidation of power and authority by the sovereign during the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I. The Elizabethan era of aggressive maritime expansion, in which piracy and privateering had played a crucial part, was superseded by James's

³⁴ Capt. J. Smith, *The Complete Works of Capt. John Smith*, ed. by Philip L. Barbour, 3 volumes, (Williamsburg: University of North Carolina, 1986), II, p. 914.

³⁵ Earle, pp. 58-61.

attempt to stabilise international trading relationships. Pirates had existed before the state needed them under Elizabeth and, as we will see, they – crucially – remained once the state had done with them.³⁶ Those pirates who had once been an asset and flourished under Elizabeth were, in the reign of James I, a threat to peaceful trade, a transition we see reflected in the legislative practices surrounding piracy at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The increasingly punitive legislation introduced by James, which criminalised piracy and drew on the classical characterisation of pirates as the enemy of all mankind, was part of an attempt to eliminate the threat to the new pacific regime. The lack of a naval force adequate to the task of tackling piracy meant that such legislation was perhaps rather more aspirational than enforceable on a large scale. The gulf between legislation and practise left a space in which pirates could be perceived as simultaneously criminals and agents of national interest.³⁷

Despite the legislative outlawing of piracy, a public debate about possible causes and means of prevention continued. Henry Mainwaring, a highly successful pirate, was pardoned in 1616 and so completely reabsorbed into society that two years later he was knighted and appointed a gentleman of the bedchamber.³⁸ Mainwaring later wrote a discourse, ‘Of the Beginnings, Practices, and Suppression of Pirates’ in which he argued that piracy might be prevented by the creation of universal employment for mariners:

Me thinketh the best and surest way, and that which might much advance the wealth and glory of our State, were to devise some more universal employment than now we have, by which men of that spirit might not

³⁶ Hanna, pp. 53-57; Barbara Fuchs, ‘Faithless Empires: Pirates, Renegadoes, and the English Nation’ *ELH*, 67.1 (2000), 45-69, p. 46; N.A.M Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain, 660-1649* (London: Penguin, 2004), pp. 347-363.

³⁷ Harding, p. 36.

³⁸ G. G. Harris, ‘Sir Henry Mainwaring’ in *ODNB*:
<<https://doi.org.ezproxy.lib.bbk.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/38733>> [accessed 13 June 2019]

complain, as they now do, that they are forced for lack of convenient employment to enter into such unlawful courses.³⁹

Much as Smith had described these men as having ‘lived bravely’, Mainwaring saw them as men of ‘spirit’, penalised by a legal system which had failed to consider the context of their actions. Perhaps unsurprisingly given his own history, he regarded men who turned to piracy not as criminals but as a potential asset and a resource which could be used to benefit the country. Both Smith and Mainwaring describe the men who turned to piracy as active figures, perhaps offering a rebuke to the implied passivity of James’s policies.

The distinction between piracy and privateering was frequently opaque and was rendered even more so by the fluidity of the maritime workforce. Privateering vessels often sailed under the licence of a ruler other than that of their home nation. Definitions of piracy and privateering were further complicated by the activities of Barbary corsairs. As we explore in chapter three, corsairs were licensed by the rulers of the Barbary States, nominally part of the Ottoman Empire, but in general were treated as pirates by Christian nations, and were frequently referred to as such in English texts. The legitimacy of the rule of these states was debated by scholars of maritime law, such as Hugo Grotius and Alberico Gentili, in order to determine if they should be considered piratical states.⁴⁰ Despite naming them as pirates, many states including England, France, Spain and Holland at various times from the late sixteenth century onwards negotiated treaties with individual Barbary rulers to secure protection and trade.⁴¹ Piracy, then, was very much in the eye of the beholder;

³⁹ Sir Henry Mainwaring, ‘Of the Beginnings, Practices, and Suppression of Pirates’ in *The Life and Works of Sir Henry Mainwaring, Volume 2*, ed. by G.E. Manwaring (London: Navy Records Society, 1922), 9-49, p.41.

⁴⁰ Harding, pp. 29-31. See Hugo Grotius, *Of the law of warre and peace* (London, 1655) and Alberico Gentili, *Three Books on the Law of War*, trans. John C. Rolfe (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1933).

⁴¹ Thomson, p.110.

maritime violence authorised by one state might not be recognised as legitimate by another.⁴²

We find the seaman's experience of this complex legal environment registered in texts including manuscript accounts and popular pamphlets. In 1609, Captain Jennings was one of nineteen men hanged for piracy at Execution Dock. The life and death of the illiterate Jennings is recalled in the 1609 pamphlet, *The lives, apprehensions, arraignments, and executions, of the 19. late pyrates*.⁴³ Jennings is depicted as recounting to the author how, during the reign of Elizabeth I, he regularly preyed on Dutch shipping from his base in Dunkirk. He explained that he was only 'proclaimed a Pyrate' once his raiding became so prolific that he came to the attention of the authorities and was subsequently apprehended. Although Jennings freely confessed that his 'name grew so odious' at no point does he call himself a pirate.⁴⁴ That label is affixed to him by the authorities. Similarly, Captain Harris, another of the men hanged with Jennings and to whom we will return later, says of his time in Ireland that his name was 'fresh in memory about the coast, although not as yet proclaimed for a Pirat'.⁴⁵ As Richard Blakemore has astutely noted, the declaration of piracy 'was a judgement applied *to* seafarers *by* the authorities'.⁴⁶ Though seamen, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries at least, rarely named themselves as pirate they were happy to attach that label to others. The seaman, Edward Coxere, referred to John Ward, the renegade, as 'the great English pirate' (Coxere, p. 56). Edward Barlow described Algiers as 'a pirate's town, inhabited by

⁴² Richard Blakemore, 'The Politics of Piracy in the British Atlantic, c.1640 -1649', *International Journal of Maritime History*, 25:2 (2013), 159-72, (p. 165).

⁴³ Anon., *The lives, apprehensions, arraignments, and executions, of the 19. late pyrates Namely: Capt. Harris. Iennings. Longcastle. Downes. Haulsey. and their companies. As they were seuerally indited on St. Margrets Hill in Southwarke, on the 22. of December last, and executed the Fryday following* (1609).

⁴⁴ *The lives, apprehensions*, C2r.

⁴⁵ *The lives, apprehensions*, B3r

⁴⁶ Blakemore, p. 164.

Turks and Moors and Jews' (Barlow, p. 49). The pirate was always an other and opprobrium was often attached to the label of 'pirate' rather than the act of piracy, suggesting that the act of piracy in itself was less problematic than the identity of the perpetrator.

The identity and allegiances of early modern seamen were not fixed and could change quickly and frequently during the seventeenth century as eloquently described by Edward Coxere:

As I was at first with the Hollanders against the English I continued in this frigate in the wars against the Hollanders till about the peace. I had not been long in this ship but I was made coxswain: so that I served several masters in the wars between King and Parliament at sea. Next I served the Spaniards against the French, then the Hollanders against the English; then I was taken by the English out of a Dunkirker; and then I served the English against the Hollanders; and last I was taken by the Turks, where I was forced to serve then against the English, French, Dutch, and Spaniards, and all Christendom. (Coxere, p. 25)

His listing of the nations under which he served conjures up the image of a life of permanent change, at the mercy of seventeenth century international political upheaval. Coxere was fluent in French, Spanish and Dutch, and his linguistic skills helped him to access a wider range of employment on vessels of different nationalities.⁴⁷ Though he was largely free to choose his employers, serving on English, Dutch and Spanish ships, he was also frequently captured. Sailing in a Dutch ship, Coxere was captured by the English who mistook him as a Fleming. He was later captured by the Spanish, captured and enslaved by Barbary corsairs, and finally captured by the Spanish again; yet always he returned to his home and family in England.

The lives of seamen were complicated by the political complexities of the era, but they sought to make the situation work to their best advantage. Lauren

⁴⁷ For further information on Coxere's linguistic skills see John Gallagher, 'Language-learning, Orality, and Multilingualism in Early Modern Anglophone Narratives of Mediterranean Captivity', *Renaissance Studies*, 33.4 (2019), 639-661

Benton has argued that early modern seas ‘were sites not of lawlessness but of legal complexity and strategizing’.⁴⁸ This is borne out by evidence of seamen employing a sophisticated understanding of maritime law in their own defence. Some sought licences or commissions which were vague and which might be exploited, such as the commission awarded to Henry Morgan in 1667, which did not authorise attacks on Spanish holdings but did allow him to stop Spanish vessels to prevent any plot against Jamaica. Morgan’s interpretation of the commission enabled him to concoct a fictitious plot against the English in Jamaica to justify his attacks on Spanish shipping.⁴⁹ Others who had seized prize vessels paid to ensure legality on their return to England: Charles Howard, Earl of Nottingham and Lord Admiral, freely issued retrospective letters of reprisal for a fee.⁵⁰

Although seamen went to some lengths to ensure they had commissions in place, these were often little more than a ruse, with some presenting fraudulent documents as an alibi in case of capture. Coxere describes the captain of one Dutch vessel copying out the commission of another to enable him to seize English ships (Coxere, p. 16). During his trial for piracy against English shipping in 1675, George Cusack presented the court with a French commission in the name of someone else as part of the evidence in his defence:

He next insisted on a Commission from the French King. Which was read; but was found to be directed to another person: But he alledged, it was his Kinsman, who had the Grant of a Commission at the same time; and that by mistake the Commissions were changed; and so his Kinsman’s Commission sent him from Callice to London; where he paid a Sum of Money for it to the French Resident: And that he not being able to read French, could not

⁴⁸ Lauren Benton, ‘Oceans of Law: The Legal Geography of the Seventeenth-Century Seas’, *Proceedings of the Seascapes, Litoral Cultures, and Trans-Oceanic Exchanges Conference*, 12-15 February 2003
http://webdoc.sub.gwdg.de/ebook/p/2005/history_cooperative/www.historycooperative.org/proceedings/seascapes/benton.html [accessed 15 December 2018] (para. 4 of 30).

⁴⁹ Peter Earle, *The Sack of Panama: Sir Henry Morgan’s Adventures on the Spanish Main* (New York: Viking, 1981), pp. 60-61.

⁵⁰ Rodger, p. 345.

perceive the Errour, but acted by it; not doubting but that it had been his own. And that his ship the *Robert*, was never made any free Ship of England; but the Owners were Dutch and lived in Rotterdam: and that he hoped the Court would allow of his Commission.⁵¹

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the court deemed this argument worthless, stating that even if the commission were in Cusack's name it would not authorise him to attack English shipping, and berated him for acting in defiance of a recent proclamation by Charles II which forbade the acceptance of foreign commissions. Cusack was undeterred by this:

To which he Replyed, That his Commission bore date before that Proclamation. And besides insisted, That whereas by the Indictment he was charged with an Offence committed Super altum Mare, upon the Sea; This Ship was taken in one of the Dutch Ports, and so not appertaining to the Jurisdiction of the English Admiralty.⁵²

Pleading for his life, Cusack tackled complex legal points during his trial, demonstrating a detailed knowledge of maritime law. The narrator of the pamphlet, though otherwise unequivocally critical of Cusack, was forced to accede that he had argued well:

This Mr. Cusack appeared to be a Person of Clear Courage, and good understanding: he pleaded very well for his life; but the matter was too foul to be washt off with good words.⁵³

Although Cusack was praised for his 'good words', his self-fashioning rhetoric was ultimately negated by his foul deeds, and he was sentenced to death.⁵⁴ Cusack was an educated man, 'bred a Scholar', brought up a Catholic and, 'disposed by his Parents for a Fryer', but the evidence suggests the scene played out at his trial was not unusual.⁵⁵ As Benton observes, sailors had shared knowledge of defence arguments

⁵¹ Impartial Hand, *The Grand pyrate, or, The life and death of Capt. George Cusack, the great sea-robber with an accompt of all his notorious robberies both at sea and land: together with his trial, condemnation, and execution* (London, 1676), p. 30.

⁵² *The Grand pyrate*, pp. 30-31.

⁵³ *The Grand pyrate*, p.31.

⁵⁴ Richard Frohock, 'Bible Overboard: The Word and the Grand Pirate, Captain George Cusack', *Early American Literature*, 42:2 (2007), 263-83 (p. 277).

⁵⁵ *The Grand pyrate*, p. 4.

and made great efforts to preserve the pretence of legality wherever possible.⁵⁶ Other piracy trials, perhaps most notoriously that of Captain William Kidd in 1701, followed an arc similar to that of Cusack: Kidd argued, unsuccessfully, that he had a legal basis for acting as a privateer in two of the cases for which he was tried and eventually hanged.⁵⁷

Most accused of piracy did not mount such an adversarial defence as Cusack, but still tried to make a case that they should not be found guilty. Many protested that they had been taken by pirates against their will and forced to sail as part of the crew. Richard Parker, an English merchant, was called to make depositions to the High Court of Admiralty in 1608 and again in 1613 about his relationship with the renegade, John Ward, with whom he had sailed. In his statements Parker explained that he was in Salé with his ship, the *Blessing*, when Ward arrived there to refit and provision his ship and to recruit new crew members. Parker claimed that he was forced to join Ward's crew. He argued that he had no other option because so many men had abandoned the *Blessing* to join Ward that he feared he would be abandoned in a 'heathen country' unless he followed suit.⁵⁸ We cannot know the truth of Parker's story, but he cleverly crafts a narrative which played on Christian fears of Islam in the hope that associating with pirates would be judged a lesser offence than the threat of apostasy.

For some, the ambiguity shaping responses to piracy was advantageous. Men with skill or means who feared they might be prosecuted for piracy were sometimes able to negotiate a pardon or commission from a foreign ruler. Ward himself was one such man, as we will explore in the next chapter; another was Captain Peter Easton,

⁵⁶ Benton, (para. 17 of 30).

⁵⁷ Robert C. Ritchie, *Captain Kidd and the War Against the Pirates* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 207-227.

⁵⁸ TNA HCA 13/47; TNA HCA 13/97.

who, in 1612, sailed into Villafranca with four ships. Easton, an Englishman, had led his fleet, which at its height numbered twenty-five ships and almost two thousand men, on lucrative raiding expeditions as far as Newfoundland.⁵⁹ He had refused the pardon recently offered by James I, as the Venetian Ambassador to England reported:

Captain Eston [...] haughtily refused the pardon offered by his Majesty, declaring that he would not bow to the orders of one King when he himself was, in a way, a King as well.⁶⁰

In describing himself as a King, Easton portrayed himself both as a power in opposition to James I and as an equal with other monarchs. Such oppositional tropes were frequently applied to pirates, both by themselves and by others, as we will discuss in more depth in the final chapter of this study. After shunning James I's offer, Easton arrived in Villafranca armed with a fortune and negotiated complete immunity under the protection of the Duke of Savoy:

Captain Eston has offered to his Highness to invest large sums in his States, on condition that he shall never be touched at the insistence of any Sovereign whatsoever on the ground of plunder made by him. Eston promises in return to pay once and for all a tithe of all that he invests, which amounts to a great sum.⁶¹

The great wealth Easton had gained through plunder gave him the means by which he could buy immunity from prosecution. He chose Savoy as his protector as he was 'moved by the report of the complete freedom which his Highness offers to all conditions of men in that port and on the coast of Nice'.⁶² Gaining much more than freedom, Easton was ennobled as a Marquis by Savoy and became an integral part of

⁵⁹ 'Venice: March 1616', *CSPV*, Volume 12, 1610-1613, pp. 498-516 <<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/venice/vol12/pp498-516>> [accessed 27 July 2017]; Earle, p. 31.

⁶⁰ 'Venice: October 1612', *CSPV*, Volume 12, 1610-1613, pp. 429-440 <<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/venice/vol12/pp429-440>> [accessed 27 July 2017]

⁶¹ 'Venice: March 1616', *CSPV*, Volume 12, 1610-1613, pp. 498-516.

⁶² 'Venice: March 1613', *CSPV*, Volume pp.498-516 <<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/venice/vol12/pp498-516>> [accessed 27 July 2017]

the court, eventually settling in Nice.⁶³ Although Easton is described as a pirate throughout the Venetian reports, there is no sense that he is regarded as the enemy of all humankind. Both James I and the Duke of Savoy were well aware of Easton's piratical exploits yet rather than punish him both offered a pardon; Easton had the freedom to choose which offer would be most advantageous to him. This suggests that that even where an individual was officially labelled as a pirate, a certain level of pragmatism could be exercised as to whether the law relating to piracy should be applied to them and whether they would be treated as a pirate in the social sphere.

The definition of piracy in law as unlicensed plunder gave sovereigns the power to say who the pirates were, as Daniel Heller-Roazen observes: 'A single ruler could, by fiat, decide which enemies were legitimate representatives of a state and which, by contrast, were mere "bandits"'.⁶⁴ This meant that individual sovereigns could, if it benefited them, licence those such as Peter Easton who had committed acts of outright piracy. The law allowed that individuals could pass from one legal category to the other, as Grotius acknowledged:

Yet a change may happen, not only in single persons (as Jephtha, Arsaces, Viriatus, of Captains of Robbers became just Captains) but in companies also, as, they that were only Robbers, embracing another kind of life may become a Commonwealth.⁶⁵

In law, it was the act which was deemed piratical rather than the person. With the exception of those sanctioned by Barbary rulers, a pirate would no longer be a pirate if their piratical acts were reclassified by the issue of a licence, or if they were deemed to have participated in piratical acts against their will. Sovereigns used this

⁶³ 'Venice: March 1616' CSPV, Volume 12, 1610-1613, pp. 498-516; 'Venice: April 1613', CSPV, Volume 12, 1610-1613, pp. 516-529 <<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/venice/vol12/pp516-529>> [accessed 27 July 2017]

⁶⁴ Daniel Heller-Roazen, *The Enemy of All: Piracy and the Law of Nations* (New York: Zone Books, 2009), p. 109.

⁶⁵ Hugo Grotius, *The illustrious Hugo Grotius Of the law of war and peace with annotations, III parts, and memorials of the author's life and death* (London, 1655), p. 520.

situation to offer licences or pardons when it would advantage them by bringing skilled seamen, such as Mainwaring, Easton and Morgan, into the service of the realm. As we have seen, while often depicted as lawless, seamen actively engaged in complex debates around maritime law and in doing so helped to define the boundaries of piracy – and negotiate when they might be crossed.

Although the label ‘enemy of all humankind’ was ascribed to pirates in law, this does not serve as an accurate description of how those engaged in piracy were treated in practice. Many seamen crossed the boundaries between legality and illegality a number of times during their career; whether they were pursued and prosecuted for piracy depended largely on their own knowledge of maritime law and the political pragmatism of a sovereign. Despite this reality, the crime of piracy continued to be vilified in legal texts which reflected an as yet unrealised aspiration of how the seas should be governed. As we have seen, there was some engagement with the law by those such as Cusack and Easton, with varying degrees of success, suggesting a perception of the law as having an element of flexibility. We now turn to accounts of seamen to consider how the equivocal nature of this situation affected their choice to engage in piracy, and how such decisions might be viewed by the wider public.

2. ‘The web of my life’: Networks of Plunder

In chapter one we saw how young men conceived of a different sort of life from that of their parents and attempted to realise this by choosing a career at sea. We now turn to consider what this new life looked like in practice for some of these men by looking at the evidence of their own accounts. Patricia Fumerton has described the seaman as epitomizing ‘the seventeenth-century economy of unsettledness that capitalized on wage labor’ and that the unsettled subject, in its most extreme form, is

‘detached from a secure community, family, or even marketplace’.⁶⁶ We might perhaps expect the most extreme form of the unsettled subject to be those who engaged in robbery at sea. As we have seen, the official narrative surrounding piracy was one of vilification; but were those who turned to piracy really the enemies of all humankind, shunning and shunned by family, friends and society – were they even necessarily society’s ‘unsettled’? In order to investigate this question what follows analyses the written accounts left by two men who were both participants in maritime crime: Edward Coxere – who we already met starting out on his career at sea – and James Harris. We have already seen that pirates such as Cusack and Easton attempted to find footholds in the law and were described not as defendants but as litigants or agents. The textual evidence left behind by Coxere and Harris reveals extensive networks of support, the study of which can tell us much about their own choices and about social perceptions of piracy.

‘Then I began to plunder’ (Coxere, p. 10). Thus, in the manuscript account of his life, *A Relation of the Several Adventures By Sea with the Dangers, Difficulties and Hardships I Met for Several Years*, Edward Coxere plainly states the fact of his turn to robbery at sea. As discussed chapter one, Coxere was a man of strong morals who eventually converted to Quakerism in 1661, but writing retrospectively he expresses neither remorse nor shame for his actions. Officially, piracy was depicted as a heinous crime punishable by the death penalty, and pirates appeared frequently in early modern print as villains. Yet in his account Coxere openly describes how he personally stole from the cargo of seized vessels and made an income by sending these stolen goods back to England to be sold: ‘The first which I practised on was on serges, of which I got some and sent home to England’ (Coxere, p. 10). The theft of

⁶⁶ Patricia Fumerton, *Unsettled: The Culture of Mobility and the Working Poor in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 31.

this fabric is just the initial act and Coxere's statement contains an inference of more to follow.

Coxere, like many other early modern seamen, supplemented his wages by private venture: buying and selling goods during a voyage and also by sending back to England goods which could be sold to make a profit.⁶⁷ He wrote that at the end of this particular voyage his income from his wages as a seaman combined with the profit from this personal trade, including the stolen serge, amounted to 'between forty and fifty pound', which he gave to his parents (Coxere, p. 20). As this was the equivalent of almost two years' wages for a skilled labourer on land, maritime plunder was a potentially lucrative income stream for Coxere and his family.⁶⁸ Despite the vehement condemnation of piracy in official texts and proclamations, Coxere's story invites us to investigate how seamen – who were often participants both as victim and/or perpetrator of robbery at sea – and their families viewed piracy.

Edward Coxere came from a middling sort of family. His mother, Wealthan, was widowed in 1633, the year of Coxere's baptism, and married again in 1635 to cordwainer Robert Hayward.⁶⁹ As discussed in the previous chapter, Coxere's mother and step-father had expected him to go into trade rather than follow his father, John Coxere, into a career at sea. His family were prosperous enough to send the young Edward to Le Havre for a year in 1647 to live with a French family in

⁶⁷ Seafarers could potentially double their wages by making their own private trades in addition to their wages. For further discussion of the income of early modern seafarers see Richard J. Blakemore. 'Pieces of Eight, Pieces of Eight: Seamen's Earnings and the Venture Economy of Early Modern Seafaring' in *Economic History Review*, 70:4 (2017), 1153-1184 (pp. 1174-1178).

⁶⁸ In 1650, £45 was the equivalent of 642 days wages for a skilled labourer and would have had the same spending worth as £4,658 in 2017 according to the National Archives currency converter.

⁶⁹ Bernard Capp, 'Coxere, Edward (bap.1633, d.1694)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004
<<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/64878>> [accessed 21 January 2016].

order for him to learn French, and later sent him to Middleburg to learn the trade of wine-cooper. Coxere ultimately shunned a career in trade to pursue a life at sea, emboldened by his social connections: William Tattnoll, master of the *Saint George*, one of the first ships on which Coxere sailed, was a neighbour and the crew included Coxere's brother and another of his friends (Coxere, p. 5). Coxere remained a seaman all his life, with his career interrupted only by periods of imprisonment following his conversion to Quakerism, but he retained close ties to family and his home town of Dover (Coxere, pp. 99-110).⁷⁰

Family connections remained important to Coxere throughout his life, and his manuscript is thick with details of his familial relations and social networks. His account of relationships with his wife, family and wider social circle reveals much about the networks supporting early modern seamen and how they perceived piracy and plunder. Most sailors of the period were young and single and, as explored by Valerie Burton, the image of the 'free' seaman prevailed.⁷¹ Fumerton has argued that seamen suffered from an 'interpersonal disconnectedness', and often had a casual attitude towards forming family ties.⁷² However, this was not the case with Coxere who wrote often and lovingly of his parents, siblings and, later, his own wife and children. He worried about his family – once returning home to Dover because he had heard his mother was unwell rather than taking his preferred option of going to the West Indies – and was anxious to ensure they had enough money to manage (Coxere, p. 17). This family connection remained robust to the end of Coxere's life.

⁷⁰ Coxere was arrested at a conventicle in Yarmouth and held close prisoner for seven months. He was imprisoned in 1683 for refusing to sign the oath of allegiance, and in 1684 he was arrested at the Quaker meeting house in Dover and held close prisoner for almost a year (Coxere, pp. 99-110).

⁷¹ Valerie Burton, 'The Myth of Bachelor Jack: Masculinity, Patriarchy and Seafaring Labour', in *Jack Tar in History: Essays in the History of Maritime Life and Labour*, ed. by Colin Howell and Richard J. Twomey (Fredricton: Acadiensis Press, 1991).

⁷² Fumerton, p. 91.

Coxere's account, along with those of other seamen discussed in this study, reveals the close-knit networks which sustained many men during their lives at sea rather than a 'disconnectedness'. He described how, in addition to receiving the proceeds of his plunder, his parents were instrumental in setting him on the path of maritime crime by placing him with Captain Tilly:

After I had been at home some time one Captain Tilly of Amsterdam, an Irishman born but an inhabitant there, came into the Downs with his ship. He came to Dover to my father's house, being bound to Cadiz in Spain, a ship of twenty-four guns. He was desirous to carry me with him. All parties being agreed, I was sent aboard, and finding myself to be amongst Dutchmen and strangers to me, it did something to discourage me; but there was no remedy, I was then fast enough. (Coxere, p. 17)

That Tilly came to the Coxere family home suggests the family had an existing relationship with him and were happy to place their son with him. There is no hint that Tilly might be disreputable or party to either criminal or morally reprehensible activities. Coxere writes that all parties were agreed, yet describes himself in this exchange in terms of a commodity: Tilly is desirous to 'carry' him, he is 'sent aboard' and held 'fast'. There is little evidence of Coxere exerting agency in this matter and his parents must have been anxious to find another trade for him following the abandonment of his apprenticeship in Middleburg. Coxere was unhappy at finding himself in the company of Dutchmen and other strangers – he seems always happier in the company of a family member or countryman – and in order to be able to communicate he applied himself to learning Dutch, eventually becoming so fluent he was mistaken for a Fleming (Coxere, pp. 17-19).

Coxere's parents had chosen well in placing him with Tilly, a man under whose patronage Coxere, and by extension his family, might thrive. Tilly appears to have been a successful and shrewd captain who was subsequently able to give up his life at sea, as Coxere described: 'Our captain had so enriched himself that he left off going to sea' (Coxere, p. 12). His wealth was such that he was able to set up as a

merchant in Amsterdam where he acquired his own trading fleet of several ships. Coxere's relationship with Tilly proved an enduring one and he remained under Tilly's patronage for some years, following his advice on which ships he should sail, and stating that Tilly's 'purpose was to prefer me' (Coxere, p.12). Tilly eventually offered Coxere the chance to become master of one of his vessels and to settle in Amsterdam, under his protection (Coxere, pp. 31 & 51). But Tilly was far from being what might usually be considered respectable: a practising Irish Catholic, who kept a friar aboard ship to say mass, he was happy to be in the employ of the Dutch and the Spanish and made much of his money through plundering other – sometimes English – shipping (Coxere, p. 8). Coxere has little to say about religion until his conversion to Quakerism, and makes no inference that his family were Catholic. This suggests they may simply have taken the pragmatic view that they knew Tilly's reputation and judged that their son, and therefore the wider family, would be likely to prosper under his patronage.

Coxere's first description of participating in robbery at sea takes place under the auspices of Captain Tilly, whilst they were employed against the French by the King of Spain. Coxere reported they took several French vessels as prizes, 'by which our captain did enrich himself very considerably' (Coxere, p. 8). During the same voyage, Coxere describes how they tricked a Dutch vessel into believing they were also Dutch, before revealing themselves to be in fact Spanish (although sailing in a Dutch ship with a mainly Dutch crew) and seizing the vessel and cargo (Coxere, pp. 9-10). The layers of obfuscated identity illustrate the difficulties inherent in identifying an ally or an enemy at sea, and the ease with which piracy might be practised. Captain Tilly in particular profited from this incident, as Coxere relates in some detail:

We took him and made prize of all his goods, which was salt, sugar. The captain, having the poor man's letters, found that in a chest of sugar was a

box with musk-cods of considerable value. He got this chest aboard from the prize. He keeping of it privately as if nothing had been in it but sugar, he sent the purser, myself, and one man more to open the chest, which was done, and found the box and delivered it to the captain so privately that the scent of it never came to the Spanish general's nose that I ever heard of. This was a sweet prize to the captain and also profitable, for, as he turned it into pieces of eight, the seamen turned it into their bellies, where it melted, for there was a great deal of marmalade, as well as sugar. (Coxere, p. 10)⁷³

Although Coxere shows some sympathy towards the tricked Dutch captain, repeatedly referring to him as a 'poor man', he seems thrilled by this episode and frames the entire incident as an adventure, with the introductory sentence, 'One very great adventure' (Coxere, p. 10). He illustrates his journal with a sketch, proudly captioned, 'I was in the Spanish man of war which Took the Hollander' (Coxere, p.10). There is no condemnation of Tilly's actions, rather the captain is admired for acting 'so privately' and remaining undetected. Coxere seems giddy with the excitement of the incident, playing with words, punning on the sweetness of the stolen sugary cargo. He immediately follows this 'great adventure' with his declaration: 'Then I began to plunder' (Coxere, p.10). Coxere's narrative is, therefore, consciously and deftly constructed to make the reader believe that plunder was something learned from the (positive) example of his master, Captain Tilly.

Despite Tilly's continued support, Coxere's income remained precarious throughout his life. He hoped to take up a position as master of one of Tilly's ships but – literally – missed the boat when he was delayed on another voyage (Coxere, p. 31). He declined Tilly's suggestion that he should move to Amsterdam, on the basis that he could not part his new wife, Mary, from her family (Coxere, p.50). This was not just solicitous of Mary's feelings, though he seems to have cared deeply for her; as we will discuss in more detail later, Mary played an integral role in maintaining

⁷³ 'Musk-cods' are the musk glands of the Asian musk deer which were high value and prized for their use in perfume and medicine. For further information see Peter Borschberg, 'The European Musk Trade with Asia in the Early Modern Period', *Heritage Journal*, 1:1 (2004), pp. 1-12.

the family finances. Seldom out of work until he became a Quaker in 1661, Coxere made a living through a piecemeal patchwork of activities: wages, private ventures, and plunder. When there was any spare money he invested it in stock for his ventures. Although potentially lucrative, even small ventures were high risk for an early modern seamen and Coxere details the loss of both stock and profit several times; in each instance he was left penniless. Michael Mascusch observed that for the middling sort the abyss of poverty was always closer than the escape hatch that would enable them to escape.⁷⁴ Mindful of the abyss, and ever resourceful, even at his most desperate Coxere sought ways to generate income. When he was captured and enslaved on the Barbary Coast he stole nails in the hope that he could sell them to make a profit; imprisoned as a Quaker in Yarmouth he learned to spin and to make shoes which he then sold (Coxere, pp.63 & 105). Plunder was just one part of the income stream which kept the Coxere family finances afloat.

Money was never far from Coxere's mind and he dreamed of the riches which always eluded him: 'The thoughts of my part of the gold rejoiced my heart, to think what a flourishing condition I should pop into at last' (Coxere, p.75). In common with other early modern writers preoccupied with their finances, Coxere tracked his income assiduously, recording the payments and wages he received for each voyage.⁷⁵ His wages ranged from twenty-three shillings a month at the start of his career through to £3 10s a month in 1661 (Coxere, pp. 67-85). He was constantly learning in order to enhance his chances of employment and increase his income; he trained as a gunner and was a proud and skilled linguist, speaking French, Spanish,

⁷⁴ Michael Mascuch, 'Social Mobility and Middling Self-identity: the Ethos of British Autobiographers, 1600-1750', *Social History*, 20 (1995), 45-61 (p. 61).

⁷⁵ Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998), p. 95.

Dutch and lingua franca (Coxere, p. 58).⁷⁶ In 1664, he was briefly made the master of a vessel, but this caused him some anxiety:

I was brought up a seaman, and was willing to officiate the place of a master, yet was to seek as a merchant. The concern being so much as the whole cargo, to be at my disposing, I found it too heavy for me, though I was encouraged by the wages. (Coxere, p. 108)

The burdensome disposal of the cargo was too great a responsibility for him; the sense of the heavy weight of it is palpable. Although at seven pounds a month the wages were the highest he had ever earned, he relinquished this post after just two voyages, suggesting that he was not solely motivated by money.

Throughout his career at sea, Coxere's wage was supplemented by the income from his private ventures; during the course of his voyages he bought and sold a wide variety of commodities including cloth, fish, hens, raisins and wine and then traded them on, seizing opportunities to make money as they occurred:

The two pistols I had given me at Cadiz I laid out in wine and, homeward bound at sea, when the Flemings' wine was drank up, I sold mine to them and doubled my money, besides my own drinking and, receiving my wages at Amsterdam, I laid it out in linen cloth. (Coxere, p. 51)

On his return to England the cloth was then sold by his wife:

My wife soon turned the holland into money, which we then had occasion for. As I remember, it sold for nine pounds, which was then our stock; for my wife, having good friends, with her own industry kept me out of debt. (Coxere, p. 51)

Coxere had married Mary, the daughter of a Dover sailor, Richard Hiway, in 1655, and they went on to have eight children, six of whom survived infancy. She played an active and crucial role in maintaining the family finances, supporting the family during Coxere's often lengthy absences. The work of John C. Appleby has revealed how the willingness of women to act as receivers and traders of plunder was part of a

⁷⁶ Coxere describes lingua franca as 'the language which was generally spoken' in Tunis.

discrete economy in stolen and second-hand goods.⁷⁷ Based in the busy port town of Dover, the wife and daughter of seafarers, Mary was ideally placed for this, and sold the goods which Coxere brought home through her network of contacts. But she was not solely reliant on Coxere, as he reported on returning home after eighteen months captivity in Barbary and Spain: ‘At this time my wife did begin to keep shop, there being a necessity for something to be done for a livelihood’ (Coxere, p.80).

Regularly receiving goods and money, both stolen and traded, from Coxere, she appears to have developed a network of trade substantial enough for her to establish a shop. Far from condemning Coxere’s plunder, Mary was at the heart of a network which enabled the entire family and wider community to profit from it (Coxere, p. 51).

The irregular lifestyle of men at sea meant that wives and families were forced to find ways to support themselves in the absence of husbands, but discrete interdependent systems of support functioned even when they were apart. Whilst at sea, sailors sent gifts and money to their wives and partners through seafaring networks of contacts.⁷⁸ The 1609 pamphlet, *Newes from sea*, describes the renegade captain John Ward and his crew giving sums of money to an English seaman, Master Fisher, to take to their wives and friends back in England.⁷⁹ This was not an entirely reliable system: Fisher neglected to deliver the hundred pounds which Ward had given him for his wife. At their next encounter Ward caused Fisher to be ‘very vilely handled’ and had him ducked at the yard arm, where he died.⁸⁰ This incident suggests that those engaged in piracy retained a sense of obligation towards those

⁷⁷ John C. Appleby, *Women and English Piracy, 1540-1720* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013), p. 52.

⁷⁸ Appleby, *Women and English Piracy*, p. 72.

⁷⁹ Anon, *Newes from sea, of two notorious pyrats, Ward the Englishman, and Danseker the Dutchman* (London, 1609), C2r.

⁸⁰ *Newes from sea*, C2v.

left at home, but also hints at complex networks of communication based on trust:

Ward was not only able to send money back to England but could also obtain confirmation of whether it had been received. The breaking of such networks was a noteworthy breach of trust. As we explore in the next chapter, Ward was infamous for his piracy and reviled for his crimes. Yet even the demonised Ward was able to maintain a wife in England and a network of contacts which enabled him to communicate with her while abroad, suggesting that the legislative vilification of piracy was not wholly reflected amongst the general population.

Similarly, though somewhat less dramatically, whilst at sea, Coxere also sent money and goods back to Mary. This was not always in circumstances of his own choosing. On his way home to England after escaping from slavery in Tunis, Coxere was captured yet again – this time by the Spanish. He lost a chest and some clothing which he had plundered and hoped to take back to England, but retained a bag of gold ducats and managed to hide some in the brim of his cap and the toes of his shoes, stuffing the remainder into a gun in the hope the Spanish would overlook them. He then discovered a Dover man, Humphrey Mantle, was part of the Spanish crew. Coxere recognised Mantle, exchanged caps and shoes with him, and told him of the bag of gold in the gun, in the expectation that Mantle would keep it safe for him (Coxere, pp. 74-75). Coxere appears to have had little personal knowledge of Mantle other than that he was a Dover man but this proved enough to instil trust in him:

I being still in a hearkening out condition whether this fellow would prove honest, which I did not much question, he being a neighbour and townsman. (Coxere, p. 76)

Coxere was unsure of Mantle, and ‘in a hearkening out condition’, trying to assess his honesty. In his urgency he made a judgement based on criteria he might have applied in England. That Mantle was a neighbour and a townsman carried an

implication of his honesty and provided reassurance for Coxere. Reputational credit relied on knowledge communicated through chains of friends and business associates.⁸¹ For those overseas, unsupported by these networks of knowledge, it was more difficult to know who to trust, or how to obtain redress if someone proved untrustworthy.⁸² Ties of neighbourliness and kinship which would carry obligation in Dover are assumed by Coxere to have a global reach and are freighted with the same responsibility abroad.

Mantle, however, did not reciprocate the sense of neighbourliness and ran off with the gold on a Dutch ship, leaving Coxere penniless (Coxere, p. 76). But he was not entirely without scruples. When Coxere returned to Dover in poverty after eighteen months of captivity, to find his son had died in his absence, he discovered that Mantle had been in touch with Mary:

But as for the fellow that run away with the gold, he had been with my wife, being a townsman, and could not well avoid it more than his honesty, and gave her as many of the Barbary ducats as was valued at nine pounds, which was some help, though but little to what he had. This fellow fell sick after he had spent the gold, and died miserable poor. (Coxere, p. 80)

Coxere's anger at Mantle is tangible. He cannot bring himself to use Mantle's name, referring to him as the 'fellow', and concludes the episode with the inference that his death was a providential punishment for his behaviour towards Coxere. Although Mantle has cheated Coxere, giving Mary less than their share, he could not entirely renege on the bargain he made with Coxere. Mantle 'could not well avoid it' if he wanted to return to Dover as failure to make a token effort to honour his obligations, at least in part, could have resulted in his reputational ruin. That he does not honour his obligations in full is scandalous enough for Coxere to imply that his death was a fitting punishment. This episode highlights the efforts men abroad

⁸¹ Muldrew, p. 152.

⁸² Muldrew, p. 188.

made to replicate those relationships of social obligation which existed at home. Coxere's relation of this incident performs something of an educational function for the reader, teaching that norms of neighbourliness should still apply even amongst pirates.

Coxere's plunder was a small-time, opportunistic form of piracy and he was as often the victim as the perpetrator. For the most part his thefts consisted of cloth, clothing and wine – gold was an exception. His choice to turn to plunder is presented as being a part of trade. In Coxere's writings, the goods which he seized are treated as just another source of revenue, subsumed into the family finances along with his wage and any profit from his ventures. There is no special moral weight afforded to them, and Coxere never refers to any fear of legal retribution or rebuke from family, friends, community or God. The active role of Mary and Coxere's wider family in receiving and trading his stolen goods illuminates the inability of the state to distinguish between legal and illegal forms of maritime plunder. This was a commercialised enterprise with support from family and community.⁸³ Coxere's account is, as he terms it, a relation of his adventures, but it is also a textual account of his life which tells us much about his family, networks and community. The complexity of the credit economy and of Coxere's networks is evident throughout the text, revealing that, in Dover at least, the trade of plundered goods was an integral part of the domestic economy, suggesting widespread acceptance of a practice which was criminalised in law. Coxere presents his decision to begin to plunder not as a turn to crime but as an economic decision enmeshed with the support and approval of his family and community.

Manuscript accounts such as those of Coxere and Barlow are not the only kinds of texts relating seamen's experience of piracy, and we now turn to consider

⁸³ Appleby, *Women and English Piracy*, p. 84.

the printed account of James Harris, who was hanged for piracy along with eighteen other men, at Execution Dock in December 1609. His testimony, described as ‘The discourse of Captaine Harris under his owne hand’ was hurriedly printed, alongside the stories of his less literate confederates, in a pamphlet *The lives, apprehensions, arraignments, and executions of the 19 late pyrates* in the immediate aftermath of the execution.⁸⁴ The anonymous author of the pamphlet states that Harris’s story was written by Harris himself, ‘under his owne hand’. Although we cannot be certain of this, the structure of the pamphlet seem to suggest that Harris either wrote the testimony himself or was a direct source for the author. Harris is the only one of the pirates featuring in the pamphlet reported to have written his own account. His literacy is remarked upon by the author of the pamphlet who states that unlike Harris, Captain Jennings, another of the condemned pirates, was illiterate and therefore could not write his own testimony.⁸⁵ Harris’s own narrative ends as he leaves the Marshalsea for his final journey to Execution Dock. His death, which we return to in chapter four, is described in a postscript by the pamphleteer. Harris’s narrative, a hybrid of scaffold confession, captivity narrative and religious writing, is very different in form to the previously discussed manuscript accounts of Coxere, Barlow and Norwood. However, in common with Coxere’s account it contains a wealth of material about his relationships with family and community and we now attend to this in order to consider what it can tell us about the support networks of early modern seamen and attitudes towards piracy.

The pamphlet relates that James Harris was born and brought up in Bristol, the son of a merchant. He first went to sea as a young man, and eventually rose to be

⁸⁴ Anon., *The lives, apprehensions, arraignments, and executions, of the 19. late pyrates Namely: Capt. Harris. Iennings. Longcastle. Downes. Haulsey. and their companies. As they were seuerally indited on St. Margrets Hill in Southwarke, on the 22. of December last, and executed the Fryday following* (1609).

⁸⁵ *The lives, apprehensions*, C1r.

Captain of a merchant vessel. Whilst on a trading voyage in the Mediterranean, he was captured during a skirmish with a Turkish galley, taken to Tunis and imprisoned for three years, during which time he was tortured and forced to work as a galley slave. He was freed when Captain Richard Bishop, a notorious pirate, paid a ransom for him. On his release, Harris joined Bishop and turned pirate, operating in the Mediterranean and along the coast of Ireland. He was eventually captured off the coast of Baltimore, sent to London to be tried and hanged for piracy.⁸⁶

Harris's stated intention in writing his narrative is so that readers can 'see unravelled the whole web of my life'.⁸⁷ The description of his life as a web gives us some indication that seamen, even pirates, considered themselves connected and supported rather than adrift at sea. At the centre of Harris's web is Bristol, his home city, of which he writes fondly and often in his account. His father was a merchant and although Harris describes him lovingly, he also characterises their relationship as one of exchange and credit. Of his youth, he writes: 'My education was such, as did credit my loving and carefull father, and was obeyed by me as a dutyfull sonne'.⁸⁸ This is a close relationship, but also a transaction where the father provides and cares for his son and, in return, the son is obedient and dutiful.

Harris depicts his family as being of the middling sort, though rather more successful than the Coxeres. He describes his father as well-connected within the powerful merchant venturer community in Bristol with aspirations to rise even higher. Harris was eager to please his father, and sought to develop himself as an asset and extend the reputational credit of his family:

My company to our gentry was accounted so welcome, that they esteemed me for pleasure, more than expenses, and the contempt I held to associate with the base, had bought my faire demeanor to be beloved of the best. So

⁸⁶ *The lives, apprehensions*, A1r- C2r.

⁸⁷ *The lives, apprehensions*, A2v- A2c.

⁸⁸ *The lives, apprehensions*, A2v.

that my fellowship entirely desired, and my condition held honest, my father was proud to call me his happy sonne.⁸⁹

Ever the son of a merchant, credit, accounting and expenses feature largely in Harris's narrative. He calculates how his standing can be improved both with his father and the worthies of the community. It is essential that he is 'held honest' in order to gain credit with these men. His worth was dependent on their judgement, in the manner which Thomas Hobbes observed in *Leviathan*:

The Value, or Worth of a man, is as of all other things, his Price; that is to say, so much as would be given for the use of his Power: and therefore is not absolute; but a thing dependent on the need and judgement of another.⁹⁰

Men such as Harris could strive to improve their social standing, but, as indicated by Hobbes, credit and worth were inherently unstable as they were based on the status of neighbourly relations and the mutability of reputation.⁹¹ This reckoning of credit and worth based on the judgement of others was especially crucial within the mercantile community as credit networks became more complex and ranged over long distances.

Harris's conduct appears to have satisfied the expectations of the Bristol merchants. He reports that he 'so farre prevailed in the love of our Marchants' that they encouraged him to go to sea, first as an apprentice and later as a purser in a man-of-war.⁹² In this role, responsible for the finances of the ship, Harris proved so successful and profitable he was promoted to captain. The promotion was entirely due to the credit he had gained through his conduct, as he explained:

How carefull I governed, let my owne hand neglect to record, and the Marchants themselves when my body is in dust, impartially report, I never returning home but with sayles of succeſſe profitable to the venturers,

⁸⁹ *The lives, apprehensions*, A2v.

⁹⁰ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London, 1651), p. 42.

⁹¹ Muldrew, p. 157.

⁹² *The lives, apprehensions*, A3r.

comfort to my father, and credit to his sonne: whereby from degree to degree deserving advancement I was at length set forth as Captaine my selfe.⁹³

Harris depicts himself as an asset to his community as a man who could be trusted with investment, claiming that the impartial merchants will confirm his diligence and care. With each successful voyage his credit increased within the merchant community and with his father. But these relationships of trust demanded constant nurturing and could be difficult to maintain over the distances required by overseas trade. When misfortune struck, seamen such as Harris could find themselves abandoned by those very networks they believed would support them and unsure who to trust.

During the course of a voyage in the Mediterranean, Harris was captured and enslaved by Barbary corsairs, serving three years at the oars in the galleys of Tunis.⁹⁴ This was not a particularly unusual fate for an Englishman. As we will discuss in chapter three, the maritime strength of ‘the Turk’ was a force frequently encountered by Christian nations who sought to engage in seaborne trade. Although the Levant Company was established by the English in 1581 to enable trade with the Ottoman Empire, such trade also facilitated other cross-cultural encounters, including mutual plunder and taking of captives. As English involvement in trade spread throughout the Mediterranean, so too was there an exponential growth in the number of vessels and seamen captured. Any fit male captives taken during these raids were at risk of being sent to the galleys as a slave. This slave labour powered the corsair fleets whose ships could have up to 300 slaves shackled to the oars, rowing for up to twenty hours a day.⁹⁵ Francis Knight, who wrote an account of his own seven years

⁹³ *The lives, apprehensions*, A3r.

⁹⁴ *The lives, apprehensions*, A1r.

⁹⁵ Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600-1850*, 2nd edn (London: Pimlico, 2003), p. 60.

as a captive, described the lot of the galley slave as ‘most inhumane and diabollicall’:

For a drop of water they would pawne their soules, and often are constrained to drinke of the Salt Oceans; their repast at best but bread and water, and for want of sleepe are in continuall extasies; the strokes of the Oare is dollerous, and with its ausideousnesse many splits their hearts at it, in this miserie all things makes against themselves: the scorching heate now penetrates their brains, their flesh is burned off their backs, when anon they are as much pinched with cold: strong fetters are their nearest consorts from which they are never exempted ... not having so much roome as to stretch their legges; their sleep when they have any is an hour in twelve and that at night, when the one half Roaes and the other slumbers: a call of a Whisell awakes them all three hundred or more of them, their audiance and leape must be altogether; the discipline take Oare in hand, the stroke regular and punctiall.⁹⁶

Captives could be redeemed from this suffering for a ransom, which could be paid with money raised through official church collections or by private individuals if they were able to raise the finance. The work of scholars such as Linda Colley, Nabil I. Matar and Daniel J. Vitkus has shown that ransom negotiations over Barbary captives were common and demands were often met by family, church or community.⁹⁷ However, Harris makes no mention of any such efforts made on his behalf, or any contact with family and friends, during his imprisonment in Tunis. There does not appear to have been any actual rift and, as later events revealed, regard for Harris amongst his family and the Bristol merchant community remained high. Arranging a ransom over such a distance is likely to have been laborious and time consuming. However, Harris seems to have perceived it as something of an abandonment by his community and this, coupled with cruel usage by his captors,

⁹⁶ Francis Knight, *A relation of seaven yeares slaverie under the Turkes of Argeire, suffered by an English captive merchant Wherein is also conteined all memorable passages, fights, and accidents, which happined in that citie, and at sea with their shippes and gallies during that time* (London, 1640), pp. 28-29.

⁹⁷ For more information on Barbary captives see Colley, *Captives*; Nabil Matar, *Britain and Barbary, 1589-1689* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005); Daniel J. Vitkus, ‘Unkind Dealings: English Captivity Narratives, Commercial Transformation, and the Economy of Unfree Labor in the Early Modern Period’ in *Piracy and Captivity in the Mediterranean, 1550-1810*, ed. by Mario Klarer (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 56-75

caused him to become bitter and he ‘vowed that my liberty gained, should be to others losse’.⁹⁸

When Harris was at this low ebb he was approached by Richard Bishop who appeared to offer Harris a lifeline. Although Bishop and Harris had never previously met, Bishop was seemingly aware of Harris’s reputation as a captain and sought him out in prison. Harris described their first encounter:

He having (by what rumour I never understood) had intelligence of my thralldom there, of my extreame usage, and infortunate mishap, of his own free nature he enquired me out, and demanded of me if I were that Captaine Harris so talked of in Bristow, who had bene so fortunate to inrich others, and was now dejected in this misfortune my selfe.⁹⁹

As this text serves as Harris’s last testimony, it is possible he was hoping for a pardon and therefore stressed his usefulness to society and his connections within his home city. He may also have sought to benefit by portraying himself as having no other option than to throw his lot in with Bishop. Harris describes feeling pride in the recognition of his reputation, that despite his straitened circumstances he still had credit in Bristol. His reputation – or perhaps more specifically his ability to enrich others – made an impression on Bishop who paid a ransom of 300 ducats to the Governor of Tunis for Harris’s freedom, telling Harris that he did so ‘remembring what Bristoll had spoke of’.¹⁰⁰ Harris’s good reputation as a man who could bring wealth to his investors had spread as far as Tunis and convinced Bishop to view him as a good investment. Although the ransom was not paid by any collection or direct intervention by Bristol, it was Harris’s credit with Bristol that secured his freedom.

The ransom of 300 ducats which Bishop paid was relatively modest. In 1625, Robert Adams wrote to his father from captivity in the Barbary port of Sallee requesting payment of a ransom of 730 ducats. He stressed to his father that this

⁹⁸ *The lives, apprehensions*, A2r.

⁹⁹ *The lives, apprehensions*, A4v.

¹⁰⁰ *The lives, apprehensions*, B1r.

ransom was not excessive and he had not struck a poor deal as all his fellow captives also had their ransoms set at 730 ducats.¹⁰¹ Unknown to Harris – or so we are led to believe – Bishop was in a position to negotiate the lowest figure for Harris's redemption because he was a captain in the Barbary fleet led by the ubiquitous English renegade captain John Ward. Ward operated out of Tunis under the auspices of the Governor who both licensed and profited from his activities. Bishop was Ward's chief lieutenant in the fleet and therefore had easy access to the Governor. The Governor profited from the activities of Ward and his men, and he would also derive benefit if Harris, a skilled captain with a record of profitable voyages, were to join the fleet. He would therefore be likely to accept a low ransom figure in the expectation of future returns.

Following Harris's release from captivity, Bishop supported him financially and entertained him lavishly. They spent some weeks carousing in Tunis. Harris praised Bishop's generosity, reporting that 'his purse was as open to me as to himself'.¹⁰² Harris began to forge new relationships in Tunis, principally with Bishop and his men, as his connections with Bristol appeared to have broken down. But eventually Bishop sought a return on this investment and made a proposal to Harris:

Captaine Harris what saist thou my heart, how art thou resolved man, whether as occasion shall offer thee, to make for England, and there to be held bold and beholding to thy old, but wavering acquaintance, or to abide with me, & venture thy fortunes with thy certain friend.¹⁰³

As Harris describes it, Bishop cleverly offers him a choice, subtly casting doubt on the strength of his ties to England. His acquaintances in England are portrayed as

¹⁰¹ Robert Adams, 'Robert Adams to Captain Robert Adams', in *Piracy, Slavery and Redemption: Barbary Captivity Narratives from Early Modern England*, ed. by Daniel J. Vitkus (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 349-350.

¹⁰² *The lives, apprehensions*, B1v.

¹⁰³ *The lives, apprehensions*, B1r - B1v.

‘old, but wavering’ intimating that although there is a shared history Bristol failed Harris in his time of need and did nothing to secure his freedom. Bishop hints that in Bristol Harris may have credit – he is held bold – but with this also comes obligation. He is beholden to them for his fortunes. In paying the ransom Bishop has already demonstrated his own trustworthiness – he is a ‘certain friend’ and to consolidate this offers Harris a share in any spoils:

If for England thou resolvest thy course, such is my love to thy welfare, I will not leave thy company, till I see thee ashore, and then leave me to shift for my selfe, But if with me and my love to thee, thou wilt fasten thy fortunes, I will call thee my brother, and in the riches I have gained I will make thee a sharer.¹⁰⁴

In stressing his devotion to Harris and styling himself as a brother Bishop seeks to privilege his bond with Harris above ties with family and community in Bristol. He offers him a degree of self-determination – the opportunity to make his own fortune.

Harris demonstrates some insight into Bishop’s motives, confessing that he ‘was almost caught at the first angling’, assenting that Bishop had sought to entrap him. However, he then makes a reckoning of the credit that Bishop had extended to him:

Having had intelligence that his purchase was great, seeing his riot and expenses huge, and having found his curtesie towards my miserie manifest, I found my inclination yeelding.¹⁰⁵

Harris describes feeling bound to Bishop by obligation due to the outlay he had made and the kindness he had shown. As a result he agreed to sail with him as part of the pirate fleet. He reported that, as pirates, they thrived and shared their spoils equally, with Bishop generously refusing to recover anything from Harris’s share for the expenses he had incurred.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ *The lives, apprehensions*, B1v.

¹⁰⁵ *The lives, apprehensions*, B2r.

¹⁰⁶ *The lives, apprehensions*, B2r.

We must be mindful that Harris's account is retrospective and, imprisoned at the time of writing, he may have been hoping for a pardon or, at least, a good death following confession. Bishop was not with Harris in Ireland at the time of his capture, having stayed in Tunis to recover from 'superflous revelling'.¹⁰⁷ Yet Harris immediately revealed his relationship with Bishop, informing his captor, Sir William Saint John, 'I was prisoner in Tunis, and from that thraldom released by Captaine Bishop, I was bound to obey him'.¹⁰⁸ He later reiterated this, saying that Bishop was Lord of him and he was compelled to his will.¹⁰⁹ Although, as we have seen, it was common for men accused of piracy to argue that they had been seized by pirates and forced to act with them against their will, Harris argued that his debt to Bishop meant that it would be dishonourable to act otherwise. His entire narrative frames this argument, from his initial styling of himself as a dutiful son, through to describing the creation of his reputation in the Bristol community, and the eventual debt of obligation owed to Bishop.

At the time of writing Harris may have been hoping for clemency. Bishop himself was granted protection in 1611 and allowed to settle peacefully in West Cork.¹¹⁰ Harris may have constructed his narrative in the manner he believed most likely to gain him a pardon, yet the plausibility of his story rests on genuine early modern concerns around reputational risk and the consequences of failing to fulfil obligations. The financial investment which Bishop made in Harris had to be repaid otherwise Harris's reputation might be damaged. If Harris's good reputation in Bristol could follow him to Tunis, might not Bristol hear of any failure on Harris's part to fulfil his obligations to Bishop? Given the equivocal nature of early modern

¹⁰⁷ *The lives, apprehensions*, B2r.

¹⁰⁸ *The lives, apprehensions*, B3v.

¹⁰⁹ *The lives, apprehensions*, B4r.

¹¹⁰ Adrian Tinniswood, *Pirates of Barbary* (London: Vintage, 2011), p. 68.

piracy, Harris perhaps gambled that piracy might be considered a lesser offence than failure to meet his obligations.

Following his apprehension Harris was returned to England, where he spent 20 days in Bristol before being transported to London. In Bristol, he was received joyfully by friends and family who constantly visited him and gave financial aid:

My friends mor sorrowed to see me now, then ever they rejoiced to behold me before, yet never neglected to visit my company, allowing me meanes to beare me like a Gentleman, nor ceasing since with both purse and paines to have recovered my peace.¹¹¹

Harris's friends, family and community continue to support him despite the accusation of piracy. Indeed, he was held in such esteem by this community they attempted to raise eight hundred pounds to purchase his pardon.¹¹² But finally, Harris faced his judgement which he typically described in terms of a reckoning: 'being weighed in the scales of Justice we were found too light'.¹¹³ His community continued to support him to the end with his brother accompanying him to his execution in London and friends visiting him daily in prison. These relationships prevailed even when the full force of the law against piracy was enacted to the point of execution. That Harris, although convicted of piracy, continued to be supported by both his family and community to the very public end suggests that acceptance of the legal argument for the criminalisation of piracy was far from hegemonic.

The textual lives of both Coxere and Harris reveal they retained strong connections with family, friends and community despite frequent lengthy absences from England. Furthermore, these networks of support remained untroubled by their maritime crimes and indeed appear to have benefited from them. Coxere's family received, sold and profited from his plunder, and Harris's family, friends and

¹¹¹ *The lives, apprehensions*, B4r.

¹¹² *The lives, apprehensions*, A3r.

¹¹³ *The lives, apprehensions*, B4r.

community were enriched by him and supported him even to the foot of the gallows. The accounts of both these men suggest that far from being the disconnected figure of our imagination, pirates often retained complex social networks of support. These pirates were an integral part of wider society providing a valuable income stream for many, albeit one that the state struggled to control. In the previous chapter we saw how young men perceived a life at sea as a route to new opportunities. Similarly, by turning to piracy seamen sought to capitalise on opportunities which emerged through the rapid expansion of Mediterranean trade, in the hope that by doing so they could improve the wealth and social status of their families. The increasing criminalisation of piracy and depiction of pirates as the enemy of all humankind can be read as an attempt to curb such ambitions, however the narratives of men such as Coxere and Harris reveal that the web of community solidarity often withstood the threat of the law.

Conclusion

We have seen how early modern legal texts sought to define piracy from other, lawful, types of maritime plunder and to label pirates as the enemy of humanity. The proliferation of these texts and increasingly punitive legislation coincided with an expansion of overseas trade and the growing necessity to protect merchant vessels. Yet, paradoxically, the very skills which pirates possessed were crucial to furthering that growth in trade. Piracy flourished under Elizabeth I, who both licensed plunder and tacitly encouraged outright piracy to further her ambitions of expansion. Although the succession of James I saw a more overt criminalisation of piracy, a level of pragmatism was nevertheless exercised with the continuing pardon of pirates. The pirate was, then, both agent of and threat to maritime mercantilism; hero and villain.

Accounts of men such as Cusack and Easton evidence that seamen often fell foul of anti-piracy legislation but they also learned to exploit it, perceiving that piracy was only distinguished from legitimate activities such as privateering by legal definition. If this were the case it could be transformed into lawful activity were it to be redefined. We have seen how seamen went to some lengths to redefine and legitimise their otherwise criminal activities: paying for or falsely obtaining licences, arguing their case in court, and procuring sovereign patronage. In theory the law was immutable but, in practise, it could be stretched to offer a veneer of legality where it was pragmatic to do so. In contrast with the strident tone of legal texts, the business of defining piracy was slippery and uncertain.

Investigation of the textual accounts of Harris and Coxere revealed further evidence of the ways in which seamen practically navigated the legal landscape by highlighting the divergent attitudes demonstrated by seamen involved in maritime crime: Harris, facing execution for piracy, repented of his crimes but, in doing so,

attempted to justify his actions, whereas Coxere regarded his plunder as nothing more than another source of income. Although Harris's activities were on a considerably larger scale than those of Coxere, it is difficult to believe that the prospect of a last minute pardon played no part in his repentance. In repeatedly stressing his links to the Bristol merchant venturers, and his success on their behalf, Harris, like Coxere, links his piracy to trade. Robbery at sea was, for these two seamen at least, perceived as an integral part of mercantile trade – a means of increasing both income and social standing.

Examination of these accounts has uncovered that, despite lengthy periods at sea, both Harris and Coxere retained close social relationships with family and friends in England. In our analysis of this material, this study breaks with scholars such as Fumerton who describe early modern seamen as suffering an interpersonal disconnectedness.¹¹⁴ The textual evidence of the lived experience of seamen considered in both chapters one and two suggests that seamen retained robust connections with family and community. Both Harris and Coxere had loving relationships with their families, and family members supported, traded and profited from their robbery at sea, with Harris's family and community supporting him to the foot of the scaffold, suggesting that the official narrative criminalising piracy had failed to dominate the wider debate. There continued to be many men, with their families and networks, who hoped to emulate the heroic yet piratical Elizabethan seadogs and perceived maritime plunder as a route to riches and status. Having considered those who aspired to success, we now turn to discuss those who achieved it – at a price – on the Barbary Coast.

¹¹⁴ Fumerton, p. 91.

Chapter 3: Turning Turk

Introduction

Chapter two considered what made men choose to turn to maritime plunder, and found them often moving back and forth across the boundary between lawful trade and illegal piracy. This chapter takes a specific group of pirates, and explores representations of seamen who chose to seek their fortunes as corsairs on the Maghreb Coast, referred to in contemporary texts as the Barbary Coast, many of whom converted to Islam in the process. Such converts were a well-recognised group who became known as renegades, and they can be found throughout literature of the period, in texts including captivity and travel narratives, official documents, sermons, and in drama where the renegade became a popular subject. This chapter analyses this range of textual evidence to ask what it can tell us about the choices and motivations of these men who rejected not only their country but their religion.¹ If we examine them together, what do these texts disclose about the society that produced them?

The term ‘renegade’, along with its variants ‘renegado’ or ‘runagate’ describes someone who has renounced their religious beliefs, but it also implies a rejection encompassing more than just religious beliefs.² Previous chapters explored the network of obligations which sustained seamen even after they turned to piracy.³

¹ Although women also became renegades this chapter is focussed on renegade sailors, the overwhelming majority of whom were male.

² “renegade, n. and adj.” in *OED Online* <<https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.lib.bbk.ac.uk/view/Entry/162410?rskey=6kt4Co&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>> [accessed 21 October 2018]

³ For further discussion on networks of obligation see Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998).

A renegade, however, was someone who in official discourse at least, was portrayed as having deserted, rejecting obligation, social commitment and the law in favour of personal interest.⁴ ‘Renegade’, particularly in its form of ‘runagate’ is used as a term of contempt to describe a wanderer or restless roving person.⁵ The label ‘renegade’ thus implicitly links perceptions of faithlessness to those of vagrancy, placelessness and mobility which, as we have seen evidenced, dogged early modern seamen giving rise to anxieties about their unruliness.⁶ Resolution was required to turn against country and religion, and renegades were often described as having ‘turned Turk’. As with ‘turning pirate’, the use of the verb to turn implies a decisive choice – in this case renegades had chosen to turn their back against England and against Christianity. However, the decision to turn should not solely be framed in terms of a rejection or as ‘preposterous’ and perverse, as Patricia Parker suggests; evidence indicates it was also viewed as a positive turning towards an alternative culture perceived as offering possibilities for which it was deemed worth rejecting certainties of home and faith.⁷ Marcus Rediker has described the seaman’s labour as ‘a commodity to be sold on the open market like any other’, and we consider the decision to become a renegade in the context of the commodification of maritime labour where expansion of maritime trade had resulted in the creation of a global

⁴ “renegado, n. and adj.” in *OED Online* <www.oed.com/view/Entry/162413> [Accessed 21 October 2018]

⁵ “runagate, n. and adj.” in *OED Online*, <www.oed.com/view/Entry/168879> [Accessed 21 October 2018]

⁶ Chapters one and two have examined scholarship which explores perceptions of placelessness and mobility, including the work of A.L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England, 1560-1640* (London: Methuen, 1985); Patricia Fumerton, *Unsettled: the culture of mobility and the working poor in early modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Linda Woodbridge, *Vagrancy, Homelessness, and English Renaissance Literature* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

⁷ Patricia Parker, ‘Preposterous Conversions: Turning Turk, and its “Pauline” Rerighting’, *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 2:1 (2002), 1-34.

market for labour, in which highly mobile seamen were ideally placed to sell their skills to the highest bidder regardless of nationality or religion.⁸

In previous chapters we have looked at the choices seamen made to go to sea and to turn pirate and how these choices were represented textually. The decision to turn Turk, as we will see, is often presented in highly moral terms as a stark betrayal that, as Matthew Dimmock comments, causes the renegade to ‘lose all vestiges of his identity, epitomized in the breakdown of family ties and of all national and religious allegiance’.⁹ Analysis of the evidence, however, reveals a more nuanced attitude towards renegades. Scholarly attention to the figure of the renegade has mainly focussed on the role it performed within early modern discourses of race, religion and nationalism.¹⁰ Whilst retaining a dialogue with scholarship in these areas, this chapter explores some of the same and some additional evidence to consider the renegade as a socially mobile figure which became the locus of expectations and anxieties arising from the expansion of maritime trade. In doing so, it contends that the mobility of this highly skilled maritime workforce allowed for the imagination of a differently structured society and troubled domestic notions of authority and social hierarchy.

In order to understand the tropes of the textual representation of renegades the chapter begins with an exploration of them in travel writing. Consideration of this literature affords insight into the motives and aspirations of those who ‘turned

⁸ Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987), p. 16.

⁹ Matthew Dimmock, *New Turkes: Dramatizing Islam and the Ottomans in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 100.

¹⁰ See, among others, Jerry Brotton, *This Orient Isle: Elizabethan England and the Islamic World* (London: Allen Lane, 2016); Jonathan Burton, ‘English Anxiety and the Muslim Power of Conversion: Five Perspectives on “Turning Turk” in Early Modern Texts’, *JEMCS*, 2.1 (2002), 35-67; Barbara Fuchs, ‘Faithless Empires: Pirates, Renegadoes, and the English Nation’ *ELH* 67, no.1 (2000):45-69.

Turk', and the reaction their apostasy provoked in others. It then goes on to examine texts, including sermons, which reveal that many converts to Islam later returned to England, and ask what this body of understudied evidence reveals about responses of Church and community towards converts. The second part of the chapter offers a case study in the choice to become a renegade and examines the textual life of John Ward (c.1553 – c.1622), a man who rose from humble obscurity to become one of the most famed English pirates of the seventeenth century. An energetic and lucrative career of piracy combined with apostasy ensured celebrity for Ward, and his exploits are well documented both in official records and popular print including ballads, pamphlets and drama. Ward is perhaps now best known as the titular character in Robert Daborne's dramatization of his life, *A Christian Turned Turk* (1612), which is read here as evidencing an unease concerning the threat to domestic social order which cross-cultural encounters posed. The wealth of evidence considered in this chapter is seldom read together, but taking this approach enables us to interrogate the figure of the renegade from a much wider range of perspectives. In doing so we reveal that demonization of the figure of the renegade concealed attitudes that were often more pragmatic and nuanced in practice.

1. 'A very unhappie boie': A Better Life in Barbary?

In 1583 Thomas Saunders, a sailor, recorded witnessing an incident which occurred at the island of Djerba off the coast of Tripoli:

This King had a sonne which was a ruler in an Iland called Jerbby, whereunto arrived an English ship called the *Greene Dragon*, of the which was Master one M. Blonket, who having a very unhappie boie in that ship, and

understanding that whosoever would turn Turke should be well entertained of the kings sonne, this boy did run a shore, and voluntarilie turned Turke.¹¹

In this account the ‘very unhappie boie’ appears to have believed that in converting to Islam he would be rewarded by the King’s son and, in doing so, would be better served than by remaining, unhappily, with Master Blonket. This short narrative appears in a pamphlet published in 1587 in which Saunders describes his own capture, enslavement in Tripoli, and his eventual release. There are nine Christians described as having converted to Islam in Saunders’ brief twenty-three page account, seven of whom are Englishmen – including John Nelson, ‘a son of a yeoman of our Queenes guard’, one French, and one Maltese.¹² This suggests there was a substantial population of formerly Christian converts living and working in the Barbary States. Saunders cites various motivations for the apostasy of these men: some were converted forcibly and some, such as the Frenchman Romaine Sonnings, are described as having converted to Islam in the hope of gaining the clemency of their captors – a vain hope in the case of Sonnings, who was later executed in Tripoli, reportedly ‘in the faith of a Turke’.¹³ Others, such as Master Blonket’s boy, who understood that if he ‘would turn Turke should be well entertained of the kings sonne’, were portrayed as converting to Islam because they saw it as a route to a better life.¹⁴ We cannot truly know the reason for this boy’s desertion, but in his telling of the incident Saunders disrupts the narrative against conversion by

¹¹ Thomas Saunders, *A true Discription and breefe Discourse, of a most lamentable Voiage, made latelie to Tripolie in Barbarie, in a Ship named the Jesus* (London, 1587), C2r.

¹² Saunders, C2r.

¹³ Saunders, B4r. Sonnings was a Frenchman and a Catholic. Brotton comments that the Spanish inflected ‘renegado’ suggests that apostasy was a phenomenon associated, presumably by English Protestants, with Catholicism. See Brotton, p. 131.

¹⁴ Saunders, C2r.

introducing the idea that apostasy would not only remain unpunished but might in some way be rewarded.

Saunders' description of the 'unhappie boie' stands in contrast to the unforgiving views on renegades he displays elsewhere in the text by containing a justification for the boy's conversion to Islam. The boy is unhappy in his current situation and perceives he will have a better life as a convert in the service of the King's son. Saunders is not critical of the boy as he is of others who convert for money or pardon. There is an implication of blame against Master Blonket and the crew of the *Greene Dragon* as the possible cause of the boy's unhappiness, and the suggestion that Christian boys would perhaps not be driven to apostasy were their conditions happier. The boy is not masterless, as Fumerton suggests unsettled youths to be, but, in common with Barlow, Coxere and Norwood in chapter one, is choosing who his master will be.¹⁵ This one small incident of the unhappy boy captures the unprecedented opportunity for choice which faced early modern seamen as they encountered cultures which offered prospects for advancement unattainable in England. Daniel Vitkus has described the figure of the renegade as an embodiment of English economic and cultural vulnerabilities arising from the expansion of trade in the Mediterranean and, despite his condemnation of apostasy, Saunders' account carried within it a sense of opportunity and the possibility that conversion to Islam might offer a route to financial and social betterment.¹⁶

The suggestion of aspiration is corroborated by other travellers' reports which described the prosperity of some apostates in Turkey and the Barbary States. In common with Saunders, we find correspondents who took an ambiguous view of such successful converts. In 1586, William Harborne, agent for Elizabeth I and

¹⁵ Fumerton, p. 17.

¹⁶ Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theatre and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 113.

representative of the Turkey Company, wrote to the treasurer of the Governor of Algiers seeking the redemption of an English captive, William Hamore. In this letter, reproduced by Hakluyt, the treasurer is addressed as: ‘Assan Aga, Eunuch & Treasurer to Hassan Bassa king of Alger, which Assan Aga was the sonne of Fran. Rowlie of Bristow merchant, taken in the *Swallow*.’¹⁷ In 1577, Samson Rowlie from Bristol, had been taken captive with the crew and passengers of the *Swallow* and held in Algiers. He converted to Islam, taking the name Assan Aga, and rose to become treasurer to the Governor of Algiers.¹⁸ Harborne reported that Assan Aga still had ‘fervent faith [...] in our lord Jesus Christ’ and called on his ‘true Christian mind & English heart’, despite his conversion to Islam, and referred to the Governor of Algiers as Aga’s master and Elizabeth I as his mistress.¹⁹ Although Aga was by all outward signs a Muslim, having reportedly even been castrated, Harborne links the concept of being an Englishman with that of being a Christian. Overall Harborne signals that the renegade Aga might still be considered both.

Other reports display a similar ambivalence towards renegades. In 1599, the organ builder Thomas Dallam recounted his voyage to Constantinople where he was to deliver a mechanical organ and clock to the Sultan on behalf of Elizabeth I. In his account he described the interpreter who accompanied them:

This man that was sente with us to be our drugaman, or interpreter, was an Englishe man, born in Chorlaye in Lancashier; his name Finche. He was also in religion a perfit Turke, but he was our trustie frende.²⁰

¹⁷ Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, 12 vols (Glasgow: MacLehose, 1903-1905), v, p. 168.

¹⁸ Gerald MacLean, *Looking East: English Writing and the Ottoman Empire before 1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 103-105.

¹⁹ Hakluyt, *Navigations*, v, p. 168.

²⁰ Thomas Dallam, ‘The Diary of Master Thomas Dallam, 1599-1600’ in *Early Voyages and Travels in the Levant* ed. by Theodore J. Bent (London: Hakluyt Society, 1893), pp. 1-98 (p. 84). ‘Drugaman’ is defined by the *OED* as ‘an interpreter; strictly applied to a man who acts as a guide and interpreter in countries where Arabic, Turkish, or Persian is spoken’, see “dragoman, n.” in *OED Online*, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/57428>> [accessed 24 February 2018]

Finche held a valued position as interpreter and, like Rowlie, his status was ambiguous: he was viewed as being simultaneously both Englishman and Muslim. Far from being vilified, he was regarded as a 'trustie frende'. Unlike Aga, who Harborne claimed was a Christian, Finche was described as 'a perfit Turke' yet could still be trusted and Dallam writes of him with great fondness. Finche is not reviled for his apostasy and his 'Englishness' was, for Dallam, not dependant on his Christianity. There is a palpable sense of gratitude in many of these accounts when the authors, far from home, find someone they might trust, regardless of religion.

Those who apostatized were, as Peter Earle has shown, able to enjoy the full benefits of the Barbary economy and could work as corsairs, set up as merchants, or sell their skills for a higher price than at home.²¹ Many renegades, such as Finche, practised skills and trades which were in high demand, perhaps, in part, due to a depopulation of North Africa following successive bouts of the plague.²² Others became part of Muslim military forces, and engaged in action against their former Christian brothers. One letter to the Pope claimed there were thirty thousand Christians among the Ottoman artillery troops, 'all Renegados to fight in defence of our lawe, and with us to conquer your country.'²³ Those with military skills were sought after with English gunners held in particularly high esteem, as the captured gunner, Richard Hasleton confirmed as he related the incentives he was offered to convert:

The King of Cabiles or Cookooe perswaded me very seriouslie to serve him willie, and to turne Moore, and offered to give me vij. hundred Dubles by the

²¹ Peter Earle, *Corsairs of Malta and Barbary* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1970), p. 92.

²² Nabil Matar, 'Introduction' in *Piracy, Slavery and Redemption Barbary Captivity Narratives from Early Modern England*, ed. by Daniel J. Vitkus (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 1-52 (p. 2).

²³ *Letters from the great Turke lately sent unto the Holy Father the Pope and to Rodolphus naming himselfe King of Hungarie, and to all the Kings and Princes of Christendome* (1606), B1v.

yeare, which amounteth to the summe of fiftie pounds of English monie, and moreover to give me by the day thirtie Aspers (which is worth twelve pence English) to find me meate, and likewise to give me a house and lande sufficient to sowe an hundreth bushels of graine yearely, and two Plow of Oxen, furnished to till the same: also to furnish me with horse, Musket, Sword, and other necessities, such as they of that countrie use. And lastly he offered to give me a wife freely, which they esteemed the greatest matter, for al buy their wives at great price.²⁴

Hasleton finds the offer so extraordinary that he lists the details very precisely, taking pains to convert the currency in order that the reader can understand the enormity of it. The English were considered particular experts in artillery and were offered high pay and other inducements to join Muslim forces.²⁵ There were considerable opportunities to be had for men of skill; stories such as that of Hasleton were popular and circulated widely leading to expectations of wealth amongst those who did convert.²⁶ These hopes sometimes proved to be unfounded: T.S. met with an ‘English Turk’ and ‘found him desirous to seek his escape, because he had not lighted upon so good a Fortune as others in their Apostasie.’²⁷ As Hasleton’s account demonstrates, those renegades who prospered often did so because they possessed a specific expertise for which Ottoman and Barbary rulers were prepared to pay. By ‘turning Turk’, skilled men might achieve social advancement and financial reward which they could not achieve in the restrictive social hierarchies of England. As we will discuss in more detail in the case of John Ward, poor English seamen who were frequently cast as unsettled or placeless seemingly found their place in the Islamic societies of the Barbary States.²⁸

²⁴ Richard Hasleton, *Strange and wonderfull things. Happened to Richard Hasleton, borne at Braintree in Essex, in his ten yeares travailes in many forraine countries. Penned as he delivered it from his owne mouth* (1595), pp. D3r-D3v.

²⁵ Nabil Matar, *Turks, Moors and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 51.

²⁶ Hasleton’s *Strange and Wonderfull things* was reprinted twice within a year of publication. See Matar, ‘Introduction’, (p. 3).

²⁷ T.S., *The Adventures of (Mr T.S.) an English merchant taken prisoner by the Turks of Argiers, and carried into the inland countries of Africa* (London, 1670), p. 71.

²⁸ Fumerton, p. 31.

There is substantial evidence that thousands of early modern Christians converted to Islam.²⁹ As we will discuss, popular texts such as the poem 'Apostasy Punish'd' vilified renegades and plays such as Daborne's *A Christian Turned Turk* and Philip Massinger's *The Renegado* (1624) appeared featuring demonized renegade protagonists.³⁰ The Church, which maintained that apostasy would be punished, feared the prosperity of renegades who had converted would cast doubt upon its teachings and sought to explain the successful spread of Islam variously in terms of a chastisement to lax Christians or a scourge to the papists.³¹ Some, such as Saunders, did not deny the allure of Islam but sought to locate English weakness and acts of apostasy within a providential framework. Narratives, such as that of Saunders, sought to sift events – both good and ill – for evidence of God's intervention. Saunders recognised that in this process man could not know God's purpose, merely recognise divine intervention which could often thwart the plans of man: 'But heere ought everie Christian to note & consider the workes of our God (that manie times) what man doth determine God doth disappoint'.³² An illustration of the faithful Englishman triumphant in the face of adversity, Saunders' narrative can be read as an attempt to explain Christian weakness in the face of Islamic power, a continuing assertion of English identity and national commitment. Jonathan Burton has described how providentialism 'offered the English a reassuringly systematic way of interpreting the world around them, particularly in times when the world was experienced in a series of adverse and cataclysmic events'.³³ Seamen such as

²⁹ Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain, 1558 -1685* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), pp. 15-19.

³⁰ Anon, 'Apostacy punish'd, or, a new poem on the deserved death of Jonas Rowland, the renegado, lately executed at Morocco' (London: 1682).

³¹ See Psalm 68.6 in the *Book of Common Prayer*: 'He is the God that maketh men to be of one mind in an house, and bringeth the prisoners out of captivity: but letteth the runagates continue in scarceness'; Vitkus, 'Introduction', (pp. 8-11).

³² Saunders, A4r - A4v.

³³ Burton, (p. 41).

Saunders, who were prey to storms, shipwreck and disaster, developed a rich tradition of providential sea narratives using this framework to make sense of the catastrophes that so regularly befell them.³⁴ As Alexandra Walsham notes, for the providentialist ‘every happening, catastrophic or trivial, was held to be relevant to the quest for assurance that one was numbered among the “saints”’.³⁵

An even greater challenge to the Christian faith was posed by renegades who had converted to Islam but subsequently returned to England. An examination of sermons from this period, preached publicly at parishes in maritime communities and later printed for circulation, reveals the Church struggling to reconcile the apostasy of returning renegades with the apparent absence of divine retribution. Unless these renegades could be returned to Christianity their unpunished apostasy might be interpreted as a weakness of Christianity and a victory for Islam. The efforts to readmit renegades into the Church were often recorded in detail in sermons. Consideration of these texts reveals the equivocation with which renegades were viewed by both the Church and the wider communities into which they hoped to reintegrate and, as we explore, a certain level of resignation and tolerance of apostasy.

The first record of a returning renegade appears in a sermon preached by Henry Byam in March 1627 on the occasion of a renegade returned to his parish from Algiers.³⁶ The man is unnamed in the sermon and we are told little of the

³⁴ For a wider discussion on providential sea narratives see Julie Sievers, ‘Drowned Pens and Shaking Hands: Sea Providence Narratives in Seventeenth Century New England’, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 63:4 (2006), 743-776.

³⁵ Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), p. 15.

³⁶ Henry Byam, *A Return from Argier. A Sermon Preached at Minhead in the County of Somerset the 16. of March 1627. at the re-admission of a Relapsed Christian into our Church* (London, 1628), p.76. Matar has identified this as the first record of a returning renegade, See Matar, *Islam in Britain*, p. 63.

circumstances; however, he is described as being young at the time of his apostasy.

Byam adds that:

Youth and Torments, and whatever else may be alleaged, do somewhat lessen and extenuate the sin, but they cannot clear the Conscience. We are bound without fainting to resist unto the death. I would be loath to break a bruised Reed, or add affliction to affliction.³⁷

In addition to describing the youth of the convert, the allusion to ‘torments’ and ‘alleaged’ incidents leading to the conversion mirror Saunders’ telling of the unhappy boy on the *Greene Dragon*. Like Saunders, Byam saw this tormented youth as having been driven to his actions. His youth and torments ‘lessen and extenuate the sin’. There is a degree of understanding as to why an unhappy youth might choose to abandon country and religion for a new life. Byam’s sermon also contained a warning that there were perhaps many more renegades passing undetected in Christian communities:

Many hundreds are Musmans in Turkey, and Christians at home; doffing their Religion as they do their Cloaths, and keeping a Conscience for every Harbour where they shall put in. And those Apostates and circumcised Renegadoes think they have discharged their Conscience wondrous well, if they can Return, and (the Fact unknown) make profession of their first Faith.³⁸

The perception was one of large numbers of opportunists who adapted their religion in order to seek favour in whichever country they found themselves. Byam alludes to seafarers as the main culprits by his use of the phrase ‘every Harbour where they shall put in’. Geographical mobility is used as an indicator of moral and spiritual instability.

The spiritual risk to seamen suggested by Byam was directly addressed by the clergyman William Gouge in his sermon *A Recovery from Apostacy*, given at Stepney Church, a sailors’ parish, in 1638 on the return to the Church of Vincent

³⁷ Byam, p.76.

³⁸ Byam, p. 74.

Jukes.³⁹ Jukes had been an enslaved captive and confessed that he had converted to Islam after a period of cruelty and torture at the hands of his master. Like Byam, Gouge explicitly addressed mariners and merchants, those in his audience who were most likely to come into contact with Islam and be tempted to apostasy, and urged them to meditate on the Christian martyrs:

Most especially this is like to be usefull for you Mariners, Merchants, Merchants-factors and others, whose calling it is to goe to sea in ships, and doe businesse in the great waters, where yee are in danger to be surprized (as this Penitent was) by the mortall enemies of Christians, or to have occasion to abide or trafique among them. You may be brought to triall, and to give prooffe before men, whether the habit of Martyrdome be in you or no.⁴⁰

Gouge is alert to the attractions Islam posed for those Christians far away from home, family and church. He describes Jukes by drawing on the parable of the prodigal son: lost at the moment of his apostasy but then found at his return to Christianity. As we explored in chapter one, seamen were often described in terms of the prodigal son, anchoring them however loosely to England. Laurie Ellinghausen has suggested that the renegade remained ‘an *English* creature’, not always understood in terms of abandoning his country.⁴¹ The prodigal renegade was welcomed back, albeit with a show of reluctance, in order that Christianity might demonstrate its strength in the face of Islam. This willingness to readmit renegades implies an acceptance that although renegades might have strayed, their natural place was within the Church and in England.⁴² Readmittance of the renegade to the Church was a re-imposition of order.

³⁹ William Gouge, *A recovery from apostacy Set out in a sermon preached in Stepny Church neere London at the receiving of a penitent renegado into the Church, Octob. 21. 1638* (London, 1639).

⁴⁰ Gouge, p. 57.

⁴¹ Laurie Ellinghausen, *Pirates, Traitors, and Apostates: Renegade Identities in Early Modern English Writing* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), p. 12.

⁴² Woodbridge usefully defines ‘place’ as having access to parish, eligibility for poor relief programs, station in life, employment, and embeddedness in a master/servant or master/apprentice relationship. Woodbridge, p. 30.

Other sermons reveal that returning renegades were often defended by family and friends, as Edward Kellet confirmed in a sermon he preached alongside Byam at Minehead: ‘Thy kindred, friends or acquaintance [...] have risen up in your defence, with semblances to make thy sinne shew lesse’.⁴³ As Earle has observed, many renegades on the Barbary Coast set up as merchants and developed trading relationships with their relatives in Christian countries.⁴⁴ It is likely that many families in England financially benefited from the profits of their renegade relatives as we saw the Coxere family profited from Edward Coxere’s plunder. In other cases, renegades were met with a more equivocal reception from the communities to which they returned. Ironically, such responses were criticised by clergy for undermining their efforts to return repentant apostates to the church. Byam condemned his congregation for such ‘unchristian upbraidings, reproches, twittings’ towards one returning renegade, and urged them towards forgiveness.⁴⁵ As such there is little textual evidence of sustained opposition to renegades returning to their communities. Many were welcomed and supported by their friends and families and the Church would not only readily readmit them but would chastise those who sought to apply even the mildest form of retribution.

Whilst repentant converts could be reintegrated into the Church, sermons, including that of Gouge, voice a fear that unrepentant apostates remained undiscovered amongst them in England:

I feare, I feare, that there are some even now here present that have beene in the case wherein this Penitent was, lost; but not in the case wherein he is, found. I feare there are some that have played Renegadoes, and as an evidence thereof, are circumcised. Let such know (whether they heare me themselves, or shall heare of what I say by others) let them know, that by their secret thrusting themselves into the Church, and concealing their sinne

⁴³ Edward Kellet, *A Returne from Argier. A Sermon Preached at Minhead in the County of Somerset the 16. of March, 1627. at the re-admission of a relapsed Christian into our Church* (London, 1628), p. 17.

⁴⁴ Earle, p. 92.

⁴⁵ Byam, p. 76.

from the Governours thereof, and that without just satisfaction which ought to be publikeley given for an offence so scandalous as theirs is, they can never find such peace in their conscience as this Penitent may.⁴⁶

Gouge likens the action of these covert renegades to a rape of the church; their 'secret thrustings into the Church' are a furtive defilement. Although he assured his congregation that 'apostacy implungeth into perdition', he tacitly admitted that apostates walked freely and unpunished amongst them.⁴⁷ These sermons hint at the impossibility of recognising true religious belief. Preaching in Plymouth in 1636, in an attempt to gather support for Barbary captives, Charles Fitz-Geffry admitted that, 'some of them have professed so much in their private letters to their friends that outwardly they are Mahumetans, but in minde they remaine Christians'.⁴⁸ For these apostates, their conversion to Islam was no more than an outward show whilst they held their true faith as Christians within. Hypocrisy was one of the vices against which early modern Protestants measured themselves and the hypocrisy of these renegades threatened both their own spiritual peace and the stability of the church.⁴⁹

In an attempt to deal with the matter decisively, the Church sought to find a formal way to reintegrate penitent apostates offering them a way back to the Church whilst avoiding censure. In 1637 Archbishop Laud formulated a ritual of reacceptance into the Church and presented it to Parliament.⁵⁰ This ritual, 'A Form of Penance and Reconciliation of a Renegado or Apostate from the Christian Religion to Turcism', was a performative form of penance in seven parts, which

⁴⁶ Gouge, p. 16.

⁴⁷ Gouge, p. 23.

⁴⁸ Charles Fitz-Geffry, *Compassion towards captives chiefly towards our brethren and country-men who are in miserable bondage in Barbarie. Urged and pressed in three sermons on Heb. 13.3. Preached in Plymouth, in October 1636* (Oxford, 1637), p. 35.

⁴⁹ Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), p. 4.

⁵⁰ William Laud, *The Works of the Most Reverend Father in God, William Laud, DD, Sometime Lord Archbishop of Canterbury*, (Oxford: Parker, 1847), 5.2., p. 352.

would take place in public before clergy, court and parish over four weeks.⁵¹ The penitent would first need to be heard by the bishop of his diocese and formally excommunicated in order that he might then be absolved and readmitted. A court order would be made and published in the parish, decreeing that the penitent have regular private conference with his minister. The following Sunday he would need to stand in the church porch:

In a penitent fashion in a white sheet, and with a white wand in his hand, his head uncovered, his countenance dejected, not taking particular notice of any person that passeth by him; and when the people come in and go out of the church, let him upon his knees humbly crave their prayers, and acknowledge his offence in this form, 'Good Christians, remember in your prayers a poor wretched apostate, or renegado'.⁵²

For two Sundays thereafter, he would be allowed into the church to perform acts of penance until he was finally given absolution. Although Laud's ritual demonstrated that the Church was attempting to address the problem, there is little evidence that it had any real impact on the behaviour of returning renegades.⁵³

That Laud's response to the problem of returning apostates was scripted and highly performative was no coincidence. Christian conversion to Islam was a popular subject for early modern dramatists and staged versions of the conversion ceremony were regularly performed in theatres. Daborne's *A Christian Turned Turk*, a play which we will return to in greater detail later in this chapter, depicted the ritual of the pirate John Ward's conversion to Islam in a complex dumb show:

Enter two bearing half-moons, one with a Mahomet's head following. After them, the Mufti, or chief priest, two meaner priests bearing his train. The Mufti seated, a confused noise of music, with a show. Enter two Turks, one bearing a turban with a half-moon in it, the other a robe, a sword: a third with a globe in one hand, an arrow in the other. Two knights follow. After them, Ward on an ass, in his Christian habit, bare-headed. The two knights, with low reverence, ascend, whisper the Mufti in the ear, draw their swords, and

⁵¹ William Laud, 'A Form of Penance and Reconciliation of a Renegado or Apostate from the Christian Religion to Turcism,' in Laud, *The Works of the Most Reverend Father in God*, 5.2., pp. 372-376.

⁵² Laud, 5.2., pp. 372-373.

⁵³ Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain*, pp. 70-71.

pull him off the ass. He [is] laid on his belly, the tables (by two inferior priests) offered him, he lifts his hand up, subscribes, is brought to his seat by the Mufti, who puts on his turban and robe, girds his sword, then swears him on the Mahomet's head, ungirds his sword, offers him a cup of wine by the hands of a Christian. He spurns at him and throws away the cup, is mounted on the ass who is richly clad, and with a shout, they exit.⁵⁴

The dumb show created by Daborne is an ethnographic spectacle which pays detailed attention to the exchange of clothing which Ward must undertake. This process is mirrored in Laud's ritual for returning renegades, where the apostate must symbolically reject the turban and robe by exchanging them for the white sheet of a penitent. The sword is, in Laud's retelling, exchanged for a white wand. Laud's ritual could be as easily understood by parishioners as an audience might understand a play. Apostates might, as Byam observed, be able to doff their religion as easily as their clothes precisely because conversion was depicted both in Church and on stage as being little more than a matter of clothing – an outward show. Circumcision, the one seemingly indisputable sign of conversion to Islam, would not be apparent without a bodily search and Daborne showed that even this could be faked, with his fictional Ward substituting an ape's tail for his penis:

DANSIKER: Ward turned Turk? It is not possible.

SARES: I saw him Turk to the circumcision.

Marry, therein I heard he played the Jew with 'em,

Made 'em come to the cutting of an ape's tail. (9.1-4)

Adriana Streifer notes that the play elides renegade and Jewish identities, linking renegade behaviours to those attributes of 'stage Jewishness' such as vengefulness, greed and selfishness.⁵⁵ Here, Sares voices an acknowledgement of the instability and untrustworthiness of outward religious practise. He sees Ward as a Christian

⁵⁴ Robert Daborne, *A Christian Turned Turk*, in Daniel Vitkus (ed.), *Three Turk Plays from Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), Scene 8. All references henceforth are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

⁵⁵ Adriana Streifer, 'Jewish Renegades and Renegade Jews in Robert Daborne's *A Christian Turned Turk*', *European Judaism*, 51:2 (2018), 30-35 (p. 31).

becoming a Muslim but playing the Jew. He could be any of these religions, or none. How could anyone discern his true belief?

Dramatists used the act of circumcision – often conflated with castration – in portrayal of the conversion ritual as a comic scene. In Thomas Heywood's drama, *The Fair Maid of the West, Part I*, the heroine, Bess Bridges, meets with Mullisheg, the King of Fez, to negotiate the release of Spencer, her betrothed. When Mullisheg threatens to make Spencer his eunuch, Bess's servant, Clem, offers to stand in for him. Far from being an act of altruism, Clem has mistaken the word gelded for gilded and, thinking he will be financially rewarded asks Mullisheg to bestow on him the 'honor' which Spencer has refused.⁵⁶ Clem, a comic character, begins the play as an apprentice drawer in Bess's tavern and sets sail with Bess 'to prove an honor to all the drawers in Cornwall.'⁵⁷ Depicted as a bumbling social climber, he sees in Mullisheg's court a chance for advancement that would be unthinkable in England. He adopts local dress and imagines himself a courtier:

Enter Clem [as a fantastic Moor]

CLEM. "It is not now as when Andrea liv'd," – or rather Andrew
Our elder journeyman. What, drawers become courtiers?
Now may I speak with the old ghost in Jeronimo:
When this eternal substance of my soul
Did live imprisoned in this wanton flesh
I was a courtier in the court of Fez.⁵⁸

Clem views his transformation as so astonishing he will recall it even after death.

The audience, however, are invited to laugh at his aspirations of honour and wealth.

He is shown as being foolish in his Moorish garb with his dated references to courtly

⁵⁶ Thomas Heywood, *The Fair Maid of the West Part I*, ed. by Robert K. Turner in *The Fair Maid of the West Parts I and II* (London: Edward Arnold, 1968), 5.2.99-100. The play was published in 1631, but is likely to have been composed between 1596 and 1603.

⁵⁷ *Fair Maid of the West*, 4.2.103-104.

⁵⁸ *Fair Maid of the West*, 5.1.110-115.

behaviour from Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*. In the play's final scene Clem has been disabused of the notion that Fez might be any kind of ideal society:

Enter Clem running.

CLEM. No more of your honor, if you love me! Is this your Moorish preferment, to rob a man of his best jewels? ⁵⁹

Although he has escaped from the castrator it is unclear whether this was before or after his castration. He now sees Moorish honour as the robbery of Christian bodies. Clem has been punished for his social aspirations. At the end of the play Spencer is restored to Bess with his honour and masculinity intact; Bess and Mullisheg have reached an alliance of sorts, with Bess as the dominant partner; Bess's crew are given gold. Everything is resolved to the satisfaction of the English characters with the exception of Clem. Clem exits the play as poor as he entered, and may have sustained a life-changing loss through castration. As Barbara Fuchs observes, 'the text focuses on the actual emasculation of the upstart, who threatens the socio-economic hierarchy of England'.⁶⁰ The fate of Clem suggests that the possibilities for social mobility offered by the Barbary States perhaps posed more of a threat than apostasy.

In the character of Clem we find echoes of those who, like the unhappy boy of the *Greene Dragon*, believed they might find opportunities for financial and social advancement in the Barbary States. Such perceptions were fuelled by the impoverishment of seamen in England and the reports of those such as Richard Hasleton who had witnessed the immense rewards that might be gained for men of skill. Sermons and ecclesiastical documents evidence widespread anxiety about the allure of Islam and the existence of large numbers of converts who posed a threat to religious certainties. Yet far from regarding these renegades as 'human scum' as

⁵⁹ *Fair Maid of the West*, 5.2.126-127.

⁶⁰ Fuchs, 'Faithless Empires', (p. 61).

Peter Lamborn Wilson argues they were viewed, analysis of the evidence suggests that many were welcomed back into their communities by family and friends with the Church seeking to resolve their apostasy through re-assimilation rather than punishment.⁶¹ John Ward, the real life Christian turned Turk, was the man who in the early seventeenth century became the embodiment of both the fears and possibilities which the figure of the renegade contained, and it is to his life that we now turn.

2. Writing John Ward: A Pirate's Life in Print

John Ward (c.1553 – c.1622), rose from obscurity to become one of the most famed English pirates of the seventeenth century and, as such, is worth exploring as an example of a renegade who achieved financial success and status. A fisherman's son from Faversham, he deserted from the navy and sailed to the Barbary Coast where he led a highly successful career of maritime plunder as a corsair. Although he incurred the wrath of both English and Venetian rulers he skilfully managed to evade capture. Having relocated to Tunis, where he lived to old age in palatial splendour, Ward's notoriety reached even greater heights when in 1610 it was reported that he had converted to Islam.⁶² Apostasy, combined with a prolific and lucrative career of piracy, ensured celebrity for Ward and his exploits were well documented both in official records and popular print. He became part of the discourse of everyday life and his fame was such that John Donne could drop his name without introduction or explanation into *A Tale of a Citizen and His Wife*:

I ask'd the number of the Plaguy Bill,
Ask'd if the Custome Farmers held out still,

⁶¹ Peter Lamborn Wilson, *Pirate Utopias: Moorish Corsairs and European Renegadoes* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1995, repr. 2003), p. 13.

⁶² David R. Ransome, "Ward, John [called Issouf Reis, Captain Wardiyya] (c. 1553-1623?)" in *ODNB* <<https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.bbk.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/28690>> [accessed 2 December 2017]

Of the Virginian plot, and whether Ward
The traffique of the Midland seas had marr'd.⁶³

In this conversation about popular news Ward was, it seems, a familiar enough topic that everyone would know him by this casual reference. We have seen that many Englishmen shared Ward's experience of settling in the Barbary States but Ward is exceptional in that a wealth of documentation exists about his life. He did not write his own life, unlike other seamen we have discussed, and may not have been literate, but extensive traces of his life remain: Ward appears in pamphlets, plays and poetry, ballads and court records, and features extensively in the State Papers of England, Ireland and Venice. This weight of evidence can appear overwhelming, and is in particular contrast to that for Coxere or Harris where we have one source only, yet the sheer volume allows us to trace the cultural construction of Ward. Through analysis of this mass of evidence this section acts as a case study in representations of choices delineated in other texts of pirate lives.

The figure of Ward is most often considered by scholars in terms of discourses around nationality and religion but a closer examination of the wider textual evidence about his life reveals a preoccupation with his mobility – both geographical and social – which has often been obscured by the focus on his apostasy. Woodbridge has argued that 'fulminations against vagrants' geographical mobility project or displace fear of other kinds of mobility: religious and intellectual change, social mobility', and we can apply this argument equally to the figure of the renegade.⁶⁴ Ellinghausen has usefully explored the dialectic of sovereignty and dispossession enacted through the dramatic enactment of Ward's life.⁶⁵ Expanding their work, this study reads the evidence of the figure of Ward in the context of

⁶³ Donne, John, 'A Tale of a Citizen and his Wife' in *John Donne: The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets* ed. by Helen Gardner (Oxford: OUP, 1965), pp. 101-103

⁶⁴ Woodbridge, p. 26.

⁶⁵ Laurie Ellinghausen, *Pirates, Traitors, and Apostates*, pp. 47-72.

domestic anxieties about mobility. This allows us to explore the motivations behind his stigmatisation in greater depth and consider an often neglected aspect of Ward's life – his worth as a skilled seaman. In order to understand the textual construction of Ward we begin by examining the facts of his life as we know them before moving on to analyse his cultural depictions.

John Ward turned pirate late in life. Born around 1553, we know little of him prior to 1603 and the beginning of his career of piracy. He was born in Faversham in Kent and worked as a fisherman there and later joined the Royal Navy in Plymouth. The Venetian State Papers provide a dispassionate summary of Ward's career before to his turn to piracy, in the form of a report made by an English sailor to the Venetian Cabinet:

In his youth he was an East-coast fisherman. Then he came to Plymouth, and rose through all the ranks of the service in our wars with Spain. Finally he had a post in the Channel squadron.⁶⁶

This indicates that Ward had considerable experience as a privateer and had risen to the rank of captain in the wars against Spain. Greg Bak has speculated that, like many Kentish fishermen, Ward may also have sailed the difficult voyages to the fishing grounds of Iceland and the Grand Banks of Newfoundland.⁶⁷ The report was ambivalent about Ward's talents:

John Ward, commonly called Captain Ward, is about 55 years of age. Very short, with little hair, and that quite white; bald in front; swarthy face and beard. Speaks little, and almost always swearing. Drunk from morn till night. Most prodigal and plucky. Sleeps a great deal, and often on board when in port. The habits of a through "salt". A fool and an idiot out of his trade.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ 'Venice: June 1608', *CSPV*, Volume 11, 1607 – 1610, pp. 137-143
<<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/venice/vol11/pp137-143>>
[accessed 17 January 2017]

⁶⁷ Greg Bak, *Barbary Pirate: The Life and Crimes of John Ward* (Stroud: The History Press, 2006, repr. 2010), pp. 9-10.

⁶⁸ 'Venice: June 1608', *CSPV*, Volume 11, 1607 – 1610, pp. 137-143.

In addition to being taciturn, drunk and profane, Ward is also prodigal and plucky. He may be a fool and an idiot out of his trade but he is a ‘salt’, his trade is that of a seaman.⁶⁹ When at sea he is in his trade and is neither fool nor idiot, but a captain respected by his crew, and other seamen. Ward deserted from the Navy and turned pirate following a failed attempt to seize the wealth a recusant was transporting to France. He captured a French vessel and plundered his way through the Mediterranean to the Barbary Coast.⁷⁰

The Barbary States, comprised of three regencies of the Ottoman Empire – Algeria, Tripoli and Tunisia – along with Morocco, were frequently cast as piratical societies by the English due to the aggressive incursions of the Barbary Corsairs. Yet these activities were sanctioned by the state which, as discussed in chapter two, would more usually lead them to be defined in law as privateering.⁷¹ The rulers of the Barbary States were relatively independent of Ottoman rule as Paul Rycaut, English ambassador in Constantinople, explained:

In these times of licentiousness and revolt, the Pirates of Algiers and Tunis began also to cast off their respect and reverence to the Ottoman Empire; for being become rich by the Prizes they had taken on Christian Vessels, they resolved to set up for themselves, and to esteem the Peace which Christian Princes had made with the Grand Signior not to concern them.⁷²

Those Englishmen who flocked to these states did so, according to Rycaut, because they could no longer enrich themselves through privateering and piracy out of

⁶⁹ OED defines ‘old salt’ as an experienced sailor, see “old salt, n.” in *OED online* <<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.bbk.ac.uk/view/Entry/130955?redirectedFrom=old+salt#eid33427513>> [accessed 13 March 2018]

⁷⁰ Andrew Barker, *A true and certaine report of the beginning, proceedings, overthrowes, and now present estate of Captaine Ward and Danseker, the two late famous pirates from their first setting foorth to this present time* (London, 1609), B1v-B4r; Bak, pp. 35-46.

⁷¹ Nat Cutter, ‘Peace with Pirates? Maghrebi Maritime Combat, Diplomacy, and Trade in English Periodical News, 1622-1714’, *Humanities*, 8.4 (2019), pp. 2-3 <<https://doi.org/10.3390/h8040179>> [accessed 20 November 2019]

⁷² Paul Rycaut, *The History of the Turkish Empire, from the Year 1623, to the Year 1627*, quoted in Mark Hanna, *Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire, 1570-1740* (Williamsburg: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), p. 61.

England due to the peace with Spain. Rycaut described Algiers and Tunis as renegade states which had little regard for their ultimate Ottoman ruler who was frustrated by their persistent turn to piracy. As such they were an ideal haven for Ward and his crew who had so recently cast off 'respect and reverence' for their own masters in turning to piracy. The Barbary Coast was a place where skilled and enterprising seamen with few scruples might be well received and could make a living.

On arrival in Algiers in 1603 Ward's crew were seized as reprisal for the attempted burning of the Algiers fleet by the Englishman Richard Gifford.⁷³ Ward is described as approaching the Pasha, ruler of Algiers, to negotiate the release of his men:

But Ward having gotten much money at Sea, and greatly inricht himselfe with unlawfull purchase by his Setty, joynes with certaine Janisaries, promises a somme of money, and so procures the peace and enlargement of his followers. This is the first of Wards proceedings in the Streights.⁷⁴

This report is brief but it appears that Ward secured the release of his crew by promising a ransom which he would earn by working as a corsair. Ward had already proved himself an able pirate, having arrived in Algiers with a number of prizes captured on his voyage from England; the Pasha sought to capitalise on his skills. Ward negotiated the release of his crew and agreed to sailing with a company of janissaries on board. In doing so he brokered an entirely new type of alliance which formed the basis of his success in the Mediterranean. Other Christians had served as crew and officers in the Barbary Corsair fleet but Ward is thought to be the first non-Muslim captain or *raïs* of such a vessel, sailing with the accompaniment of Ottoman

⁷³ Clive Senior, *A Nation of Pirates: English Piracy in its Heyday* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1976), p. 88.

⁷⁴ Anon, *Newes from sea, of two notorious pyrats, Ward the Englishman, and Danseker the Dutchman* (London, 1609), B1v.

troops – the janissaries.⁷⁵ In this arrangement he was an innovator and continued to captain mixed crews, often accompanied by janissaries, throughout his time on the Barbary Coast. The frontispiece to the 1609 pamphlet, *Ward and Danseker, Two notorious Pyrates* (Figure 5), shows a sea fight between a Barbary Corsair and a Christian vessel. The details of this illustration reveal the ferocious – barbarous – ways in which the corsairs were reputed to behave. Proudly flying the Ottoman flag, they have two dead captives hanging from the yardarm. Two turbaned janissaries, muskets at the ready, stand fearlessly on deck as the ships fire on each other. Ward had shifted his allegiance to this Muslim force which preyed on the shipping of England and other Christian nations.

Ward continued to operate as a corsair after repaying the debt to Algiers, and in 1605, made his way to Tunis and arrived, according to one report, intending to make an impression:

Where with small suit to the King, in respect hee brought Marchandise with him, benefisciall to the state, hee had leave their to find safe harbouring for himselfe, his ships and followers, where having made sale of his Commodities, and presented diverse acceptable presents to the King of Tunis, as also for his gifts, received some outward graces of the Crossymon, which is as much to say, the Lord Admirall of the Sea.⁷⁶

Arriving in Tunis with a fleet, Ward made specific representations to the ruling elite of Tunis in the hope of developing this relationship. ‘The Crossymon’ was Cara Osman or Uthman Dey, the ruler of Tunis, former janissary from Turkey who had led a popular rebellion to assume the government of Tunis in 1590.⁷⁷ Ward quickly found favour with Cara Osman who ‘held share with Ward in all his Voyages, Prises, and Shippings’.⁷⁸ The seaman Thomas Mitton described Ward as dependant on the support of Cara Osman:

⁷⁵ Bak, pp. 53-56.

⁷⁶ Barker, B4v.

⁷⁷ Bak, pp. 68-72.

⁷⁸ Barker, B4v.

Carosman is the onelie aider, asister and upholder of the saied Warde in his piracies and spoiles for that hee the saied Warde hathe noe other place to victualle in save onelie Tunis, and at Tunis hee coulde not victualle but by the meanes of Carosman whoe graunteth him the saied Warde warrantes to take upp and buy victualles at Tunis and the Cuntrie theereabouts. And the reason that moovethe the saied Carosman soe to doe is because when Warde takethe anie prize Carosman buyethe his goodes of him at his owne price.⁷⁹

Cara Osman provided safe harbour for Ward and his fleet in return for cheap goods.

Building on his experience in Algiers, Ward also requested and was granted a company of janissaries to sail under his command. Having chosen his own master and found a place where he could flourish, Ward petitioned to become a subject of the Ottoman Empire.⁸⁰

The Tunis fleet took a number of lucrative prizes under Ward's command, but in 1607 his audacious seizure of one particular Venetian vessel caused a sensation.⁸¹ Ward encountered the *Reniera e Soderina*, one of the largest ships in the world, after being separated from the rest of his fleet by a storm and made a bold and opportunist attack, as vividly described by one of Ward's men:

Captaine Ward was our worthy Generall, who being severed from us by a forcible Tempest, himselfe in his small Argosie, having none but his Fly-boat with him, he met with a great Argosie of fourteene or fifteene hundred Tunnes, very richlie laden with Venetian goods, and who, by Computation, was esteemed to be worth two millions at the least, betwixt whom and him was such a mercillesse and incredible fight, as a man may compare is betweene those two Tyrants, the remorselesse windes, and the resisting waters. It was long, and it was cruell, it was forcible, and therefore fearefull: but in the end our Captaine had the Sunshine, he boorded her, subdued her, chained her men like slaves, and ceased on her goods, as his lawfull prise, whom the whistling calme made musicke unto, ushering her and our Generall into Tunis, and whose bounty with his men, did there triumph with her treasure.⁸²

⁷⁹ Deposition of Thomas Mitton to the High Court of Admiralty, cited in Senior, p. 90.

⁸⁰ Barker, B4v.

⁸¹ N.A.M Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain, 660-1649* (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 350.

⁸² Barker, C1r –C1v

Ward is portrayed here as heroic, engaged in an elemental struggle, as he and his crew, in two small boats of around 300 tons, took on the heavily armed 1500 ton *Soderina*.⁸³ The struggle is described in terms of the forces fundamental to the life of a mariner – wind, water, sunshine – and the battle is pitched as quintessential, as though trade and plunder were features of a timeless natural seascape. Venetian reports of the incident confirmed the ferocity of the attack:

Their plans, designed to terrify, succeeded excellently, because two of those who were defending the quarterdeck were hit by one of the shots, and when they were wounded, indeed torn to pieces, all the rest fled, leaving their weapons lying on the quarterdeck and all of them running to their own property, even while the two vessels were coming alongside.⁸⁴

The *Soderina* was undermanned, relying on her size as main defence.⁸⁵ The overwhelmed crew forced their captain to surrender to Ward, who returned to Tunis triumphant.

The capture of the *Soderina* brought wealth to Tunis and a fortune to Ward and his men.⁸⁶ Armed with these riches, in 1607 Ward sought to obtain a pardon from James I in order that he and his remaining crew could return to England, as the Venetian Ambassador reported, emphasising the immense wealth Ward had at his disposal and the sizeable forces he commanded:

This person tells me in the name of Ward that he and all his followers, who number about 300, offer to give up their piratical career and to return to England, if they can obtain the King's pardon. They know that this they can never obtain without the consent of your Serenity because of the many injuries they have inflicted upon your subjects; he therefore offers to restore all that those subjects have a right to and that he now holds, namely three ships with all their guns and armaments and goods to the value of thirty to forty thousand crowns in silk, indigo and other merchandize. My informant

⁸³ Bak, p. 118.

⁸⁴ Alberto Tenenti, *Piracy and the Decline of Venice, 1580-1615*, trans. by Janet and Brian Pullan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 77-78.

⁸⁵ Tenenti, p. 78.

⁸⁶ Bak estimates that each of Ward's men would have received around £83 from this prize alone – more than four times the annual wage of a skilled tradesman in England: Bak, p. 123; *National Archives Currency Converter* <<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>> [accessed 13 March 2018]

declares that he himself had seen these people, and that Ward would give even more.⁸⁷

It is significant in this account that we see that Ward is far from having lost his identity, as suggested by Dimmock's characterization of the renegade.⁸⁸ If we do not begin from the assumption that pirates are outsiders, as the myths suggest they usually are, then, as we see here, evidence exists that points in the other direction – indicating, in this case to a continuity of connectedness. Ward appears to have maintained networks in England: he was married and sent money back to his wife in England.⁸⁹ Though he had achieved success in Tunis, he may have wished for the familiarities of home and, as explored in chapter two, the purchase of pardons by those accused of piracy was a relatively common practice. Commenting on Ward's request for a pardon in November 1607, Sir Henry Wotton, English Ambassador to Venice named Ward as 'the greatest scoundrel that ever sailed from England' and referred to the great damage that he had done, yet stated he believed it would be a public benefit to pardon Ward in order that he would cease his attacks on shipping.⁹⁰ However, the loss of the *Soderina* had been an immense blow to the Venetians and, in an attempt to retain their favour, in 1608 James I proposed a substantial financial settlement in respect of reparations, resolved to publish an order forbidding his subjects from trading with pirates or with Tunis, and declared there would be no pardon for Ward.⁹¹

⁸⁷ 'Venice: October 1607', *CSPV*, Volume 11, 1607 – 1610, pp. 40-53 <<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/venice/vol11/pp40-53>> [accessed 17 January 2017]

⁸⁸ Dimmock, p. 100.

⁸⁹ *Newes from Sea*, C2r.

⁹⁰ 'Venice: November 1607', *CSPV*, Volume 11, 1607 – 1610, pp. 53-69 <<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/venice/vol11/pp53-69>> [accessed 17 January 2017]

⁹¹ 'Venice: November 1608', *CSPV*, Volume 11, 1607 – 1610, pp. 186-194 <<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/venice/vol11/pp186-194>> [accessed 17 January 2017]

In January 1609, as we have seen, the King issued *A Proclamation against Pirates*, which stated his intention:

To reiterate and inculcate his loathing and detestation not onely of the crimes, but also to manifest to the world his sinceritie and exceeding desires for the due & speedy suppressing of the delinquents.⁹²

In his success, the fisherman from Faversham commanded the attention of some of the most powerful rulers in the world. The King might have been minded to pardon and rehabilitate Ward, as he later would with Henry Mainwaring in 1616 but, unlike Mainwaring, who we discussed in chapter two, Ward did not come from a noble family and was instead held up to the world as an example of piratical delinquency. James had to be seen to be sincere in his desire to suppress piracy, particularly in the case of Ward who had both financially and reputationally damaged the Venetians. The proclamation is unusual in naming Ward specifically and repeatedly, indicating the level of disruption and irritation he had caused:

Forasmuch as his Majestie is advertised that this pirate Ward and others, are made the more able to continue in strength and power, to infest the Subjects of all Christian Princes and Estates, by meanes of that receipt and protection which is given them in Tunis, Argiers, and the places adjoyning, his Majesty doeth hereby straitly prohibite all his Subjects whatsoever that shall goe to Sea, that they nor any of them, shall sell, alien, barter or exchange any Ordinance, powder, cordage or any provision whatsoever, serviceable for the warre or shipping, directly or indirectly, to or with the said Ward, or his adherents, or any other Pirate or Pirates whatsoever, under paine of death.⁹³

The proclamation sought to demonstrate the King's stance against piracy, and against Ward in particular, to the Venetians but it also indicated the dangers inherent in cross-cultural contact. Overseas trade contained within it the possibility that anyone 'whatsoever that shall goe to Sea' might make for 'Tunis, Argiers, and the places adjoyning' and engage in piracy against Christian nations.

⁹² *By the King. A Proclamation against Pirates* (London, 1609).

⁹³ *A Proclamation against Pirates*.

In December 1610, the Venetian Ambassador to England reported news that would gain Ward even further notoriety:

There is confirmation of the news that the pirate Ward and Sir Francis Verney, also an Englishman of the noblest blood, have become Turks, to the great indignation of the whole nation.⁹⁴

Venice had continued to keep a close watch on Ward, and at one point contemplated making an assassination attempt on him.⁹⁵ As the possibility of a pardon and return to England was finally removed, Ward appears to have decided to settle in Tunis and, in doing so, converted to Islam, taking the name of Issouf Reis.⁹⁶

Reports focussed on Ward's prosperity in his new life. In 1615 the Scottish traveller William Lithgow met with Ward in Tunis, and described his life there as one of lavish domesticity:

Here in Tunneis, I met with our English Captaine, generall Ward, once a great Pyrat, and Commander at Seas; who in despite of his denied acceptance in England had turned Turke, and there built a faire Palace, beautified with rich Marble and Alabaster stones: With whom I found Domestick some fiftene circumcised English Runnagats, whose lives and Countenances were both alike even as desparate as disdainful. Yet old Ward their Master was placable, and joynd me safely with a passing Land conduct to Algerie.⁹⁷

Tellingly, however, Lithgow makes it clear that, despite his palatial lifestyle Ward's decision to settle in Tunis was prompted by the refusal of his request for a pardon.

There are no eye-witness reports of Ward's conversion and nothing to indicate if he

⁹⁴ 'Venice: December 1610', *CSPV*, Volume 12, 1610-1613, pp. 85-104
<<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/venice/vol12/pp85-104>>
[accessed 17 January 2017]

⁹⁵ 'Venice: January 1609', *CSPV*, Volume 11, 1607 – 1610, pp. 208-226
<<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/venice/vol11/pp208-226>>
[accessed 17 January 2017]

⁹⁶ David R. Ransome, 'Ward, John [called Issouf Reis, Captain Wardiyya] (c. 1553-1623?)' in *ODNB* <https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.bbk.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/28690>
[accessed 2 December 2017]

⁹⁷ William Lithgow, *The totall discourse, of the rare adventures, and painefull peregrinations of long nineteene yeares travailes from Scotland, to the most famous kingdomes in Europe, Asia, and Affrica* (London, 1640), p. 358.

converted as a matter of faith or pragmatism, but the timing suggests that in refusing his pardon England's domestic practices created Ward the renegade.⁹⁸

The textual evidence relating the events of Ward's life indicates he was a man of great skill and abilities which he used to great profit working as a corsair captain out of Tunis. Yet despite his wealth and success Ward sought a return to England. The denial of this option appears to have been the catalyst for his apostasy, with his conversion to Islam and subsequent marriage to Jessimina, a renegade woman from Palermo, an indication of his resignation to spending the rest of his life in Tunis.⁹⁹ In 1622 the Venetians, who continued to view Ward as a threat and monitored his activities to the end, reported that Ward had died of the plague in Tunis.¹⁰⁰ His extraordinary story – his rise from poverty to great wealth and his subsequent apostasy – ensured his infamy and his immortality in print. It is to Ward's depiction in popular print that we now turn.

The 1609 publication of *A Proclamation against Pirats* projected Ward into the public imagination and prompted the publication of three pamphlets about Ward: *A true and certaine report; Ward and Danseker two notorious pyrates; and Newes from sea*.¹⁰¹ The aim of these pamphlets, as stated by one, was to flesh out the rumours about Ward:

To the Reader, which is as much to say, I care not what he be, so he be not a Turke: thou hast heard much talke of one captain Ward, and I know thou desirest to understand what he is? then not to bely him (since tis a sin to bely the devil) he is a notable theefe, he has undone many of your country men, by which he gives you warning to have care of your selves: he has made slaves of many poore Christians, and I holde him no good Christian, that will blesse

⁹⁸ Daniel Heller-Roazen, *The Enemy of All: Piracy and the Law of Nations* (New York: Zone Books, 2009), pp. 13-27.

⁹⁹ Adrian Tinniswood, *Pirates of Barbary* (London: Vintage, 2011), p. 49.

¹⁰⁰ 'Venice: September 1622', *CSPV*, Volume 17, 1621-1623, pp. 414-422 <<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/venice/vol17/pp414-422>> [accessed 17 January 2017]

¹⁰¹ Anon, *Ward and Danseker two notorious pyrates, Ward an Englishman, and Danseker a Dutchman. With a true relation of all or the most piraces by them committed unto the first of Aprill. 1609.* (London, 1609).

him for it, To content thee, I have heere in (white and black inckle) hung him out to thee at Sea, who could better have wished to have seene him hang'd to death (in hemp) a shore. If thou hast a minde to heare more of him, spend thy time on a fewe foule papers following, and thou shalt know as much as I know.¹⁰²

Here Ward is criticised for aligning himself with another – non-Christian – country against his own. By this time, Ward enjoyed a certain amount of celebrity, and a demand already existed for news of him, as Barker indicated when he described having published his pamphlet following his release at the request of his friends, ‘and their greedy and avidous expectation’ of an account.¹⁰³ The pamphlets are generally critical of Ward and his actions, with *Newes from sea* claiming to have ‘hung him out’ for the reader, alluding to execution, but they display a degree of ambivalence towards him which complicates the narrative which *A Proclamation against Pirats* sought to establish. Ward is frequently shown to be brave and bold and his rise from poverty to riches renders him an attractive anti-hero.

Much of what we know about Ward’s life comes from Andrew Barker’s *A true and certaine report*, printed by William Hall and sold by John Helme in St. Dunstan’s churchyard, which stands out from other pamphlets concerning Ward as Barker knew Ward. Barker, the master of a vessel captured and held for ransom by Ward in Tunis in 1608, published the account on his return to England. Barker also sought to respond to other, perhaps less truthful, versions of Ward’s exploits:

Since so many flying fables, and rumoring tales have beene spread, of the fame, or rather indeede infamie, over the whole face of Christendome of this notorious and arch pirate Ward.¹⁰⁴

Ward was, then, already famous by 1609 but Barker suggests that many of the reports in circulation were inaccurate, not least for promoting Ward as famous rather infamous. One of the ‘rumoring tales’ which Barker was particularly keen to correct

¹⁰² *Newes from sea*, A4r.

¹⁰³ Barker, A3r.

¹⁰⁴ Barker, A3r.

was that given in another pamphlet, the 1609 *Newes from sea*. This pamphlet lists all of the ships taken by Ward and Danseker up until April 1609, including Barker's own vessel: '*The York bonaventer* of Hull, of the burthen of 180. tunnes, of whom Andrew Barker was Maister: this ship had 15. peeces of ordnance'.¹⁰⁵ Barker took issue with this statement and published an explicit correction of this information in the final sentence of his own pamphlet:

Whereas it was reported in a former booke, that the *York Bonaventure* (of which I was master) carried fifteene cast peeces at the time of her taking, she had scarce five which shee could use, or were fit for service.¹⁰⁶

As Bak observes, Barker was writing to clear his own name.¹⁰⁷ If the *York Bonaventure* had fifteen pieces of ordnance fully operational, Barker would have been expected to repel any attackers and his capture, and the loss of his ship and cargo, would require an explanation to the owners. *A true and certaine report* is, at least in part, something of a defence of Barker's own reputation. He stresses the truthfulness of his account and names the sources of his information throughout the text to reinforce the impression of his own honesty. As such, although *A true and certaine report* provides the most lengthy and detailed contemporary account of Ward's life we should be mindful of Barker's motivations as we read it.

Barker begins his account by highlighting Ward's poverty during his life in England, describing him as 'a fellow, poore, base, and of no esteeme, one as tattered in cloathes, as he was ragged in conditions'.¹⁰⁸ He tells us that Ward was born in Faversham in Kent and lived as a 'poore fisherman'.¹⁰⁹ Barker's text shares with others an emphasis on Ward's humble start in life: *Newes from Sea* tells us that Ward was 'as base in birth as bad in condition, [...] his parentage was but meane, his estate

¹⁰⁵ *Newes from Sea*, B3r.

¹⁰⁶ Barker, p. 25.

¹⁰⁷ Bak, pp. 172-173.

¹⁰⁸ Barker, A3v.

¹⁰⁹ Barker, A3v.

lowe, and his hope lesse'.¹¹⁰ The use of the word 'base' in both of these instances implies an inferiority. Ward is not just poor, he is seen as worth less in every sense and, were it not for his extraordinary success as a corsair, would have been expected to remain in that station in life. In *A Christian Turned Turk* the character Francisco mocks Ward's low birth:

FRANCISCO: Poor fisher's brat, that never didst aspire
 Above a mussel boat; that were not born
 Unto a fortune 'bove two cades of sprats
 (And those smoked in thy father's bedchamber). (4.103-106)

Francisco's sneering remarks assign Ward to the caste of labouring poor, assumed to have neither money nor aspiration. Ward's humble origins and his subsequent spectacular rise to riches are encapsulated in an illustration from *Ward and Danseker two notorious pyrates*, a reprint of *Newes from Sea* (Figure 6) which was published within a year of the original.

The top image depicts Ward as a poor fisherman in his skiff – it is unclear if he is the figure gazing directly out of the page at the reader or the younger apprentice – and is in contrast with the bottom image of the *Charity*, a richly decked out ship complete with artillery and trumpeter, which was unlucky enough to have been captured twice by Ward and his men. The same two images appear in *Newes from Sea*, but are shown separately in chronological order with Ward in his skiff at the beginning of the text and the *Charity* at the end.¹¹¹ Tellingly, Ward's skiff and the *Charity* are depicted as travelling in opposite directions. The rise of Ward from poverty to riches, his refusal to remain poor, informs many of the most extensive texts about him suggesting a preoccupation with his social mobility.

Such texts often display an unease about their inability to categorise Ward who seems always to have been employed as a seaman, but the precise nature of his

¹¹⁰ *Newes from sea*, B1r.

¹¹¹ *Newes from Sea*, A4v and B4r.

employment was fluid; during his life he was fisherman, privateer, pirate, corsair or navy man. Ward moved easily between all of these maritime occupations and we never encounter him in land-based employment. Fumerton has observed that the “profession” of seaman in the seventeenth century was ‘casual, intermittent and porous by nature’, and Ward’s life as a corsair on the Barbary Coast can, then, be read as yet another development of his constantly evolving career as a seaman.¹¹²

Ward is described as a seaman who could not be confined by one profession:

His profession was as a fisherman of Feversham in Kent, though his pride at last would be confinde to no limits, nor any thing would serve him but the wide Ocean to walke in.¹¹³

Like Daborne’s Francisco, this text seeks to narrowly define Ward as a fisherman and infers that he should have remained in that role were it not for his pride. He attracted criticism for his refusal to remain in his place. Linda Woodbridge has astutely commented that ‘the use of the word “place” to mean both social rank and geographical location gives away the game’.¹¹⁴ Ward refused to stay in either the geographical location or social rank allocated him and ‘would be confined to no limits’. He is depicted as placeless, both geographically and socially.

Other texts reveal the figure of Ward was used as a vehicle to make implicit political criticisms. Jowitt has examined in depth the ways in which the figure of the pirate is used to articulate oppositional ideas.¹¹⁵ This is evident in Barker’s account of Ward’s turn to piracy which begins by portraying his discontent with naval life:

It at last so happened, that in the beginning of the Kings raigne, hee found meanes to be imployed for service, in a small ship of his majesties, commonly called by the name of the *Lions Whelpe*, in which imployment,

¹¹² Fumerton, p. 92.

¹¹³ *Ward and Danseker two notorious pyrates*, A2r.

¹¹⁴ Linda Woodbridge, p. 26.

¹¹⁵ Claire Jowitt, *The Culture of Piracy, 1580-1630* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 30-36.

persisting as before, in his melancholy disposition, not contented, with that good and honest meanes was allowed him.¹¹⁶

Barker paints Ward as melancholy and discontented with the ‘good and honest meanes’ offered by the Navy. However, in this Ward was certainly not alone. Pay and conditions were notoriously poor in the navy during this period, with a master’s mate in the navy paid 20-30 shillings a month compared with 40 shillings in a merchant vessel and 56 shillings in an East India Company ship.¹¹⁷ Disorder, mutiny and desertion were common in the Elizabethan and early Jacobean navy due to a combination of low pay, poor victualling and overcrowding of vessels. Skilled seamen tended to avoid the navy for these reasons and seek employment on merchant ships. Naval vessels were frequently manned by unskilled and pressed men who had little or no choice in their employment.¹¹⁸ Why Ward, an experienced sailor, found himself on a navy ship is unclear, but he had some justification for his ‘melancholy disposition’ at finding himself in naval employment. Barker shows Ward persuasively voicing his discontent with navy life to his shipmates:

My mates, quoth he, whats to be done? heres a scurvy world, and as scurvily we live in’t, we feede here upon the water, on the Kings salt beefe, without ere a penie to buy us bissell when we come a shore.¹¹⁹

Although Ward and his crew received their victuals as part of the navy, they had no wages to speak of and here Barker’s Ward voices their lack of agency. They were fed but could buy nothing for themselves. He contrasts their current straitened circumstances with the former glory days of Elizabethan privateering and piracy:

Where are the daies that have bene, and the seasons that wee have seene, when we might sing, sweare, drinke, drab, and kill men as your Cake-makers doe flies? When we might do what we list, and the law would bear us out? Nay, when wee might lawfully doe that, wee shall be hangd for and we do

¹¹⁶ Barker, B1r.

¹¹⁷ Kenneth R. Andrews, ‘The Elizabethan Seaman’, *The Mariner’s Mirror*, 68:3 (1982), 245-262, (p. 252).

¹¹⁸ Andrews, ‘The Elizabethan Seaman’, (pp. 247-248).

¹¹⁹ Barker, A4r

now, when the whole Sea was our Empire, where we robd at will, and the world but our garden where we walked for sport.¹²⁰

He speaks of a time of freedom and plenty for seamen and evokes a maritime alterity where pirates rule over an empire of the sea. The law of the land has no authority in this empire of liberty and seamen are free to sing, swear, drink, drab and kill without sanction. The eloquent words which Barker gives to Ward offer an insight into the perceived motivations of men who turned to piracy and the ways in which they were thought to behave. They also portray Ward as a charismatic and persuasive leader, greedy to overturn a social order which disadvantaged men like him. This depiction of Ward shows him as more sophisticated than a mere villain. His words are freighted with political meaning, containing an implied criticism of a system which allows seamen to go hungry.

Other texts about Ward, in particular popular ballads, offered a conflicted view describing him as ‘lusty Ward’ and praising his plunder of foreign shipping and his courage:

From the Bay of Plimouth
Sailed he toward the South,
with many more of courage and of might
Christian Princes have but few
Such Seamen.¹²¹

That Ward is seen as a man that any Christian prince might be glad to have in his service contains an implicit criticism of James I and the policies which had driven seamen to such desperate measures as piracy. The balladeer initially paints an appealing picture of Ward, his brave crew, and their lifestyle funded by spoils – including Ward’s palace:

At Tunis in Barbary
Now he buildeth stately,
a gallant Palace and a Royal place,

¹²⁰ Barker, A4v.

¹²¹ Anon., *The Seaman’s Song of Captain Ward the famous Pyrate of the world, and an English man born* (1655-1658).

Decked with delights most trim.
Fitter for a Prince than him.¹²²

Ward is shown as having constructed an alternate realm over which he ruled with his own palace, his own men, his own fleet. As a counterbalance to this glamourized

Ward, ballads also offered details of the pitfalls of such a sinful life:

This wicked gotten treasure,
Doth him but little pleasure,
The land consumes what they have got by sea
In drunkennesse and letchery,
Filthy sins of Sodomy,
these evill gotten Goods do wast away,

Such as live by theeving
Have seldom times good ending.
as by the deeds of Captain Ward is shown
Being drunk amongst his Drabs
His nearest friends he sometimes stabs,
such wickedness within his heart is grown.¹²³

The piratical kingdom was painted as a realm of vice, sin and division ruled over by a fisherman from Faversham incapable of ruling as a godly prince might. Ward is seen as fearing ‘neither God nor the divel’, posing a problem for the balladeer as the sinful godless Ward appeared to be rewarded with a lavish lifestyle rather than receiving punishment for his actions. In this instance, the author preferred to let time deal with Ward:

His name and state so mounteth
These Countrey men accounteth
him equal to the Nobles of that Land
But these his honours we shall find
Shortly blown up with the wind,
or prove like letters written in ye sand. Finis.¹²⁴

In this version Ward’s fame would be ephemeral, disappearing like writing in the sand. This might be seen as a fitting punishment for a man who was perceived as

¹²² *The Seaman’s Song of Captain Ward the famous Pyrate of the world.*

¹²³ *The Seaman’s Song of Captain Ward the famous Pyrate of the world.*

¹²⁴ *The Seaman’s Song of Captain Ward the famous Pyrate of the world.*

having sought to rule the sea yet had no line of succession. Ward was not equal to the nobility. His kingdom was fleeting and would disappear on his death.

The contrast between the realm of the land and that of the sea is even more starkly apparent in the popular ballad, *The Famous Sea-Fight between Captain Ward and the Rainbow*. In this version of Ward's life Ward sets himself as an equal in direct opposition to the monarch:

Go tell the King of England
go tell him thus from me,
If he reign King of all the Land,
I will reign King at Sea.¹²⁵

An illustration from the ballad (Figure 7) reinforces this impression, placing woodcuts of the pirate Ward and the King side by side. The King, bearing more of a likeness to Charles I or Charles II than James I, is depicted as very stately in full monarchical regalia, but it is Ward who is the active figure here. In the illustration he strides towards the static figure of the King, hand outstretched. Ward dominates the ballad despite the King having the larger of the two portraits. The ballad is set 'to the Tune of Captain Ward' – that it was popular enough to have its own well-known tune indicates the level of Ward's fame. The words of the King are sung to the tune of the pirate. As Jowitt has observed of this ballad, 'the figure of the pirate combines orthodox and alternate political visions'.¹²⁶ The sea is seen as a kingdom of maritime alterity with Ward as ruler. He both appropriates monarchical authority and offers an alternate political vision. Ward is used here as a vehicle by which to criticise the reign and policies of James. In addressing Ward as 'captain' this ballad affords him a level of respect and implicitly treats him as a folk hero in his stance against the King. Such was the popularity of this ballad that it underwent many reprints throughout the

¹²⁵ Anon, *The Famous Sea-Fight between Captain Ward and the Rainbow* (London, 1650).

¹²⁶ Jowitt, *The Culture of Piracy*, p. 2.

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, resurfacing again in the nineteenth century in versions such as *Ward the Pirate!* in which Ward writes a letter to Queen Victoria.¹²⁷ Ward's fame in song endures still: a version of this ballad was performed at the Glastonbury Festival in 2007.¹²⁸

Thomas Heywood and William Rowley's play *Fortune by Land and Sea* (c. 1607) attributes similar views to other pirates. The play includes the characters Purser and Clinton, who, as we have seen, were real life Elizabethan pirates hanged for piracy at Wapping in 1583 and are here transposed to a Jacobean drama. Purser and Clinton also articulate the idea of a parallel maritime realm where pirates rule:

But was't not better when we reign'd as Lords,
Nay Kings at Sea, the Ocean was our realm.
And the light billows in the which we sayl'd
Our hundreds, nay our shires, and provinces.
That brought us annual profit, those were daies.¹²⁹

Purser and Clinton reign over a watery world which, in its mapping of hundreds, shires and provinces, reflects yet is seemingly more profitable than the terrestrial world. In positing an alternate empire of the sea, all of these texts contain an implicit criticism about the poverty, injustice, and lack of social mobility caused by James I's foreign policy decisions and harken back nostalgically to the era of Elizabethan expansionism. In Barker's telling, when Ward speaks of the sea as their empire his shipmates berate him for his nostalgia:

What should we talke of that now? To think of those happinesses past, is as much for a man to remember his mother's flesh, and the favour of her countenance, seven yeares after her bones are rotten. The daies were then clear, and they are now clowdie, and to speake of that golden world, is like

¹²⁷ For reprints of the ballad see English Broadside Ballad Archive: <<https://ebba.english.ucsb.edu>>; Bak, pp. 193-197.

¹²⁸ Spiers and Boden, Captain Ward (2007) <<http://spiersandboden.com/watch/>>

¹²⁹ Tho. Heywood and William Rowly, *Fortune by land and sea a tragi-comedy, as it was acted with great applause by the Queens servants* (London, 1655), V.1.2157-61.

knocking our lips against cherries, while others sweeten their mouths with the meate.¹³⁰

These words confirm the decline in fortunes suffered by seamen at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century discussed in chapter two.¹³¹ For many mariners, the reign of Elizabeth I had been a ‘golden world’ of privateering and profit and here the lamented dead Queen is resurrected as the corpse-mother of seamen. The speeches which Barker gives to Ward have a certain theatrical flourish and hint at the interplay which existed between pirates on stage and in reality. Perhaps Barker had seen the dramatisation of the real-life pirates Purser and Clinton in *Fortune by Land and Sea* and created similar speeches for Ward in his own ‘true and certaine’ report. In early modern writings about piracy the relationship between truth and fiction, drama and fact is often complex and difficult to unpack.

Reports of Ward’s apostasy in 1610 caused an outpouring of popular print, much of which heaped scorn upon him. From the poet and satirist Samuel Rowlands came ‘To a Reprobate Pirat that hath renounced Christ and is turn’d Turk’, which addressed Ward as ‘Thou wicked lumpe of onely sin, and shame’. Rowlands warned Ward of his imminent punishment:

Receive this warning from thy native land;
 Gods fearefull Judgements (villaine) are at hand.
 Devils attend, Hell fier is prepar’d:
 Perpetuall flames is reprobates Re-ward.¹³²

¹³⁰ Barker, A4v.

¹³¹ For further discussion regarding the expansion of Elizabethan maritime trade see James Davey, ‘Adventurers: England Turns to the Sea, 1550-80’, in *Tudor and Stuart Seafarers: The Emergence of a Maritime Nation, 1485-1707*, ed. by James Davey (London: Adlard Coles, 2018), pp. 38-53.

¹³² Samuel Rowlands, ‘To a Reprobate Pirat that hath renounced Christ and is turn’d Turke’, in *More Knaves Yet: The Knaves of Spades and Diamonds: With New Additions* (London, 1612), B1r.

Many might consider Rowlands' execrable wordplay punishment enough. In

Thomas Dekker's 1612 play *If it be not good, the Divell is in it*, the demons decide that Ward is not yet ready for hell:

The merchants are not pill'd nor pull'd enough.
They are but shaven, when they are fleeced he'll come
And bring to hell fat boats of rich thieves,
A crew of swearers and drinkers the best that lives.¹³³

The expectation was that Ward would certainly reach hell eventually once he had exhausted his capacity for plunder. He would arrive at hell in a boat, still confined to the role of a mariner even after death.

The treatment meted out to Ward on his conversion contrasted sharply with that shown to Sir Francis Verney, whose apostasy was reported with that of Ward. Verney had left England following an unwanted and unhappy marriage and financial difficulties. He arrived in Tunis in 1609 and began sailing with Ward's fleet.¹³⁴ In 1615 William Lithgow, who had also met Ward, encountered Verney in a hospital in Messina and recounted his fate:

Here in Messina I found the (sometimes) great English Gallant Sir Francis Verny lying sick in a Hospitall, whom six weekes before, I had met in Palermo: Who after many misfortunes in exhausting his large patrimony, abandoning his Countrey, and turning Turk in Tunneis; he was taken at Sea by the Sicilian Gallies: In one of which he was two yeares a slave, whence hee was redeemed by an English Jesuit, upon a promise of his conversion to the Christian faith: When set at liberty, hee turned common Souldier, and herein the extreamest calamity of extreame miseries, contracted Death: Whose dead Corpes I charitably interred, in the best manner, time could afford me strength, bewailing sorrowfully the mierable mutability of fortune, who from so great a Birth, had given him so meane a Buriall, and truly so may I say, *Sic transit gloria mundi*.¹³⁵

Lithgow depicts Verney as an object of pity rather than of scorn and hatred. His life is one of 'extreame miseries' and Lithgow offers no criticism of either his piracy or

¹³³ Thomas Dekker, *If it be not good, the Divell is in it* (London, 1612), L4r-L4v.

¹³⁴ Nabil Matar, 'Verney, Sir Francis (1584–1615), pirate' in *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com>> [accessed 15 March 2018]

¹³⁵ Lithgow, p.397.

his apostasy. Verney's story illustrates the permeable religious boundaries of the Mediterranean: he is Protestant, then a Muslim, and finally Catholic but, unlike Ward, he receives little vilification in print for his actions. Verney appears in *A Christian Turned Turk*, thinly disguised as Franciso, where he is depicted as an honourable gentleman pirate – a great gallant fallen low – in contrast with Ward, the fisher's brat reaching high.

That Ward remained unpunished for his crimes and his apostasy was something that many found difficult to reconcile. One playwright, however, dramatized Ward's life to ensure he was punished on stage if not in life, and it is to this version of Ward that we now turn. Robert Daborne's *A Christian Turned Turk* was published in 1612 and is thought to have been written between 1609, when the sources were first available, and 1612, for performance by the Queen's Revels company at the Whitefriars Hall theatre.¹³⁶ The play's preface 'To the Knowing Reader' indicates that it was popular in performance but suffered the contempt of 'silken gulls and ignorant citizens'.¹³⁷ Bak has commented that courtiers may have been offended by the play's insufficiently critical depiction of Ward at a time when the King had refused a pardon.¹³⁸ The mixed reception received by the play suggests a fear on the part of the 'silken gulls' that at least some of the audience may have been supportive towards Ward's activities.

Daborne's stated intent in writing the play, as set out in the Prologue, was to examine Ward's apostasy: 'What heretofore set others' pens awork | Was Ward turned pirate; ours is Ward turned Turk' (Prologue, 7-8), and the play seems to have

¹³⁶ Daniel J. Vitkus, 'Introduction', p. 24; Lucy Munro, *Children of the Queen's Revels: A Jacobean Theatre Repertory* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), p. 25.

¹³⁷ Robert Daborne, 'To the Knowing Reader', *A Christian Turned Turk*, in Daniel Vitkus (ed.), *Three Turk Plays from Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

¹³⁸ Bak, p. 184.

been in part a response to news of Ward's conversion which had reached England in 1610. Setting his work apart from that of other authors who had concentrated on Ward's highly successful career of maritime plunder, Daborne professed to 'reach the heart itself of villainy' rather than examine the 'trivial' act of piracy (Prologue, 14). Although other printed sources allude to Ward's conversion to Islam, *A Christian Turned Turk* explores the subject most extensively. However, despite Daborne's avowal that he will not dwell on the theme of 'Ward turned pirate' he returns to the theme of Ward's lowly origins and skill as a seaman throughout the play, drawing attention his rise to fame (Prologue, 8).

Robert Daborne (c.1580-1628) was the son of a merchant. His father, Robert Daborne, Senior (1551-1612), was a London haberdasher who invested in overseas trade ventures which were the victim of piracy.¹³⁹ This may account for a certain amount of knowledge and interest in maritime trade and piracy on Daborne's part. However, Daborne was also a patentee for the Children of the Queen's Revels at the Whitefriars Playhouse from 1610 onwards where his predecessor, Lording Barry (c.1580 – 1629), patentee, playwright, and author of *Ram-Alley, or, Merrie-Trickes* (1611), had been forced to flee the country due to debt, and in 1608 turned to piracy.¹⁴⁰ Thomas, one of the men hanged alongside a number of John Ward's men at Execution Dock in 1609, had been a pirate in Lording Barry's crew.¹⁴¹ These details from Daborne's life demonstrate how enmeshed piracy was in everyday society, and offer a motive for Daborne's choice of Ward as a subject.

¹³⁹ S. P. Cerasano, 'Daborne, Robert (c.1580-1628), playwright', in *ODNB* <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/6993>> [accessed 4 February 2018]

¹⁴⁰ Lois Potter, 'Pirates and "Turning Turk" in Renaissance Drama', in Jean-Pierre Maquerlot and Michèle Willems (eds), *Travel and Drama in Shakespeare's Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 133-134. For more on Lording Barry see C. L. L'Estrange-Ewen, *Lording Barry, Poet and Pirate* (privately printed, 1938).

¹⁴¹ *The Lives, Apprehensions Arraignments, and Executions, of the 19. late Pyrates* (London, 1609), F2r.

The play opens *in medias res*, on board Ward's ship. Ward and his officers are playing cards and dice with French merchants, Albert and Ferdinand, who are unaware of the true identity of their opponents. From the outset the play addresses themes of trickery and chance, connecting gambling with investment in merchant voyages. The merchant Albert draws explicit parallels between the game of hazard and maritime trade: 'We came aboard to venture with you: deal merchant-like, put it upon one main and throw at all' (1.6-7). Here, 'venture' refers to both the risk involved in the game and the merchant voyage, 'main' alludes to both the sea and to a number in the game of hazard.¹⁴² The money a merchant invests in a voyage is no more secure than that of a gambler risking all on the throw of a dice. The merchants prove no match for Ward who effectively kidnaps them by slipping anchor and sailing off while they are busy playing dice. C. L'Estrange-Ewen has noted that Daborne's predecessor, Lording Barry, was accused of a similar kidnapping during his career as a pirate and the incident may have been the inspiration for this scene.¹⁴³ When Albert and Ferdinand realise that they have been tricked by pirates, Gismund taunts them: 'Now you may show yourselves gamesters: you shall have your bellies full of hazard' (1.17-18). The risk has proved too great for them and they have lost both the game and their ship.

Gismund finally introduces Ward to the merchants, who are unaware of their captors, and to the audience:

GISMUND: Do you not know this honorable shape? Heroic Captain Ward, lord of the ocean, terror of kings, landlord to merchants, rewarder of manhood, conqueror of the Western world, to whose followers the lands and seas pay tribute; and they to none but once in their lives to the manor of Wapping and then free ever after. (1. 22-26)

¹⁴² Vitkus, p. 233.

¹⁴³ L'Estrange-Ewen, '*Lording Barry*', p. 14.

Ward is honourable and heroic, but is also a ‘terror of kings’, signifying the challenge he poses to order and authority. The language used in this description of Ward alludes to Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine*, who conquers kings and ‘means to be a terror to the world’.¹⁴⁴ Like Ward, *Tamburlaine* rose from low beginnings to great heights: *Tamburlaine* began life as a shepherd, Ward as a fisherman. Both plays are situated in the eroticised Ottoman Empire and both Ward and *Tamburlaine* set their ambition above God. Marlowe’s play was well known and the allusion to *Tamburlaine* would indicate to Daborne’s audience that this was a play about overreaching ambition leading to the eventual undoing of the protagonist. However, as Mark Hutchings notes, the evocation of *Tamburlaine* was a risky strategy for Daborne to adopt if he intended condemnation of the pirate as, far from condemning *Tamburlaine*, early modern audiences appear to have marvelled at him.¹⁴⁵ Daborne’s Ward is a nuanced and complex character who frequently reflects on the motives for his actions, many of which might cause audiences to sympathise with him.

Ward reveals his motives for turning to piracy early on in the play. On discovering their capture, Ferdinand offers Ward all of their money in exchange for their freedom, an offer which Ward rejects:

WARD: Know we have other uses for you,
 Have not enticed you hither for your gold:
 It is the man we want. Is’t not a shame
 Men of your qualities and personage
 Should live as cankers, eating up the soil
 That gave you being (like beasts that ne’er look further
 Than where they first took food)? That men call “home”
 Which gives them means equal unto their minds,
 Puts them in action. (1.31-39)

¹⁴⁴ Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great Who, from a Scythian shepheard, by his rare and woonderfull conquests, became a most puissant and mightye monarque* (London, 1590), A6v.

¹⁴⁵ Mark Hutchings, ‘Acting Pirates: Converting A Christian Turned Turk’ in *Pirates? The Politics of Plunder, 1550-1650*, ed. by Claire Jowitt (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 90- 104 (p. 95).

Ward's refusal to accept the merchants' gold troubles the narrative of the pirate as nothing more than a venal sea robber. Gismund's initial introduction of Ward as 'rewarder of manhood' hinted at meritocracy. Now Ward, in his attempt to persuade these men to join him, describes piracy explicitly in terms of egalitarianism, as a life where men can escape lives as beasts and have 'means equal unto their minds'. As Laurie Ellinghausen observes, 'home' is the place that allows these men to thrive according to their talents and ambitions.¹⁴⁶ England cannot be a home to them as there they would be redundant, cast in to unemployment by the pacific policies of James I. Ward's view of 'home' contrasts with that of the merchants who, realising they have been captured by pirates, ask 'Only deprive us not of our fair home, our country: do but land us' (1.30). The merchants crave home, nation, and land. Ward however, rejects not just England but all nations, telling the Governor of Tunis, 'I know no country I can call home' (7.13). He and his crew claim allegiance only to the sea. When asked where they are from Ward's officer, Gismund, replies, 'We are of the sea' (2.35). They feel true belonging only when at sea, in the element which has given them agency and freed them from the social hierarchies of nation.

Ward's argument is rebutted by the merchant, Ferdinand, who defines piracy as 'theft most hateful' (1.58), and offers the figure of the brave merchant in response to Ward's pirate meritocracy:

FERDINAND: You rob the venting merchants, whose manly breast
 (Scorning base gain at home) puts to the main
 With hazard of his life and state, from other lands
 To enrich his own, whilst with ungrateful hands
 He thus is overwhelmed. (1.62-66)

Both pirates and merchants couch their actions in terms of manliness and manhood. Jowitt has noted that this is suggestive of male same-sex desire however it can also

¹⁴⁶ Laurie Ellinghausen, "'We are of the Sea!'" Masterless Identity and Transnational Context in Daborne's *A Christian Turned Turk*, *Explorations in Renaissance Cultures*, 41 (2015), 178-201 (p. 194).

be read as an indicator of an intrinsic link between male worth and occupation.¹⁴⁷

Ward and Gismund see ‘manhood’ in terms of the ‘qualities’ of an individual. For Ferdinand manliness is defined by service to his country. Ward rejects both his country and his religion therefore, by Ferdinand’s definition, is unmanned. This argument is played out throughout the drama and finally results in the literal unmanning of Ward with his circumcision – a procedure which, as we have seen, was often conflated with castration in early modern imaginings.

Although written as the villain of the piece, Daborne’s Ward is a character with a rich interior life, much given to philosophising on fate and the nature of life. He mourns the death of a friend, musing that ‘there was some other end in our creation | Than to be that which men term valiant’ (3.23-24). Questioning both codes of masculinity and social hierarchy, Ward places himself outside social convention:

WARD: My merit – shall I thrall them? The sway of things
Belongs to him dares most. Such should be kings,
And such am I. What Nature in my birth
Denied me, Fortune supplies. This maxim I hold:
He lives a slave that lives to be controlled. (4.83-87)

In stating that men of daring, such as he, should rule, Ward sets himself directly in opposition to the King, offering an implicit criticism of his fitness to rule. Although Daborne charts Ward’s downfall as beginning from this moment of treacherous thought, the play can be read as critical of James I. Jowitt views Ward’s descent into tyranny as he seeks to establish a relationship with Francisco as a comment on James’s regime and his reliance on favourites.¹⁴⁸ Bak suggests that Daborne is sympathetic to the social circumstances which drove men to piracy and that his Ward can be seen as a comment on the pacific policies of James I which threw seamen into poverty and piracy.¹⁴⁹ But although Daborne demonstrates an understanding of the

¹⁴⁷ Jowitt, *The Culture of Piracy*, p. 142.

¹⁴⁸ Jowitt, *The Culture of Piracy*, pp. 142-146.

¹⁴⁹ Bak, pp.177-178.

problems facing poor mariners and creates an intelligent and complex anti-hero in Ward at the same time he leaves the audience in no doubt about the fate of those who challenge authority.

Ward's humble origins and ambition are highlighted by Daborne from the outset:

CHORUS: Our subject's low, yet to your eyes presents
Deeds high in blood, in blood of innocents:
Transcends them low, and your invention calls
To name the sin beyond this black deed falls.
What heretofore set others' pens awork,
Was Ward turned pirate; ours is Ward turned Turk.
Their trivial scenes might best afford to show
The baseness of his birth, how from below
Ambition oft takes root, makes men forsake
The good they enjoy yet know not. (Prologue, 3-12)

Although Daborne protests that 'the baseness' of Ward's birth and his ambition is not the subject of *A Christian Turned Turk*, they are themes to which he nevertheless returns throughout. He has Francisco, the fictionalised Sir Francis Verney, mock Ward's social status:

FRANCISCO: A little calmer, sir! You are not in Kent,
Crying, "Herrings, seven a penny!" Nay, we have heard of you:
You can bawl well; you have served apprenticeship
Unto the trade, affrighting of whole streets
With your full oyster voice. (4.97-101)

Francisco depicts Ward as nothing more than a dockside fish seller. The audience is repeatedly reminded that Ward was – and perhaps only ever could be – a fisherman. Francisco attempts to re-place Ward back in his allotted social station. Francisco and Ward, though both pirates, are sharply contrasting characters: Francisco the urbane gallant and Ward a brave but rough seaman. The contrast between the two is particularly apparent in their verbal and physical sparring in Scene 4, and would make memorable impression on the audience. Ward loses his sword in their brawl but he will not yield to Francisco. Francisco refuses to kill Ward and throws aside his own sword. Ward then declares Francisco his equal:

WARD: Not only in the prize, but in myself
 Thou hast an equal share. Henceforth I vow thee brotherhood. (4.147-148)

Despite his avowed refusal Ward has, in effect, yielded to his social superior and offered him fealty.

Ward's moral decline is gradual throughout the play, beginning with the opening trickery and deceit, through to his increasing tyranny over the crew, and his selling of fellow Christians into slavery. These incremental actions all progress towards the eventual nadir of his apostasy. There is no suggestion that the real John Ward was converted forcibly or was tricked into conversion and Daborne depicts him as a voluntary but sceptical convert. The Governor of Tunis, himself a convert, initially attempts to persuade Ward to conversion by appealing to his sense of liberty:

GOVERNOR: He's too well read in poesy to be tied
 In the slave's fetters of religion.
 What difference in me as I am a Turk
 And was a Christian? Life, liberty,
 Wealth, honor – they are common unto all! (7.27-31)

As described by the Governor, Tunis seems to offer the meritocracy that Ward seeks. Ward, however, is unconvinced and refuses to convert, although he agrees to work for the Governor:

WARD: But to cut off your further argument:
 What's mine of prowess, or of art, shall rest by you
 To be disposed of; but to abjure
 My name – and the belief my ancestors
 Left to my being! (7.72-76)

Ward is painted as happy to sell his labour but the relinquishment of his name, required here by conversion, violates his intrinsic sense of identity. Finally Ward is tempted to apostasy for love of Voadia, Crosman's sister, who insists she will not marry him unless he converts to Islam. Ward rationalises this to himself thus:

WARD: What is't I lose by this change? My country?
 Already 'tis to me impossible.

My name is scandalled? What is one island
 Compared to the Eastern monarchy? This large,
 Unbounded station shall speak my future fame. (7.179-183)

This Ward sees return to England as impossible – although he names it as ‘my country’ – and sees his future and fame in the service of the Barbary States. Whereas the real Ward could not return to England as his pardon was refused, Daborne has him make the choice out of base lust.

The conversion ceremony itself is introduced by the Chorus as a black deed which strikes at heaven:

CHORUS: The deeds we have presented hitherto are white
 Compared unto those black ones we must write:
 For now, no more at men but giant-like
 The face of heaven itself he dares to strike.
 And with a blushless front he dares to do
 What we are dumb to think, much more to show. (8.3-8)

This unspeakable act is performed as a dumb show to highlight Ward’s exceptional depravity. His act of apostasy marks the zenith of his hubris and his fortunes swiftly decline as Voada, the woman he loves, proves false. Ward is betrayed, his fleet destroyed and he is charged with murder. Faced with ruin he stabs himself to death, saying, ‘Who will soar high | First lesson that he learns must be to die’ (16.293-294). Ward acknowledges ambition as his undoing. Here, Daborne has radically departed from the facts of Ward’s life. As contemporary audiences were likely to be aware, far from killing himself Ward was, at the time of their watching, alive and well and enjoying a life of luxury in his palace in Tunis.

Daborne has Ward die to demonstrate the consequences for those who seek to ‘soar high’ and place ambition before the authority of their god and their country. The fictional Ward is annihilated – his body is torn into pieces and he is thrown into the sea. The Governor of Tunis orders that his only monument will be a plaque inscribed with the words, “‘Ward sold his country, turned Turk, and died a slave’” (16.326). Far from advancing his social status, Ward has been diminished to a slave,

punished for his excessive ambition. The discrepancy between Ward's demise at the end of the play and his true circumstances in Tunis has been described by Barbara Fuchs as 'textual retribution for the pirate's cultural duplicity'.¹⁵⁰ Despite his equivocal treatment of Ward throughout, by inventing this shameful death for him Daborne ensures the play ends with social orthodoxies reinforced and Ward cast to the bottom of the social hierarchy.

Reading all of these texts together reveals the construction of the fictional Ward the pirate, a depiction at odds with the real John Ward, skilled seaman. Claire Jowitt has perceptively described Ward as 'an example of a serviceable and potentially useful Englishman gone wrong'.¹⁵¹ Much of the ire heaped on Ward can be read as directed against all such skilled men who turned to piracy and were viewed as having 'gone wrong', rejecting their responsibilities to their country for their own gain. Yet analysis of this breadth of texts, including state papers, pamphlets, ballads and drama, also reveals explicit social criticism acknowledging the role which in England played in creating both Ward and the wider problem of piracy.¹⁵²

Although we can consider Ward as occupationally defined as a seaman, he was for the most part a mobile wage labourer selling his skills. Marcus Rediker has described the seaman's labour as 'a commodity to be sold on the open market like any other'.¹⁵³ Ward sold his labour on merchantmen, naval vessels and, eventually, to the ruler of Tunis. That he prospered outside the social hierarchy of England

¹⁵⁰ Barbara Fuchs, *Mimesis and Empire: The New World, Islam, and European Identities* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), p. 125.

¹⁵¹ Claire Jowitt, *Voyage Drama and Gender Politics, 1589-1642: Real and Imagined Worlds* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 163.

¹⁵² Ellinghausen, *Pirates, Traitors, and Apostates*, p. 48.

¹⁵³ Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987), p. 16.

posed a challenge to authority and his success based on skill alone foreshadows the ‘gentlemen versus tarpaulin’ debate around the professionalization of captaincy which intensified later in the seventeenth century.¹⁵⁴ Texts about Ward were critical of him, but many display a considerable degree of ambivalence. Some saw Ward’s success in Tunis as an indictment of the pacific policies of James I and used his story as a vehicle to implicitly criticise the King. To many Ward was nothing more than a renegade, but to others his story was inspiring. In turning Turk, Ward was able to exercise a degree of self-determination and choose his employer. By doing so, he attained wealth and status in excess of anything he could have achieved in England.

Conclusion

Accounts of seamen who voluntarily converted to Islam during the seventeenth century complicate official narratives of both apostasy and piracy. The texts analysed here indicate that some viewed Islamic society as holding the possibility of social and financial advancement for men of skill at a time when England was a place of unemployment and hardship for many seamen. Those who proved their worth might achieve wealth and status denied to commoners in England. This proved an attraction to poor, skilled, and ambitious men, such as John Ward. Those, like Ward, who made the decision to operate as Barbary corsairs were accused of piracy by their detractors in England, yet they were authorised by the state and, had they acted under the license of a Christian nation, would generally have been termed lawful privateers. The introduction of a non-Christian religion added a new level of complexity to the already fraught and opaque definitions of piracy and privateering,

¹⁵⁴ J. D Davies, *Pepys’s Navy: Ships, Men and Warfare, 1649-1689* (Barnsley: Seaforth, 2008), pp. 94-99.

enabling the renegades' detractors to vilify them as pirates in defiance of both law and church.

A life on the Barbary Coast offered a route out of poverty for those brave or desperate enough to try it. For many of these men conversion to Islam may have been a way to consolidate their new lives, enabling them to integrate within a different society. In English texts at least, there is little evidence of how strongly willing apostates adhered to their new faith, but many express concerns about the fragility of Christian belief and a fear of opportunistic conversion. A study of Maghrebi texts on early modern converts is outside the scope of this study but would repay further investigation for an alternative perspective on the figure of the renegade. However, the range of English texts touching upon the renegade experience are rarely considered together. When read side by side, these different types of texts about those Christians who 'turned Turk' provide insight into the new opportunities and threats which cross-cultural encounters posed to seamen in particular, and illuminate the tensions they provoked in those who remained at home.

Chapter 4: ‘He went bouldly up the ladder’: Reading the Pirate Death

Introduction

In July 1726 a seaman standing on deck noticed a knot poorly tied by a novice and took action to correct the fault; a mundane event in the daily life of any mariner. But this was no ordinary day for William Fly, the twenty-seven year old seaman in question, as he stood on the deck of the gallows in Boston harbour awaiting execution as a consequence of his brief yet incandescent career of piracy. His execution was witnessed and recorded by Cotton Mather, pastor at Boston’s North Church, who had repeatedly attempted to bring Fly to salvation. Mather reported that on ascending the gallows Fly inspected the noose with which he would be hanged and, finding it inadequate, ‘reproached the Hangman, for not understanding his Trade, and with his own Hands rectified matters, to render all things more Convenient and Effectual’.¹ Fly then made a final address to the crowd in which he expressed his hope that:

All Masters of Vessels might take Warning by the Fate of the Captain (meaning Captain Green) that he had murder’d, and to pay Sailors their Wages when due, and to treat them better; saying that their Barbarity to them made so many turn Pyrates.²

In Fly’s view, the turn to piracy was for many a conscious decision formed in response to the actions of others and in circumstances where there were few other options. As explored in previous chapters, pirates were often portrayed as outsiders, with the choices they made provoking a range of textual responses; but how were their lives articulated – by themselves and by others – at the point of execution when

¹ Cotton Mather, *The Vial Poured Out upon the Sea: A Remarkable Relation of Certain Pirates*, (Boston, 1726), p. 47.

² Mather, *The Vial Poured Out*, p. 47.

death was an imminent reality, and opportunities for choice were fatally limited?

Taking this question as a starting point, this chapter considers the textual records these men left behind in order to discover how they chose to frame their deaths and how this might illuminate their lives in respect of contemporary perceptions.

In his choice of words and refusal to play the role of penitent in this scaffold drama, Fly posed a challenge to the authority not just of the state, but of God. He repeatedly refused to confess to Mather and even on the scaffold would not repent. Mather was frustrated and appalled, telling him:

What Criminal and prodigious Nonsense are you guilty of! – And you’l go out of the World, with what is as bad in your Heart; Even with Murder there. You will go out of the World, in a plain Rebellion against a Command of God....³

Fly, with what the text presents as his bravado and flair for the dramatic gesture, was determined to make what we must infer was the most of his brief time in front of the crowd at the scaffold, commanding both the audience and the space of his execution whilst articulating his own version of justice. According to Fly, Captain Green was guilty of ‘Bad Usage’ – barbarous treatment of his crew.⁴ Fly made this accusation at the very point at which convention required that he should confess and repent his own crimes. By doing so, he subverted the official system of justice and implied that the killing of Captain Green was an act of true justice committed against a perpetrator by his victims. Crucially, Fly was asserting agency over his own death and making a statement that, although he was certainly in circumstances not of his own choosing, he might still exert some choice over how his death was articulated.

³ Mather, *The Vial Poured Out*, p. 19.

⁴ Mather, *The Vial Poured Out*, p. 1.

The theatricality of early modern pirate executions is evidenced by the highly ritualised performance of justice by the state. If we follow Michel Foucault's interpretation, in which 'public torture and execution must be spectacular, it must be seen by all almost as its triumph', the public punishment of pirates enabled the state to reassert its power which had been so brazenly challenged by their actions.⁵ The role created for the condemned pirate in this ritual of submission to the state was to confess and repent – only then could order be restored.⁶ The purpose of any public execution was not merely to excite terror in spectators but also serve as example and demonstrate that a life of sin would be punished; only submission and repentance could lead to salvation.⁷ Fifteenth century *Ars moriendi* texts detailing how to achieve a good death spawned a tradition of English literature on the art of dying well, such as William Perkins' *A salve for a sicke man* (1597).⁸ Such texts continued to inform the speeches and behaviour of the dying throughout the early modern period, leading to an expectation that death would be met in particular way. The scaffold speech was intended as a performance of the good death in which the condemned was expected not only to confess the crime for which they would be executed, but also to confess their entire life of sin, warn others against following the same path, and offer true repentance. Only then could they submit to God's will and

⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Allen Lane, 1977), p. 34.

⁶ Katherine Royer, 'Dead Men Talking: Truth, Texts and the Scaffold in Early Modern England', in *Penal Practice and Culture, 1500-1900: Punishing the English*, ed. by Simon Devereaux and Paul Griffiths (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 63-83 (p. 73).

⁷ J.A. Sharpe, '"Last Dying Speeches": Religion, Ideology and Public Execution in Seventeenth-Century England', *Past and Present*, 107 (1985), 144-167 (p. 146).

⁸ William Perkins, *A salve for a sicke man: or, A treatise containing the nature, differences, and kinds of death; as also the right manner of dying well*. (London, 1597).

hope for salvation.⁹ Fly, in his lack of penitence, disrupted the conventions of dying well and posed a challenge to the authorities he viewed as failing to dispense justice.

Public executions were the ideological means of the state to assert its power but, as Peter Lake and Michael Questier have argued, they also contained within themselves the possibility of subversion by the condemned.¹⁰

These were almost classically liminal occasions in which the boundaries between the state and the church, religion and treason, private conscience and public subjection were deliberately made available for renewed inspection, renegotiation and, of course, ultimate reaffirmation. [...] But, while the state could manipulate the theatre of punishment, it had no absolute or even very secure hold over the things which happened during the performance'.¹¹

The penitent dying speech was the ultimate show of submission to the state and yet in order to enable this to happen the state had to relinquish control for long enough to let the condemned speak. This temporary and necessary breach of control created a space which might be occupied and exploited by those, such as Fly, who had an alternative narrative. Fly's actions and words hint at the existence of two competing theatres of execution – that of the state versus that of the pirates – which occupied the same temporal and physical space and yet which offered quite different definitions of piracy.

This chapter attends to the ways in which both pirates and state claimed the space of the gallows. The study of scaffold performances uncovers traces of how piracy was perceived in the face of failure and reveals the development of a culture of piracy focussed on opposition and death. The adoption of a longitudinal approach, using examples from the late sixteenth to the mid eighteenth centuries, enables

⁹ Ralph Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family, 1480-1750* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), p. 214; Sharpe, 'Last Dying Speeches', p. 152.

¹⁰ Peter Lake and Michael Questier, 'Agency, Appropriation and Rhetoric under the Gallows: Puritans, Romanists and the State in Early Modern England', *Past and Present*, 153 (1996), 64-107 (p. 69).

¹¹ Lake and Questier, p. 73.

examination of the changing relationship between piracy and the law and further delineates the available choices – or lack thereof – in pirate lives. The specifics of location and punishment meted out to pirates at London’s Execution Dock form a meeting point of the juridical frameworks and experiential narratives explored in chapter two. It is in the unity of pirate death and Execution Dock in particular that we find the demise of pirate choice most dramatically and, perhaps, starkly written; it is to this site of execution we now bring our focus.

1. ‘A kinde of watrish Tree at Wapping’

Pirate executions, in common with other early modern executions, were public spectacles, rituals enacted in the streets and attended by thousands. Yet, as we now turn to discuss, the jurisdiction and punishment of the crime of piracy was significantly different to that of other crimes, echoing the legislative othering described in chapter two. If pirates were truly the enemy of all mankind, might not the punishment need to be distinct in order to reflect the enormity of their deeds? Execution Dock, the location of pirate executions in London, provided a site which reflected the alterity of the crime and allowed for the public performance of justice before an audience of the pirates’ peers. An initial examination of the juridical ceremony and site of pirate punishment provides valuable context to discussion of scaffold speeches made by the condemned and insight into how, and to whom, their words were delivered.

In London, hangings for crimes other than piracy, witchcraft, heresy or treason were carried out on specific ‘hanging days’ when church bells would be rung throughout the city to announce the event. The condemned prisoner would have their

shackles struck off in the prison yard and would then be taken in an open cart on a three mile procession through the city to the Tyburn gallows. The procession passed through some of the most heavily populated areas of the city allowing a view of the condemned to those who did not attend the hanging itself.¹² But hundreds, often many thousands, made the trip to Tyburn to watch the criminals be despatched. Crowds were sometimes so vast that they blocked the streets, with one 1669 pamphlet reporting that ‘the streets were thronged with Spectators, and at Tyburn they were in such numbers that the Carts could not get up to the place of Execution, the Prisoners being led thither on foot’.¹³ A sermon would be preached; the condemned would make a last speech, assumed to be their confession, and would then be ‘turned off’ the scaffold to their death. Executions in early modern London were, then, both ritual punishment and highly public spectacle.

The condemned had some scope to influence this process if they belonged to the nobility. Sir Walter Raleigh, was able to enter into negotiations regarding the manner of his death when in 1616 a death sentence against him for treason, dating from 1603, was reinstated. John Pory wrote that on hearing that the old sentence would be invoked ‘Sir Walter became an humble suitour, that His Majesty would dispense with the ordinary punishment, and would permitte him to be beheaded’.¹⁴ Raleigh petitioned the King in respect of the method of his execution. To suffer the

¹² Douglas Hay, et al., *Albion’s Fatal Tree* (London: Penguin 1975, 1988 edition), p. 67.

¹³ Anon., *An Exact narrative of the bloody murder and robbery committed by Stephen Eaton, Sarah Swift, George Rhodes, and Henry Pritchard, upon the person of Mr. John Talbot, minister with the manner of their apprehension, arraignment and condemnation: also, a list of all the persons that are condemned, with the several offences to which they were executed* (London, 1669), p. 8.

¹⁴ ‘James I – Volume 87: June 1616,’ *CSPD: James I, 1611-18*, ed. by Mary Anne Everett Green (London: HMSO, 1858), pp. 370-378 <<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/domestic/jas1/1611-18/pp370-378#highlight-first>> [accessed 19 July 2017]

‘ordinary punishment’ for treason was to be hung, drawn and quartered, the body of state annihilating that of the felon. Beheading was viewed as the cleanest and most painless of execution methods and, as such, more appropriate for nobility and royalty – Marvell’s description of the execution of Charles I who ‘bow’d his comely Head | Down, as upon a Bed’ bestows the scene with an elegance and grace befitting a monarch.¹⁵ Choice in the manner of death was afforded mainly to the nobility: courtiers, such as Raleigh, might petition the monarch and request their sentence be commuted but commoners could hope for little more than a swift despatch and this they were often denied. Raleigh, one of the seadogs who inspired many to turn to maritime plunder, did not suffer the ignominious death of a pirate.

As discussed in earlier chapters, the treatment in law for the crime of piracy differed from that for robbery committed on land and, correspondingly, the punishment of pirates had its own very distinct characteristics. Crimes committed at sea fell under the jurisdiction of the High Court of Admiralty which developed its own processes and rituals for trials and executions. Following the 1536 Offences at Sea Act, crimes committed at sea were tried by jury under the Admiralty Sessions, under the auspices of the Lord Admiral. In his 1720 *Survey of London*, John Strype locates the origins of the High Court of Admiralty in 1360 and sets out to define its jurisdiction:

The Court of Admiralty: Which was erected in Edward the Third his Time. This Court belongs to the Lord Admiral of England, a high Officer that hath the Government of the King’s Navy, and the Hearing of all Causes relating to Merchants and Mariners. He takes Cognizance of the Death or Mayhem of any Man, committed in the great Ships riding in great Rivers, beneath the Bridges of the same next the Sea. Also he hath the Power to arrest Ships in great Streams, for the Use of the King, or his Wars, and in these Things this Court is concerned. There is a Judge of this Court, who must be a Civilian;

¹⁵ Andrew Marvell, ‘An Horatian Ode upon Cromwel’s Return from Ireland’ in *Miscellaneous poems by Andrew Marvell, Esq* (London, 1681), p. 115.

[...] The other Officers of this Court, are, a Register, and a Marshal, who carrieth a Silver Oar before the Judge.¹⁶

The Court of Admiralty had authority over crimes committed at sea and on navigable rivers. As a reflection of this alterity, both the ceremony and geography of pirate executions were significantly different from executions for other, terrestrial, crimes. In London those condemned for piracy were usually, though not always, held at the Marshalsea prison in Southwark rather than in Newgate. The few studies of the Marshalsea prison which exist concentrate on the Victorian era and the prison connections with Charles Dickens.¹⁷ But the Marshalsea was already decrepit by the sixteenth century – a dark, dank and crumbling prison, it was one of the main places of incarceration for Catholics and for political prisoners. Imprisoning pirates alongside religious and political dissidents in the Marshalsea thus tacitly categorised them as enemies of the state.¹⁸ Execution of those convicted of piracy was carried out with full ceremony to reflect the defeat of such heinous enemies.

On the day of execution, the condemned would be taken from the Marshalsea in an open cart accompanied by a chaplain and preceded by the Admiralty Marshal or his deputy carrying a silver oar, the symbol of his authority over maritime crimes. The oar mace, which remains in use, has been used by the Admiralty since at least the fourteenth century.¹⁹ W. Senior has suggested that this oar is based on the steering oar, the *gubernaculum* of the Roman ships, symbol of governance and attribute of Neptune and Fortuna, and thus through use of the oar, the Admiralty

¹⁶ John Strype, *A Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster* (London, 1720), Book 1, p. 154
<http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/strype/TransformServletpage=book1_154> [accessed 15 January 2016]

¹⁷ See Jerry White, *Mansions of Misery: A Biography of the Marshalsea Debtors' Prison* (London: Bodley Head, 2016) for a history of the Marshalsea Prison.

¹⁸ Robyn Adams, “‘The Service I am Here For’: William Herle in the Marshalsea Prison, 1571’ in *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 72:2 (2009), 217-238 (p. 221).

¹⁹ National Maritime Museum, *Oar Maces of the Admiralty* (HMSO, 1966), p. 6.

implicitly tied its authority to both the divine and the classical.²⁰ By parading through the streets of London with the condemned pirates led by the silver oar, the Admiralty sought to impose authority, both on the prisoners but also on the maritime communities they passed through, with a performance of power which echoed other civic processions such as the Lord Mayor's Show and royal pageants.

The ceremonial route to the site of execution passed through Southwark, over London Bridge and via the Tower of London before finally arriving at Execution Dock in Wapping, described by Stow in 1598 as 'the usuall place of execution for hanging of Pirats and sea Rovers'.²¹ The Turks Head Inn, which stood on Wapping High Street, was reputedly licensed to serve the condemned a last quart of ale to help them on their way. Southwark and Wapping were home to large populations of seafarers and those in associated professions and the parade of the condemned was intended as a warning to those who might profit from piracy or turn to piracy themselves; a show of the might of the Admiralty. However, passing through the principle seafaring communities in London ensured that many supporters, friends and family members would be present to hear their last words and, as we will show, participate in the event by offering assistance to the condemned or receiving gifts from them. As shown throughout this thesis, those deemed pirates often retained connections to family and community, and this remained so even to the gallows. Many others, unrelated to the condemned, attended purely as spectators. Julie Sanders has noted that public performances of all types on the Thames tended to

²⁰ Senior, W., 'The Mace of the Admiralty Court', *Mariner's Mirror*, 10:1 (1924), 49-52 (p. 52).

²¹ John Stow, *A Survey of London*, ed. Charles Lethbridge Kingsford (Oxford: Clarendon, 1908), 2 vols, II, chapter 59.

attract large audiences.²² The processions of convicted pirates attracted crowds of onlookers who lined the route, many hiring small boats to view the execution. As late as the eighteenth century, ships in the dock often had to be cleared to accommodate spectators, as reported in the *Middlesex Journal or Chronicle of Liberty* of 3 December 1771: ‘Orders have been given for clearing all the ships, boats &. From Execution Dock, on account of the Pirate’s execution to-morrow’.²³ The location of Execution Dock suggests that the gallows would also be in full view of sailors – and other pirates – berthed in ships at anchor in the Pool of London and at Wapping. The last words of the condemned pirates would be heard by a large audience, some of whom were likely to have been involved directly or indirectly in piracy themselves.

Wapping, the site of Execution Dock, was built on land reclaimed from the sea. Neither land nor sea, and perpetually flooding, it was a marshy, murky, liminal place which Stow referred to as ‘Wapping-in-the-Woze,’ woze meaning ooze.²⁴ This place, where the boundaries between earth, water, and air were so tenuous, was perhaps a fitting place for pirates to be launched into eternity. John Taylor, the Thames waterman and self-styled water-poet, described the gallows at Execution Dock as ‘a kinde of watrish Tree at Wapping’, assigning this particular gallows a different taxonomy to its landlocked cousins.²⁵ The location enabled the sentence of death to be carried out within the Lord High Admiral’s juridical realm as Thomas De Laune explained in 1681:

All Causes that happen between the High and Low-Water-Mark are determinable at Common-Law, because that place belongs then to the body of the Adjacent Country, but when it is Full Sea, the Admiral hath

²² Julie Sanders, *The Cultural Geography of Early Modern Drama 1620-1650*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), pp. 35-37.

²³ *Middlesex Journal or Chronicle of Liberty*, 3 December 1771.

²⁴ *The Copartnership Herald*, 2:22, December 1932.

²⁵ John Taylor, ‘The virtue of a Jaile, and necessitie of Hanging’, *All the Workes of John Taylor, the water-poet*, (1630), p. 134.

Jurisdiction there also, (so long as the Sea flows) over matters done between Low-Water Mark and the Land.²⁶

The gallows stood at the low water mark, a spatial representation of the limits of

High Court of Admiralty jurisdiction which covered the sea and foreshore only.

Perhaps mud retains a memory of what went before – the headquarters of the

Thames River Police has since its inception in 1798 stood almost on the location of

Execution Dock, continuing its centuries-old purpose as a disciplinary site.

Condemned pirates met their end here on the very threshold of land and sea. Their

portal to death lay on a shifting shore which was the boundary between land and sea,

separating legal things from those outside the law, where things pass from belonging

to someone to belonging to everyone – or to no-one.²⁷

The use of space at Execution Dock is strikingly depicted in the

anonymously authored 1639 pamphlet, *A True Relation, of the Lives and Deaths of*

the two most Famous English Pyrats, Purser, and Clinton, which relates the exploits

of the pirates Purser and Clinton and their subsequent execution which took place in

1583.²⁸ The pamphlet opens with three short chapters entitled ‘Of the power of

justice’; ‘Wherefore the Lawes were made’ and ‘All ill actions ought to be awarded’

before moving on to the story of Purser and Clinton.²⁹ The text is shaped to give the

impression that piracy should not be glorified, but must be punished within a fixed

legal tradition, which is here dated back to the Romans.³⁰ The pamphlet is illustrated

with a woodcut representing the hanging of Purser and Clinton at Execution Dock

²⁶ Thomas De Laune, *The present state of London: or, Memorials comprehending a full and succinct account of the ancient and modern state thereof*. (1681), p. 174.

²⁷ Daniel Heller-Roazen, *The Enemy of All: Piracy and the Law of Nations* (New York: Zone, 2009), p. 68.

²⁸ Anon., *A True Relation, of the Lives and Deaths of the two most Famous English Pyrats, Purser, and Clinton, in the reign of Queen Elizabeth* (1639).

²⁹ *A True Relation*, A3^r – A4^v.

³⁰ *A True Relation*, A5^r.

(Figure 8). This woodcut is remarkable in many respects, but is perhaps most noteworthy for its portrayal of the space of execution as a theatre. There is a very clear demarcation between the space of the audience on land and that of the gallows on the liminal shore, depicted here with the tide rising and the pirates half submerged. The execution appears to be taking place on a raised stage which is level with the heads of the audience. All except two of the crowd are faceless; we can only see the hats of the majority of the audience. Those whose faces can be seen direct the viewer towards the action, pointing at Purser and Clinton, so that the reader becomes part of the audience, complicit in the spectacle of punishment, receptive to the message of the actors. There is no Admiralty presence on this stage; Purser and Clinton are the actors. They overshadow every other figure in the scene, looming over the audience, towering over the waterman and his passengers taking in the show from their boat in the foreground, larger even than the ship far out in the Thames. Purser and Clinton, in this illustration, do not seem overly discomforted, finely dressed and inclining their heads gently towards each other, they dominate their stage as colossi. In this interpretation, the execution is likened to a play with the condemned as performers. As we will discuss later in this chapter, the execution of Purser and Clinton was indeed a highly dramatic occasion containing a strong performative element and audience participation, although perhaps less serene than shown in this woodcut.

The depiction of Execution Dock in this illustration reflects the ambiguity surrounding piracy and the choices of participants. As Claire Jowitt has astutely observed, the structure of the scaffold bears a strong resemblance to contemporary depictions of the Pillars of Hercules which signalled the boundaries of the known world and the limits of human knowledge. The ship positioned beyond the pillars

could then signify the desire to discover new worlds and expand the bounds of knowledge. Jowitt suggests two possible readings of this scene – as a celebration of the end of piracy or as a marking of the end of English territorial expansion.³¹ A further reading is that of the pirate as denizen of the liminal zone – Purser and Clinton stand on the boundary between land and sea, within the portal between knowledge and ignorance, lawful and illicit, life and death. From one perspective, clearly, pirates were hanged because of their failure to heed boundaries; they have traversed the lines drawn by law, by nations, and as we saw in the case of renegades in chapter three, even by God. And yet at their very end, they are still geographically placeless, occupying the limen. The choices which pirates made throughout their lives brought them, finally, to this dramatic end where they would have to make one last choice as to how they might engage with their deaths.

After execution, pirate corpses would be left hanging until three tides had washed over them. Those with family and friends could then be taken away by them for burial. Others would be either dismembered and their body parts nailed up along the coast, or their bodies would be covered in pitch – usually used to caulk ships and protect them from rotting – and hung in chains or a gibbet. The *Flying Post* or *The Post Master* reported a typical case in July 1700:

Yesterday Ten of the Condemn'd Pirates were carried from Newgate in 4 Carts to Execution-Dock, four of 'em being only in their Shirts and Breeches, two Gibbets were erected for their Execution, within the Flood-mark, they were attended by two Ministers, who prayed with them for near two Hours; after which six were tied upon one Gibbet, and four on the other; and we hear that six of the bodies being begg'd, were brought away by their Relations to be interr'd where they think fit, two other of their Bodies were buried at St. Catherines, and the other two were carried down in a Boat in order to be Hang'd in Chains; one of them at the half-way Tree between this City and

³¹ Claire Jowitt, *The Culture of Piracy 1580-1630: English Literature and Seaborne Crime* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), p. 41.

Graves-End and the other at the Hope; they were all Young Men and seem'd very Penitent.³²

It seems an appropriate fate for these ever-mobile seamen to be literally suspended in limbo, neither reaching the grave nor Gravesend, always in 'hope'. As the pirate Clinton remarks in Thomas Heywood and William Rowley's drama *Fortune by Land and Sea*: 'So the seas had been to us a glorious monument, where now the fates have cast us on the shelf to hang 'twixt air and water'.³³ Though this is a crude pun – 'twixt wind and water' was often used to refer to female genitals – it also describes a truth. At the end pirates were suspended between air and water, the two elements, in the form of wind and sea, which enabled the mobility of any mariner. Their bodies remained bound in chains or imprisoned in the gibbet until they rotted away – Captain Kidd's fate; his body hung in chains at Tilbury Point for years as a warning to other mariners who might consider choosing a career in piracy.³⁴ But even this final attempt by the state to capture and emplace pirates, these fluid and mobile creatures, was doomed to failure. Neither chains nor the gibbet cage would hold their bodies for ever; at the very last they would rot away, dissolve, and, borne away by the wind, would return to the sea.

As we have seen, from the state's point of view Execution Dock was a space where they sought to make an example of those felons who had defied their authority. The procession of the condemned before an audience of their peers preceded by the silver oar, symbol of the Admiralty, and the location of Execution Dock itself, the spatial embodiment of the Admiralty jurisdiction, together

³² *Flying Post or The Post Master*, (London, England), 11 July 1700 – 13 July 1700; Issue 808.

³³ Tho. Heywood and William Rowly, *Fortune by land and sea a tragi-comedy, as it was acted with great applause by the Queens servants* (London, 1655), V.1.

³⁴ Robert C. Ritchie, *Captain Kidd and the War against the Pirates*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 228.

constituted a theatre of punishment. It was only necessary for the actors – the condemned pirates – to play their part on the stage. If they would confess and repent the ritual would be complete and the authority of the state would be once more reasserted. If, as Lake and Questier suggested, the scaffold speech held the possibility of subversion, the condemned might take this final opportunity to choose how they framed their death.³⁵ We now look to the actions and words of those men about to be executed in order to discover how they chose to respond.

2. Penitent Pirates?

We have seen that the ceremony of pirate executions was performed by the state as a public enactment of power. Piracy was perceived as posing a threat to society, as explored in earlier chapters, and this brutal and overtly public performance of power over pirates can be read as a reaction to this perceived challenge. But how did the condemned pirates respond to this, and how was this articulated on the scaffold – the stage created for the culmination of this performance? As we discuss in the final section of this chapter, pirates were often portrayed as having scant belief in salvation. Were the penitent young men described in the *Flying Post* the exception rather than the rule, or did pirates finally come to genuinely repent their ways during their last minutes on the scaffold?

Captain James Harris of Bristol, who we first encountered in chapter two, was hanged at Execution Dock for piracy in December 1609. As we have seen, Harris's life of piracy began after he was captured and enslaved by corsairs, serving three years at the oars in the galleys of Tunis, and was subsequently discovered in captivity by Captain Richard Bishop, an Englishman, who paid a ransom of 300

³⁵ Lake and Questier, p. 69.

ducats for his release. However, Bishop, this seeming rescuer, was in partnership with the infamous John Ward and they had a keen eye for experienced mariners such as Harris who might be of use in their corsair fleet. Harris chose to turn pirate by agreeing to serve as a commander in Ward and Bishop's fleet, a decision which, as examined in chapter two, he described as a repayment of a debt of obligation. Whilst in the service of Ward and Bishop, Harris and his crew were captured by an English man-of-war off the coast of Ireland and returned for trial to England. It is to Harris's execution, as related in the 1609 pamphlet, *The Lives, Apprehensions, Arraignments, and Executions, of the 19. late Pyrates*, that we now turn.³⁶

After his capture in Ireland, Harris came to repent his piratical choices and described a devout time of reflection and prayer in prison before being taken to the scaffold: 'in my chamber in the houres of quiet alone, never have the Pensive-mans practise out of my hand, nor the penitent-mans practise out of my heart'.³⁷ This book, John Norden's *A pensive mans practise*, first published in 1584 was a popular book of prayers for various situations which was frequently reprinted with forty editions printed before 1625.³⁸ In prison during his time of repentance Harris came to see his previous desire for a life at sea as a form of madness, praying that if he 'might climbe toward heaven, I would now blesse the land (in my frensie I accurst) and exclaime against the seas, in my madnesse I blest'.³⁹ This identification of the

³⁶ Anon., *The liues, apprehensions, arraignments, and executions, of the 19. late pyrates Namely: Capt. Harris. Iennings. Longcastle. Downes. Haulsey. and their companies. As they were seuerally indited on St. Margrets Hill in Southwarke, on the 22. of December last, and executed the Fryday following* (London, 1609); Greg Bak, *Barbary Pirate: The Life and Crimes of John Ward* (Stroud: History Press, 2006), p.111.

³⁷ *Lives, Apprehensions*, B4^r.

³⁸ Frank Kitchen, 'Norden, John (c.1547–1625)', in *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/20250>> [accessed 29 Jan 2016]

³⁹ *Lives, Apprehensions*, A2^r.

sea with chaos, madness and temptation was a common theme in religious literature of the time, as employed by Stephen Batman in 1569:

The troubled seas signifie the temptations of mankinde, the shippe beyng rent, signifieth the dispersed churche of God, who beyng tossed to and fro by the force of temptations, and throwne out, yet they not fearyng the boysterous windes of adversitie, but thorough assured hope in Christ they flie to the rocke of endles felicitie, which is Christ.⁴⁰

For Batman, ‘the rocke’ or land, signifies Christ and all that is good – the sea its antithesis.

As explored in chapter two, Harris came from a Bristol family where his father a successful and well respected merchant. Repenting the choices he has made, Harris recalled his family and life in Bristol and describes the contrast between his own over-reaching ambition, which he describes as the cause of his downfall, and the life of his industrious brother who accompanied him to the scaffold and attended to all his affairs:

My brother coming along and bearing me company, who labouring like the carefull Bee in my businesse never idle, soliciting here and labouring there, and who had hopefull expectation and promises I should find mercy that had for my offences deserved none.⁴¹

The bee, synonymous with the land, is virtuous, careful and solicitous, labouring for the benefit of society. Unlike the ‘carefull Bee’ Harris had been infected by the madness of the seas, and perhaps that madness was still within him. Watery words poured from him as though they could not be contained. In repentance his language is saturated with water:

I may say I have sinned, and doe sing I repent, yet the lawe must have his power and the living give then verdict, my grieve is the spring which my sorrowe lets out, and Justice is the pipe which both take and can stop, while

⁴⁰ Stephen Batman, *A christall glasse of christian reformation wherein the godly maye beholde the coloured abuses used in this our present tyme* (London, 1569), N3^r.

⁴¹ *Lives, Apprehensions*, B4^r.

the world as the sponge that lickes up the superfluous is of power to besquerd forth as the multitude please.⁴²

Harris describes the waters of repentance as quite different to the wild chaotic sea.

These waters are pastoral, tame and domesticated. Grief is a gentle spring, justice a pipe which contains and regulates.

The control of water was both a topical and controversial issue at this time. In 1582 Peter Morris had been granted a 500-year lease to pipe water through the City, by means of a waterwheel at London Bridge. He was followed in 1593 by the establishment of the Broken Wharf Water Company, and in 1613 by Sir Hugh Myddleton's creation of the extensive New River Company which piped water into the homes of paying customers.⁴³ Frequent riots and disturbances broke out in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries concerning disruption to London's water supply caused by the over-consumption by wealthy households and businesses.⁴⁴ Many prominent figures spoke out against the commercial exploitation of water, including the clergyman, William Bell, who argued vigorously for the free use of water in his 1661 sermon preached in St Paul's to the Lord Mayor:

You must let judgement run down like water, and righteousness as a mighty stream, free as water from a spring, and not forc'd by importunity as water from a pump. And free as your Conduit water, that fills the earthen pitcher, as well as the silver goblet. And free as your Thames water that flows to all that will fetch it, and not as your New-River-water, that is imparted to none but those that will pay for it. And clear without mudding it by mixing self-interest. Publick men must be publick spirited, and the private is included in that.⁴⁵

⁴² *Lives, Apprehensions*, A2^r.

⁴³ Mark S.R. Jenner, 'From Conduit to Commercial Network? Water in London, 1500-1725', in *Londinopolis: Essays in the Cultural and Social History of Early Modern London*, ed. Paul Griffiths and Mark S.R. Jenner (Manchester University Press, 2000) 250-272 (pp. 256-257).

⁴⁴ Jenner, p. 254.

⁴⁵ William Bell, *City security stated in a sermon preached at St. Pauls August 11th, 1661, before the right Honourable the Lord Mayor* (1661), p. 22.

Harris, a proud Bristolian, may have intended his use of water as a relatively simple metaphor where, in contrast to the madness of the seas, fresh water was an element which could be domesticated and harnessed for the common good. But perhaps water is too fluid to be used safely as a metaphor – at the time he was writing his last words in the Marshalsea the water of London was a contested, unruly element, the subject of riot, the object of commodification.

Harris ultimately found solace in confession and repentance. There is a sense of unburdening throughout his confession and at the end he goes willingly to the gallows:

So from a free and unburthened heart, a patient mind and willing steps, I goe out of my chamber in the Marshalsies, the Friday morning being the two and twenty day of December to make my death-bed at Wapping.⁴⁶

This is the end of the account purported to be in Harris's own words, but the anonymous author of the pamphlet adds a description of Harris's death on the scaffold:

First he made his devotion and prayers with an affirmative tongue, threw away his hat as he went bouldly up the ladder, and being demanded of a stranger stood by him, If as yet he had heard no good newes from the King: he answered him, none Sir but from the King of Kings: and therefore with Peter I must resolve and say I looke for a newe heaven and a new earth, according to his promise wherein dwelleth righteousness: he sung (to a sillable) the one and twent Psalme, dyed a repentant sinner and a Christian, and by the diligence of his natural brother, was brought to the keeper of Newgates house in Newgate market, and from thence as a Christian was buried in Christe-Church.⁴⁷

Harris makes his choice and goes 'bouldly' to the scaffold. The throwing away of his hat seems an unencumbrance, a freeing from worldly trappings, a lightening of the soul. When asked if he has had news of a pardon from the King, Harris makes light of the question, saying he has only had news from the 'King of Kings'. He is hanged

⁴⁶ *Lives, Apprehensions*, C1^v.

⁴⁷ *Lives, Apprehensions*, C1^v.

after singing Psalm 21, praising God and his gifts. Harris's brother remains with him to the end and ensures his Christian burial.

The dedication to *A pensive mans practise*, the text which Harris read so avidly, refers to the Roman playwright Terence, 'who sayth (truely) that Omnes deteriores sumus licentia, All men are the worsse for too much liberty'.⁴⁸ Harris himself seems ultimately to have shared this view that his life at sea and as a pirate was one of 'too much liberty' – a life less worthy than that of his 'carefull Bee' brother. Yet the life of piracy for Harris was not one of liberty but of bondage, and represented none of the freedom and opportunities for self-determination which attracted other pirates. Throughout his life, he was a commodity, bought and sold – by the Barbary pirates, by Captain Bishop, even his supporters, the people of Bristol, could put a price on him by collecting eight hundred pounds in an attempt to purchase his pardon.⁴⁹ In death, Harris seeks 'a newe heaven and a new earth', perhaps one where he would be free. For some the life of piracy was a life of liberty, but for Harris it had been just another form of slavery where he could exert little influence over his own destiny. He could see no prospect of freedom during his lifetime, only the afterlife held a hope of liberty. Yet in a certain sense, Harris chose to subvert the ritual of execution by viewing it as a means of escape. Although he repented of his actions he went to the scaffold not in fear but with the anticipation of the liberty of his soul. Others were less eager to embrace their fate and offered a more worldly response to their imminent deaths. We will now turn to consider accounts of pirates who chose to shape their execution in less orthodox ways.

⁴⁸ John Norden, *A pensive mans practise* (London, 1584), iii (V).

⁴⁹ *The lives, apprehensions*, A3r.

Thomas Walton (known as Purser) and Clinton Atkinson (known as Clinton) were hanged alongside seven other men condemned for piracy on 30 August 1583. Their deaths attracted considerable attention in print, both at the time of execution and for years afterwards. Holinshed, in his 1586 *Chronicles*, recounted Purser and Clinton's journey to the gallows and their hanging at Execution Dock:

Walton as he went to the gallowes rent his venecian breeches of crimsin taffata, and distributed the same péecemeale, to such his old acquaintance as stood néere about him: but Atkinson had before giuen his murrie veluet dublet with great gold buttons, and the like coloured veluet venecians laid with great gold lace (apparell too sumptuous for sea rouers) which he had worne at the seas, & wherein he was brought vp prisoner from Corfe castell in the Ile of Porbeke to London, vnto such his fréends as pleased him, before he went to Wapping.⁵⁰

Although brief, this account provides some vivid details: the clothes which Purser and Clinton are described as wearing are sumptuous, expensive, and showy in the extreme and would certainly have made an impression to onlookers. With their 'great gold buttons' and velvet venetian breeches inlaid with gold lace they were splendid and noteworthy enough to be recorded. But Holinshed does more than just describe their clothing, he judges it to be 'apparell too sumptuous for sea rouers' and, in stating this, signals something to his audience about the kind of men Purser and Clinton were and how their lives and deaths should be read.

In addition to Holinshed's account this chapter considers the body of popular printed texts about Purser and Clinton, which offers a wealth of information about how the choice to turn pirate was perceived and reflected on at the point of death, and reads them alongside the extensive official records of the early 1580s in which their piracies, apprehension, and trials are well documented. Examination of the lives

⁵⁰ Raphael Holinshed, *The Third volume of Chronicles, beginning at duke William the Norman, commonlie called the Conqueror; and descending by degrees of yeeres to all the kings and queenes of England in their orderlie successions* (1586), pp. 1354-1355.

of Purser and Clinton as captured in official documents reveals much of their choices, actions and networks, and provides valuable context for their subsequent appearance in ballads and drama. Purser and Clinton appeared in a number of popular publications which detailed some of their piratical exploits, but dwelt chiefly on their execution. Following the 1583 pamphlet *Clinton, Purser & Arnold, to their countreyemen wheresoeuer* and Holinshed's 1586 report, they appeared some twenty years after their deaths in the 1605 edition of Stow's *The Annales of England*, and again in Thomas Heywood and William Rowley's play *Fortune by Land and Sea* written around 1607. In 1639, the two part pamphlet, *A True Relation of the Lives and Deaths of the two most Famous English Pyrats, Purser, and Clinton*, containing the woodcut of their execution considered earlier (Figure 8), was published relating their exploits.⁵¹ Some of this material, in particular *Fortune by Land and Sea*, has received attention from a number of critics. In examining these texts in relation to pirate lives – and deaths – what follows both takes a different route from, and builds on, significant critical work. Thus, Barbara Fuchs discusses the relationship between piracy and England's mercantile expansion and argues that *Fortune by Land and Sea* depicts the piracy of Purser and Clinton as the shadow of state authority and legitimate trading, whereas Jowitt's extensive and influential examination of the afterlives of these figures reveals that Purser and Clinton were used as a critique of contemporary regimes.⁵² Laurie Ellinghausen explores representations of Purser and

⁵¹ Anon., *A True Relation of the Lives and Deaths of the two most Famous English Pyrats, Purser, and Clinton; who lived in the Reigne of Queene Elizabeth* (1639). Two further publications regarding Purser and Clinton are noted in the Stationers Register but are no longer extant: *Clinton's Lamentacyon* (1583) and *The Confessions of 9 Rovers, Clinton and Purser beinge chief* (1586), see Edward Arber, *A Transcript of the registers of the Company of Stationers of London, 1550-1640 A.D.* (Gloucester, Massachusetts: P. Smith, 1967), 5 vols, II, p. 197, 210b.

⁵² Barbara Fuchs, 'Faithless Empires: Pirates, Renegadoes, and the English Nation', *ELH* 67:1 (2000), 45-69, pp. 52-57; Jowitt, *The Culture of Piracy*, pp. 17-45.

Clinton in *Fortune by Land and Sea* and popular ballads as the intersection of community and economy in the figure of the renegade.⁵³ Building on their work, this consideration of such official documents as state papers and court records concerning Purser and Clinton further develops important themes of piratical social mobility and connectivity which have emerged throughout this thesis. We now turn our focus on these records before returning to evaluate how they are represented in popular print and, in particular, in Holinshed's observations.

Purser and Clinton are always linked together in popular texts, sometimes accompanied by William Arnewood (known as Arnold) who was sentenced to hang alongside them. Although they knew each other and occasionally sailed in the same vessel or fleet, they were not an inseparable team but rather part of a loose confederacy of pirates based at the Isle of Purbeck on the Dorset coast. Ideally situated for access to the Channel and shipping trading between London and the Mediterranean, this area became notorious for piracy and the trade of looted goods. Clinton, originally a merchant from London, Purser, a mariner from Northwich in Cheshire, and Arnold, a gentleman from Fordingbridge in Hampshire, converged there along with others seeking to make their fortune through plunder.⁵⁴ In 1582 an official in the Isle of Purbeck lamented the influx of pirates: 'the common infamy of this poor island and me [...] the place of their repair is here where in truth they are my masters'.⁵⁵ Pirates held this mastery over Admiralty officials in the Isle of

⁵³ Laurie Ellinghausen, *Pirates, Traitors and Apostates: Renegade Identities in Early Modern English Writing* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), pp. 73-98.

⁵⁴ C. L'Estrange Ewen, 'The Pirates of Purbeck, With Particular Reference to Thomas Walton alias Purser, Clinton Atkinson alias Smith, and William Arnewood alias Arnold', *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society*, 71 (1949), 88-109 (pp. 88-89); N.A.M. Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain, 660-1649* (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 344.

⁵⁵ William Page, *The Victoria History of the County of Dorset*, 2 vols (London: A. Constable and Company Ltd., 1908), II, p. 201.

Purbeck through the patronage of powerful friends such as Sir Richard Rogers who, in 1577, was fined for his involvement in piracy and ordered to return stolen goods.⁵⁶

Such networks of support were apparent when, in 1580, Clinton Atkinson was apprehended as part of a crew which had seized a vessel and returned to England to sell the cargo. Clinton was held in Exeter gaol and whilst there found favour with the Mayor, Symon Knight, who attempted to obtain a pardon for Clinton.⁵⁷ The request for a pardon was supported by the Company of Spanish Merchants, victims of Clinton's actions. When Clinton subsequently escaped from gaol an Admiralty official, Gilbert Peppitt, complained that he had done so 'not without the consent or great negligence of the Mayor and gaoler, the Mayor having given him two very favourable testimonials'.⁵⁸ In November 1580 a warrant was issued for the arrest of Clinton at the behest of Robert Giles, a Dartmouth merchant, who had bought cochineal from Clinton which was subsequently seized by the Admiralty as plunder.⁵⁹ Clinton was captured again and, this time, held in the Marshalsea prison in London where, the following March, John Spencer and Andrew Payne stood bail of one hundred pounds for him, an act they perhaps regretted when Clinton failed to appear before the court at the allotted time and escaped once again.⁶⁰ These incidents reveal the dense networks Clinton built amongst merchants,

⁵⁶ P.W. Hasler, 'Rogers, Richard (c. 1527-1605), of Bryanston, Dorset', in *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1558-1603* ed. by P. W. Hasler (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1981); Rodger, p. 344.

⁵⁷ L'Estrange Ewen, 'The Pirates of Purbeck', p. 90.

⁵⁸ 'Queen Elizabeth – Volume 144: November 1580', in *CSPD: Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth, 1547-80* ed. by Robert Lemon (London: HMSO, 1856), pp. 685-689. <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/domestic/edw-eliz/1547-80/pp685-689>> [accessed 12 March 2021]

⁵⁹ L'Estrange Ewen, 'The Pirates of Purbeck', p. 90.

⁶⁰ L'Estrange Ewen, 'The Pirates of Purbeck', p. 93.

gentry and nobility, many of whom, as we will see, profited significantly from his piracy.

Those seeking to gain from their relationship with Clinton and other pirates did so with full awareness of the nature of their crimes, which often involved violence and torture. In 1581 Purser arrived on the Dorset coast in the *Little Diamond* and by June 1582 both he and Arnold were sailing alongside Clinton as part of the pirate fleet based on the Isle of Purbeck.⁶¹ Their activities intensified in both frequency and violence, with around forty ships brought as prizes into the area in the early 1580s.⁶² Their exploits came to the attention of Elizabeth I when, in April 1583, she received a letter from King James VI of Scotland in which he complained about the torture of the crew of the *Grace of God*, a Dundee ship, seized by Clinton and others at Dungeness in July 1582. The King condemned the pirates' 'cruel and strange usage' of the crew who were set 'naked on the shore' and then tortured 'with towis thrawin about their heidis, quhat be licht luntis in betwix thair fingers' – ropes placed around their heads and lit fuses placed between their fingers – to force them to reveal where money was hidden. As a result of this abuse some of the crew had lost their sight, and others fingers and thumbs, rendering them unable to work, 'to their utter wreck and undoing'.⁶³ In August 1582, Purser and Arnold were implicated in the torture of William Kinge, an Admiralty informer. Kinge testified that they 'tied him to the mayne yarde and ducked him into the bottom of the sea' and that he believed he would have been killed if not for the intervention of

⁶¹ L'Estrange Ewen, 'The Pirates of Purbeck', pp. 94-95.

⁶² Rodger, p. 344.

⁶³ 'Elizabeth: April 1583', in *Calendar of State Papers, Scotland: Volume 6, 1581-83*, ed. by William K. Boyd (London, 1910), pp. 356-434 <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/scotland/vol6/pp356-434>> [accessed 13 March 2021]

‘gentlemen who then were on borde’.⁶⁴ Notwithstanding the brutality of the pirates, the gentlemen may have been on board to socialise as well as trade: in 1582, the Mayor of Corfe Castle reported that Thomas Ayres, William Parsons and William Chalcott were observed playing dice with pirates.⁶⁵

Such social diversions were, however, incidental, and the main business of the pirates ashore was to dispose of their loot. Some of the stolen goods, as Clinton confessed, were offered as bribes to Admiralty officials. In 1582, Clinton arrived at Studland with a French vessel and a cargo of salt, and ‘there left the same upon a price of lx^{li} with Mr John Uvedale and Mr Thomas Aiers, deputies for Mr Hawley [...] to have their goodwill and favor in that Islande’.⁶⁶ Mr Hawley was Francis Hawley, the Deputy Vice Admiral, acting on behalf of Sir Christopher Hatton.⁶⁷

Clinton reported meeting with Hawley:

To whome he made knowne what commodities he had brought in, and at the said Vice-Admirall’s request made promise that he sholde have the first sight of his goodes before he made sale thereof.⁶⁸

Clinton gave Hawley the first choice of the goods he brought into port in return for which, presumably, Hawley would turn a blind eye to his illegal activities. This was not an exclusive relationship: Hawley is recorded as accepting a gift of wine from a cargo looted by Arnold, and Purser reported that Hawley’s servant, George Fox, came aboard his ship every day to see what would be given to him.⁶⁹ Admiralty

⁶⁴ William Kinge, 17 June 1583 quoted in L’Estrange Ewen, ‘The Pirates of Purbeck’, p. 95.

⁶⁵ L’Estrange Ewen, ‘The Pirates of Purbeck’, p. 101.

⁶⁶ Confession of Clinton Atkinson, 10 August 1583, quoted in L’Estrange Ewen, ‘The Pirates of Purbeck’, p. 98.

⁶⁷ Hasler, ‘Hawley, Francis (d. 1594), of Corfe Castle, Dorset’, in *The History of Parliament*.

⁶⁸ Confession of Clinton Atkinson, 10 August 1583, quoted in L’Estrange Ewen, ‘The Pirates of Purbeck’, p. 101.

⁶⁹ Confession of Thomas Walton, 10 August 1583, quoted in L’Estrange Ewen, ‘The Pirates of Purbeck’, pp. 101-102.

records show trade with the pirates as rife from the very top of Purbeck society to the lowest taverns, with goods being secreted locally and then distributed all over the country. In common with pirates discussed in previous chapters, far from being shunned for their crimes Purser, Clinton and Arnold, retained strong ties to littoral communities. Clinton was married, and was with his wife when he narrowly evaded capture in a tavern in Erith, and also maintained a close relationship with his brother, John.⁷⁰ Despite their brutality, pirates were not just tolerated but encouraged and enabled by the community of Purbeck which, in turn, flourished as a result of this association.

Returning now to Holinshed's report of Purser and Clinton's execution, we see that, in context, the description of their clothing as 'too sumptuous for sea rovers' contains an implicit criticism of their aspiration and, perhaps, their association with gentry. Holinshed's suggestion that these lavish clothes were the pirates' workaday clothes which they wore at sea was not only unlikely, due to both the cost and the impracticality of working at sea in heavy velvet and satin, but also untrue. Sea-going clothing held at the Museum of London suggests that early modern sailors would have worn a linen tunic and breeches, both cheaper and more practical than velvet venetians.⁷¹ Clinton confessed that he had bought his outfit from a Dorset gentlemen for five pounds, the equivalent of more than a hundred days' labour for a skilled tradesman, or over a thousand pounds in current terms.⁷² Clothing signified status in early modern England: as Polonius advised Laertes in *Hamlet*: 'the apparel oft

⁷⁰ L'Estrange Ewen, 'The Pirates of Purbeck', p. 103.

⁷¹ <<http://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/83032.html>> [accessed 13 March 2015]

⁷² Confession of Clinton Atkinson, 10 August 1583, quoted in L'Estrange Ewen, 'The Pirates of Purbeck', p.107; <<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/>> [accessed 13 May 2020]

proclaims the man'.⁷³ A person was judged by their clothes, and sumptuary statutes existed which categorised the fabrics and materials each rank of person was permitted to wear, and sought to maintain the status of clothing as an indicator of rank and wealth. As Holinshed describes them, Purser and Clinton were flagrantly in breach of such rules. Increasing mercantile wealth meant that, as never before, gentry, merchants – and successful criminals – had the means to afford the same clothing as the nobility. 'Now there is such a confuse mingle mangle of apparell' complained Phillip Stubbes in his 1583 work, *The anatomie of abuse*:

And such preposterous excesse thereof, as every one is permitted to flaunt it out, in what apparel he lust himself, or can get by any kind of meanes. So that it is verie hard to knowe, who is noble, who is worshipfull, who is a gentleman, who is not; for you shall have those, which are neither of the nobylitie, gentilitie, nor yeomanry, no nor yet any Magistrat or Officer in the common welth, go daylie in silks, velvets, satens, damasks, taffeties and such like, notwithstanding that they be both base by byrthe, meane by estate, & servyle by calling. This is a great confusion and a general disorder, God be mercyfull unto us.⁷⁴

This threat of confusion and disorder had moved Robert Greene to pen *A quip for an vpstart courtier: or, A quaint dispute betvveen veluet breeches and cloth-breeches* (1592), in which he lamented the failure of the lower orders to know their sartorial place and urged labourers and yeomen not to forsake their cloth breeches for those aspirational breeches of velvet. By flaunting it out in their expensive finery Purser and Clinton may have chosen to emulate the Queen's favourites, the famously well-dressed state-sponsored pirates Drake and Raleigh. They were carefully constructing

⁷³ *Hamlet*, I.3.72., in *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works* ed. by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: OUP, 1988; repr. 1998), p. 659.

⁷⁴ Phillip Stubbes, *The anatomie of abuses contayning a discouerie, or briefe summarie of such notable vices and imperfections, as now raigne in many Christian countreyes of the worlde: but (especiallie) in a verie famous ilande called Ailgna: together, with most fearefull examples of Gods iudgements, executed vpon the wicked for the same, aswell in Ailgna of late, as in other places, elsewhere. Verie godly, to be read of all true Christians, euerie where: but most needefull, to be regarded in Englande. Made dialogue-wise, by Phillip Stubbes. Seene and allowed, according to order.* (1583), C2^v.

their own image, fashioning how the public would perceive and remember them, but were also challenging the existing order, creating the confusion and disorder of which Stubbes despaired. As David Kuchta comments: 'By purchasing the fine apparel of their superiors, then, wealthy upstarts were threatening the semiotic stability between fabric and rank, between material signifier and social signified'.⁷⁵ Purser and Clinton's trade alliance with the gentry and nobility of Dorset threatened long-established social hierarchies. They embodied this threat by clothing themselves in wealth during their last hours at the point when their choices had most obviously and, for them, catastrophically failed.

The clothing which Purser and Clinton wore for their final public appearance was chosen with the intention of causing a spectacle – a measure of their financial success and visual demonstration that in death, as in life, they would pay no heed to boundaries. The distribution of their fine clothing to their supporters was a further part of the scaffold drama. Holinshed reported that Clinton had travelled from Corfe Castle to London in his finery, and would have made quite an impression throughout the journey and on his entrance to the capital. He reportedly gave away his clothes prior his approach to the scaffold. As Jones and Stallybrass note, clothing was often given as a memento to friends and relatives, or was used as currency in gaol.⁷⁶ Clinton's brother, John Atkinson, described wearing clothing ('the girkin and breches which he nowe wearethe') made from gifts of pirated cotton received from Clinton.⁷⁷ The record of Clinton's burial at St. Botolph's, Aldgate, states that he

⁷⁵ David Kuchta, *The Three-Piece Suit and Modern Masculinity: England 1550-1850*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 21.

⁷⁶ Ann Roslind Jones, Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p. 22.

⁷⁷ Deposition of John Atkinson, 27 November 1582, quoted in L'Estrange Ewen, 'The Pirates of Purbeck', p.103.

previously ‘sold haberdashe’ so he might have had a feel for the value of fine materials.⁷⁸ Purser, in an overtly theatrical performance, tore off his crimson taffeta breeches on his approach to the scaffold and gave pieces of his clothing to his friends and supporters. The act of tearing off these expensive clothes in public would make a memorable enough spectacle in itself, but the gifted clothes themselves were then transformed, acting as a memento for the recipient to remember the giver. The clothing becomes memory materialised – when the recipient wore this clothing he or she would be displaying a relationship with Purser. Such clothing would also carry with it something of the giver and the events of his life and death.⁷⁹

By choosing to frame their deaths with this performance of distributing mementos of themselves, Purser and Clinton reclaimed for a brief time the stage of the scaffold. Their performance was later reflected back in Heywood and Rowley’s dramatized staging of these events in *Fortune by Land and Sea*. In this version, Purser requests the permission of the hangman to distribute their clothes:

Hear you Mr. Sherif, you see we wear good clothes, they are payd for, and our own, then give us leave our own amongst our friends to distribute: There’s, Sir, for you.⁸⁰

He stresses that the clothes are of good quality and that they own them outright – the clothes were not bought on credit – thus emphasising his probity. Finally, with ‘There’s, Sir, for you’ he makes a gift of clothing to the hangman, thus including him amongst their friends. He urges the hangman to ‘wear them for our sakes, and remember us’.⁸¹ This immediately changes the attitude of the hangman towards them: he addresses them as ‘your worships’. As Jowitt suggests, the hangman, who

⁷⁸ Thomas Rogers Forbes, *Chronicle from Aldgate: Life and death in Shakespeare’s London* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 161. My thanks to Rebecca Tomlin for pointing this out to me.

⁷⁹ Jones and Stallybrass, p. 3.a

⁸⁰ *Fortune by Land and Sea*, V.1.

⁸¹ *Fortune by Land and Sea*, V.1.

should bring the restoration of order, has now been compromised by the acceptance of this valuable gift and could be viewed as supporting anti-establishment behaviour as the clothes retain something of the identity of their former owners.⁸² This scene also reflects the ease with which the actual Purser and Clinton, along with their many other pirate comrades, were able for a time at least to buy the complicity of corrupt officialdom and achieve mastery of the Isle of Purbeck.

The dominance of the pirates in Dorset and was, however, a temporary state of affairs. In June 1583, two ships, the *Bark Talbot* and the *Unica* were commissioned to apprehend the Purbeck pirate fleet.⁸³ Clinton was captured and initially held in Corfe Castle where, he claimed, Hawley extorted twenty pounds from him on the understanding that he would be tried on the Isle of Purbeck, and a further hundred pounds for the promise of a pardon.⁸⁴ The pirates' hold on the official structures of Purbeck was not robust enough to withstand intervention from London. Forty men were captured and removed to the Marshalsea in London where they interrogated by Admiralty examiners attempting to discover networks of receivership. Purser and Clinton refused to reveal details of their contacts and, with two others, were sent to the Tower to be tortured on the rack.⁸⁵ On 22 August 1583, four days before the trial began, ten pirates, including Purser, Clinton and Arnold, were listed for execution. Clinton then offered eight hundred pounds for a pardon, which he proposed should be recovered from his debtors. Lord Burghley refused the request on the basis that those who owed Clinton money would be likely to deny it

⁸² Jowitt, *The Culture of Piracy*, pp. 33-34.

⁸³ 'Queen Elizabeth – Volume 161: June 1583', in *CSPD: Elizabeth, 1581-90* ed. by Robert Lemon (London: HMSO, 1865), pp. 111-114.

⁸⁴ Confession of Clinton Atkinson, 10 August 1583, quoted in L'Estrange Ewen, 'The Pirates of Purbeck', pp. 105-106.

⁸⁵ L'Estrange Ewen, 'The Pirates of Purbeck', p. 105.

and the debt would therefore be unrecoverable.⁸⁶ On 30 August, defeated by the Admiralty, they made their final journey to Execution Dock. Although Purser and Clinton had set out in their sumptuous clothing and, for a time, claimed the space of execution as their own, at the very end they were stripped of their finery and met their deaths as common criminals. Their erstwhile comrade Arnold, a gentleman, escaped with a pardon. State authority and social order were restored.

The contrast between the penitent gentleman, Arnold, and the roguish Purser and Clinton is apparent in the 1583 pamphlet, *Clinton, Purser & Arnold, to their countreyemen wheresoeuer*.⁸⁷ Contemporary with their execution, the pamphlet depicts the pirates pleading their case for a lesser punishment. Purser describes his actions as defending England from ‘forren foes’, and speculates that his execution would place the country at risk from the French.⁸⁸ Purser’s speech, though ostensibly respectful of the monarchy and the state, carries a subtext of doubt as to whether order can be said to have been reasserted if, in doing so, it leaves the country under threat. His dying words leave a sense of ambiguity hanging in the air. Clinton, too, paints himself as devoted to the service of his country:

Who more then Clinton scowrd in every coast
who holpe the helpelesse more, (say what they shall)
Then Clinton did that came at every call.⁸⁹

The aside, ‘say what they shall’, hints at the possibility of a competing narrative but otherwise the speech depicts his actions as noble and altruistic, culminating in an extraordinary lament:

⁸⁶ L’Estrange Ewen, ‘The Pirates of Purbeck’, p.106.

⁸⁷ Anon., *Clinton, Purser & Arnold, to their countreyemen wheresoeuer Wherein is described by their own hands their vnfeigned penitence for their offences past: their patience in welcoming their death, & their duetiful minds towardes her most excellent Maiestie*. (London, 1583).

⁸⁸ *Clinton, Purser & Arnold*, A2^r. For further discussion of this point see Jowitt, *The Culture of Piracy*, pp. 26-27.

⁸⁹ *Clinton, Purser & Arnold*, B1^v.

Poore I that sought to pleasure each opprest,
 poore I that sought to cure anothers paine
 Poore I that watcht when others tooke their rest,
 poore I that did my counties cause maintaine
 poore I that sav'd, must now my selfe be slaine.
 Poore I that wisht my Queene and Countries welth
 Am now suprest, but hope upholdes my helth.⁹⁰

This verse focusses the reader on the self of Clinton, the 'poore I', whilst simultaneously trying to convince them of his selflessness. Of the three pirates

Arnold appears the most repentant:

But we abused our Princes league and law,
 Through which in deed we did deserve to dye
 For if we live not under soveraigne awe
 But senselesse seeke our own securitie
 The publike weale would perish presently.
 As for my selfe as bitter as it is,
 Welcome sweet Death for I have done amis.⁹¹

Arnold's speech describes the choice to turn pirate as a breach of the natural order and acknowledges the need to submit to 'soveraigne awe' or risk the breakdown of authority. He implores other men to learn by his example, and the speech with its elements of confession and repentance conforms to archetype of the good death.

Arnold is cast as the ingénue of the piece, an innocent gentleman brought to ruin by the treacherous actions of others. He was pardoned and returned to sea, but the credibility of his repentance was marred by recidivism – he immediately resumed his career of piracy.⁹² In this telling of the execution, Purser and Clinton are equivocal at best, recasting their deeds as public service perhaps in a vain attempt to obtain a pardon. The upstart pirates are hanged, the gentleman is freed and order is reimposed.

⁹⁰ *Clinton, Purser & Arnold*, B1^v.

⁹¹ *Clinton, Purser & Arnold*, A4^r.

⁹² C. L'Estrange-Ewen, 'Organised Piracy Around England in the Sixteenth Century', *Mariner's Mirror*, 35.1 (1949), pp. 29-42 (p. 42).

The execution of the nine pirates restored Admiralty authority in the Isle of Purbeck but at the cost of the economy of the area which never fully recovered.⁹³ The pirates were betrayed by Hawley and others who had freely traded with them and profited from their piracy. Purser and Clinton set out to meet their deaths clothed in their expensive finery, perhaps making a statement that, for a brief time at least, their choice to turn pirate had brought them success and riches and ‘mastery’ of the Isle of Purbeck. Although the threat to authority posed by the upstart pirates was defeated by the stark fact of their deaths, the donning of ‘apparell too sumptuous for sea rousers’ by Purser and Clinton represented the prospect of advancement effected by their own choices. The posthumous retention of remnants of their clothing by friends and family ensured that the memory of such possibilities would continue to circulate long after their deaths.

Many years later, in *Street Robberies Consider’d*, Daniel Defoe described that it had become so commonplace for criminals to dress finely going to their executions that it was almost an incitement to emulation:

One thing that increases the Number of our Town Thieves, is to see the Criminals go to Execution as neat and trim, as if they were going to a Wedding. G—d D—mn, says one Rogue to another, Jack Such-a-one made a clever Figure when he went to Tyburn the other Day, and died bravely, hard, like a Cock.⁹⁴

The condemned is, like a bridegroom, seemingly pure and ready to be wedded to death – many of the condemned went to their execution dressed in white wedding clothes – but is also full of bravado and vigour, ‘hard, like a Cock’.⁹⁵ The heady combination of criminality, glamour and death had more than a whiff of sexuality

⁹³ L’Estrange Ewen, ‘The Pirates of Purbeck’, p. 105.

⁹⁴ Daniel Defoe, *Street Robberies Consider’d* (London, 1728), p.52.

⁹⁵ Hay, *Albion’s Fatal Tree*, p. 112.

about it which Swift also captures in his ballad, ‘Clever Tom Clinch going to be hanged’:

As clever Tom Clinch, while the Rabble was bawling
Rode stately through Holbourn to die in his Calling
He stopt at the George for a Bottle of Sack
And promis’d to pay for it when he’d come back.
His Waistcoat and Stockings, and Breeches were white,
His cap had a new Cherry Ribbon to ty’t.
Maids to the Doors and the Balconies ran,
And said, lack-a-day! he’s a proper young Man.
But, as from the Windows the Ladies he spy’d,
Like a Beau in the Box, he bow’d low on each side.⁹⁶

Tom Clinch seems the archetypal romanticised criminal rogue, an elegant rascal with a roving eye. He is unrepentant, kicks the hangman in the stomach and eschews organised religion with his dying words: ‘My Conscience is clear and my Spirits are calm | And thus I go off without Pray’r-Book or Psalm’. Despite his spurning of the church he is an attractive figure to the onlookers, heroic rather than vilified. The ballad seems to reflect the sentiment that although these men are no ‘saints’ purified by the act of confession on the scaffold they were popular heroes, ‘proof of a strength that no power had succeeded in bending’.⁹⁷ Though not as overtly subversive as Clinch, Purser and Clinton with their extravagant clothes and flamboyant gestures were undoubtedly his precursors enabling the cultural construction of pirates as theatrical rogues, in sharp contrast to the realities of the ordinary working men whose lives we examined in earlier chapters.

Defiance on the scaffold was one way in which pirates might find themselves immortalised in literature, but conversely the words of the penitent pirate would also be preserved in the popular print of the time. A felon who repented at the gallows was usually seen as reinforcing the authority of church and state and yet, as in the

⁹⁶ *The Poems of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Harold Williams (Oxford: OUP, 1958), p. 400.

⁹⁷ *Discipline and Punish*, p. 67.

case of James Harris, repentance, formulaic though it often appeared, did not entirely preclude agency. The state sought to control the space of execution through ritual and ceremony, whereas the pirates employed devices such as gesture, clothing, and speech – or silence – as means of occupying the site and exerting agency in a situation where they seemed to be entirely at the mercy of the state. In a moment which appeared to be defined by the absence of choice, men made choices. The space of the scaffold could be used to create a performance which told more of the life of the condemned than the mere details of his crime, illuminating what their hopes for their life had been, how they viewed the decisions they had made, and how they wished to be remembered.

3. ‘A Deaths Head and an Hour Glass’

Pirates were, then, able to exert some agency on the scaffold, choosing how they would respond to their imminent deaths. As measures against piracy became increasingly repressive during the late seventeenth century, executions became more frequent. By the first years of the eighteenth century it has been estimated that one in ten pirates were executed.⁹⁸ Choosing to turn pirate in such circumstances meant accepting the likelihood of an early death. As a response, pirates began to develop symbols and behaviours which overtly referenced this perceived connection with death. In texts, they were frequently linked, either by themselves or others, to the figure of death or even to the devil. A more detailed examination of this wider culture of piracy may help us to situate the choices of some pirates on the scaffold.

⁹⁸ Marcus Rediker, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (London: Verso, 2004), p. 163.

Pirates could not expect to live a long life. Death from disease, in battle, or by accident was an occupational hazard of any early modern mariner, and the hangman was an additional threat to those engaged in piracy. The period between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries saw a dramatic reduction in the number of felons executed under English jurisdiction. While a quarter of those accused of felony during Elizabeth's reign were likely to be executed, this ratio had diminished to one in ten by the reign of Anne due to the introduction of alternative penalties including transportation to the colonies.⁹⁹ Conversely, the number of those executed for piracy increased from the relative leniency of the Elizabethan years to the early years of the eighteenth century when one in ten pirates would meet his end at the gallows. In the decade between 1716 and 1726 a total of 418 men were known to have been executed for the crime of piracy, though it is likely the actual figure was much higher.¹⁰⁰ In his *General history of the pyrates*, Charles Johnson describes the pirate Bartholomew Roberts openly acknowledging the likely trajectory of his life with his infamous quip: 'a merry Life and a short one, shall be my Motto'.¹⁰¹

Perhaps the most brazen assertion of death as the pirates' constant companion is that most universally recognisable of pirate symbols, the Jolly Roger. The 'Banner of King Death', as it was also known, was first noted in 1700, flown on a vessel captained by the French pirate Emmanuel Wynn. In pursuit of Wynn, Captain John

⁹⁹ J.A. Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England 1550-1750* (Harlow: Longman, 1984, 1999), pp. 90-100.

¹⁰⁰ Rediker, *Villains of All Nations*, p. 163.

¹⁰¹ Charles Johnson, *A general history of the pyrates, from their first rise and settlement in the island of Providence, to the present time* (1724), p. 273. Much of our information about piracy in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries comes from this text. Charles Johnson is thought to be a pseudonym, and for some years was assumed to be Daniel Defoe, although this has now been disproved by the work of Arne Bialuschewski. See Arne Bialuschewski, 'Daniel Defoe, Nathaniel Mist, and the General History of the Pyrates' in *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 98.1 (2004), 21-38.

Cranby described the pirate flag as ‘a sable ensigne with cross bones, a deaths head and an hour glass’.¹⁰² Prior to this date, pirates had sailed under national flags – that of their own or another country – or under a black or red flag. A black flag indicated their intention to engage in battle, a red flag signified that they would give no quarter.¹⁰³ When they chose symbols to represent themselves they looked to their own deaths – the symbol of the skull and crossbones was frequently used in ships’ logs as an indicator of the death of a man at sea. The hourglass, skull and crossbones, and skeleton could commonly be seen throughout the early modern period carved in churchyards, onto gravestones and illustrating bills of mortality (Figure 9).¹⁰⁴ Although each pirate crew designed their own flag it was these symbols, alluding to the brevity of life and the imminence of death, to which they almost invariably turned. Johnson described the numerous flags that Bartholomew Roberts was flying on his arrival at Whydah:

They came to *Whydah* with a *St. George’s* Ensign, a black Silk Flag flying at their Mizen-Peek, and a Jack and Pendant of the same: the Flag had a Death in it, with an Hour-Glass in one Hand, and cross Bones in the other, a Dart by it, and underneath a Heart dropping three Drops of Blood. The Jack had a Man pourtray’d in it, with a flaming Sword in his Hand, and standing on two Skulls.¹⁰⁵

Roberts was flying the flag of St. George to denote his nationality and the black flag to show that his ship was ready to engage in combat. He also flew a flag showing a skeleton carrying an hourglass and crossbones, and an arrow with a heart dripping blood. Yet another flag, the jack, was decorated with a man standing on two skulls and carrying a flaming sword. Far from subtle, the symbolism speaks of death,

¹⁰² National Archives, London, ADM 1/5261/186 fols.186-202.

¹⁰³ David Cordingly, *Life Among the Pirates: The Romance and the Reality* (London: Warner Books, 1995), pp. 138-142.

¹⁰⁴ Rediker, *Villains of All Nations*, p. 167.

¹⁰⁵ Johnson, p. 259.

violence and the brevity of life. The flying of these overt depictions of mortality was an announcement of Roberts' choice to embrace death.

The skull and crossbones used by pirates can be read as referencing the *vanitas* frequently found in early modern art, where a symbol – most commonly a skull – would be placed amongst worldly goods to serve as a reminder of the transience of life. Perhaps the most familiar example of the early modern *vanitas* is to be found in Hans Holbein the Younger's *The Ambassadors* (1533), where the anamorphic skull in the foreground of the painting foreshadows the mortality of the successful and wealthy young men, Jean de Dinteville and Georges de Selve, portrayed at the height of their success.¹⁰⁶ The flag of the pirate Bartholomew Roberts, shown on his ship *Royal Fortune* off the coast of Guinea seems to express a similar sentiment (Figure 10). The flag shows a pirate, perhaps Roberts himself, and a skeleton holding a spear. Between them they hold an hour glass. The skeleton is death personified and the sands of time are running out, but for whom? The pirates may be accepting the inevitability of their own deaths or warning their enemies that death, embodied by the pirates themselves, is at hand and time is short. The pirate appears to be the equal of Death; each has a hand on the hourglass. Death may be showing the pirate that his time on earth is brief, but perhaps this design indicates the pirates are in league with Death – equal partners in his grisly business. The symbolism is ambiguous; the meaning in the eye of the beholder, but, again, it is indicative that a choice has been made to embrace fate. The *vanitas* is a sombre warning against the futility of earthly life, an artistic rendering of the biblical verse *Ecclesiastes* 1:2 'Vanity of vanities; all is vanity'. Yet pirates embraced earthly

¹⁰⁶ Hans Holbein the Younger, *The Ambassadors* (1533), The National Gallery, London.

pleasures – acutely aware of the brevity of life they sought to make the most of the short time they had. As such, Death for the pirates perhaps more accurately reflects the tradition of *danse macabre* rather than that of the more sombre *vanitas*. Images of the *danse macabre* appeared throughout Europe from the fifteenth century and were illustrations of the inevitable yet unpredictable arrival of death to high and low alike.¹⁰⁷ Death, depicted as a skeleton, is shown arriving in the middle of various daily activities to carry off the hapless victim, demonstrating the necessity of preparedness for death. The *danse macabre* was often satirical with the figure of Death mocking and irreverent, chastising the living for their greed and injustice. Clergy, judges, the bourgeoisie and other establishment figures were particular targets for the satire of *danse macabre*. Death was shown as the dispenser of justice, the true equalizer. In 1526 Holbein created his popular series of drawings *Dance of Death*, works of social satire which were turned into woodcuts and subsequently published as a book in 1538. It is easy to see how this Death, with his sense of fun and mockery of the establishment, might appeal to the pirates' sense of humour and injustice. In flying the Jolly Roger, particularly during one of the frequent periods of violent suppression of piracy, the pirates seem to be both defying their pursuers while claiming Death as one of their own.

The use of the Jolly Roger suggests a rejection of Christian values and a deeper, more overtly blasphemous, profanity than mere defiance of death. Some pirates perhaps accepted their inevitable death and judgement and, being reasonably certain that their souls would belong to the devil, decided to throw their lot in with him during the life that remained to them. Edward Teach, commonly known as

¹⁰⁷ For more information on *Danse Macabre* see Natalie Zemon Davis 'Holbein's Pictures of Death and the Reformation at Lyons', *Studies in the Renaissance*, 3 (1956), 97-130.

Blackbeard, certainly relished his association with the devil. Johnson described him trying to literally recreate Hell on board ship:

For being one Day at Sea, and a little flushed with Drink:- Come, says he, let us make a Hell of [our] own, and try how long we can bear it: accordingly he, with two or three others, went down into the Hold, and closing up all the Hatches, filled several Pots full of Brimstone, and other combustibile Matter, and set it on Fire, and so continued until they were almost suffocated, when some of the Men cry'd out for Air; at length he opened the Hatches, not a little pleased that he held out the longest.¹⁰⁸

After Blackbeard was killed and his surviving crew captured, Johnson recalled the crew members telling a diabolical tale of a mysterious shipmate:

They found out, that they had a Man on board more than their Crew; such a one was seen several Days amongst them, sometimes below, and sometimes upon Deck, yet no Man in the Ship could give an Account of who he was, or from whence he came; but that he disappeared a little before they were cast away in their great Ship, but it seems, they verily believed it was the Devil.¹⁰⁹

These stories of pirates' devilish antics may be nothing more than sensationalism on the part of Johnson, though he himself expressed scepticism while presenting himself as impartial reporter, noting that the story of the devil as shipmate 'may appear a little incredible; however we think it will not be fair to omit it, since we had it from their own Mouths'.¹¹⁰ Such stories may however indicate a real defiance held by pirates against church and state. The black flag became intrinsic to the pirates' sense of identity. The *Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer* of 19 October 1723 reported the execution of twenty-six pirates at Rhode Island with their flag flying overhead:

Their Black Flag, under which they had committed so may Piracies and Murthers, was affixed to one Corner of the Gallows; It had in it the Portraiture of Death, with an Hour-Glass in one Hand, and a Dart in the other striking into a Heart; and 3 drops of Blood delineated as falling from it. This

¹⁰⁸ Johnson, p. 88.

¹⁰⁹ Johnson, p. 89.

¹¹⁰ Johnson, p. 89.

Flag they call'd Old Roger and used to say, They would live and dye under it.¹¹¹

Here, the flag is explicitly named 'Old Roger' making a direct link between pirates and the devil, and between the flag and the 'Piracies and Murthers' which had been committed under it. The flag, with its diabolic associations, is viewed as a motivational force, a catalyst for the bloody actions carried out by the pirates under its auspices. Yet Old Roger also presides over the pirates' execution. Everyone must dance with death – even those in league with him. When close to capture, Bartholomew Roberts' crew threw their colours overboard 'that they might not rise in Judgement, nor be display'd in Triumph over them'.¹¹² That pirates were careful to protect their colours, anxious that they should not be captured by the state and turned against them as part of the spectacle of execution indicates that they thought about how they would frame their deaths long before they were even captured.

To be captured and brought to shore for judgement was abhorrent to many pirates. This was not solely due to the likelihood of their execution if captured – some individual pirates, and some entire crews, killed themselves, or threatened to, rather than be captured alive. In 1720 Samuel Cary and his ship the *Samuel* were captured off the coast of Newfoundland by Bartholomew Roberts and his crew. Cary subsequently reported hearing the pirates declare that:

They would not go to Hope point in the River of Thames to be hung up in Gibbets a Sundrying as Kidd and Bradish's Company did, for if it should chance that they should be Attacked by any Superiour power or force, which they could not master, they would immediately put fire with one of their Pistols to their Powder and all go merrily to hell together!¹¹³

¹¹¹ *Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer* (London, England), Saturday, 19 October, 1723

¹¹² Johnson, p. 286.

¹¹³ *Boston News-Letter*, 22 August 1720.

‘Hope point’ was one of the many names given by pirates to Execution Dock, the usual place of execution for pirates in London. Although they professed to be unafraid of death no pirate wanted to share the fate of Captain Kidd. After Roberts was killed and his crew were on the point of capture they attempted to blow up themselves with the ship:

Half a dozen of the most Desperate, when they saw all Hopes fled, had drawn themselves round what powder they had left in the Steerage, and fired a Pistol into it, but it was too small a quantity to effect any Thing more, than burning them in a frightful manner.¹¹⁴

There are many other reports of pirates killing themselves, either individually or *en masse*, to evade capture.¹¹⁵ Others considered capture shameful. The pirate Anne Bonny reportedly berated her lover and co-pirate ‘Calico’ Jack Rackham for being captured rather than fighting to the death. On being granted a final visit before he was due to be hanged on November 18 1720, Bonny is alleged to have said ‘that she was sorry to see him there, but if he had fought like a Man, he need not have been hang’d like a dog’.¹¹⁶ The fear of capture, and the loss of agency which that would entail, was often far greater than fear of death. Having choice in the manner of their death, the final self-defining moment, removed from them was an anathema after a life of freedom on the seas. That they should be used as propaganda by the state was abhorrent. Death was a kinder fate than the tyranny of the state which would be brought to bear against those who were captured and brought to justice.

¹¹⁴ Johnson, p. 268.

¹¹⁵ Rediker, *Villains of All Nations*, pp.150-151.

¹¹⁶ Johnson, p. 173.

Conclusion

Almost one hundred and fifty years and an ocean separate the executions of Purser and Clinton from that of William Fly. Nonetheless they are connected; in an obvious way by their occupation, but also in the way they are described in written texts as using the gallows as performative space. In the texts examined, Purser and Clinton, James Harris, and William Fly, all use the scaffold as a space to articulate and enact their own stories in ways which were often radically different to the official versions of their lives and deaths. Purser and Clinton made their final journey to Execution Dock during the reign of Elizabeth I, an era in which piracy was frequently accepted, and often sanctioned, by the Crown. By the time of Fly's execution in 1726, piracy had undergone periods of increasingly brutal suppression. The intervening years saw the development of a culture of piracy that in its attitude to death held up a distorting mirror to wider political, religious and cultural attitudes.

Purser and Clinton were condemned to hang for piracy by an administration whose officials had collaborated with them. They created a spectacle in their finery which contravened sumptuary legislation and imitated that of the ennobled privateers such as Raleigh, yet with an added twist of insolence. It was clear to all that they should not have been wearing such clothes – ‘apparell too sumptuous for sea rousers’.¹¹⁷ There is an ambiguity about their reported behaviour which reflects the status of piracy at the Elizabethan court. The speech attributed to Purser and Clinton in popular texts was often respectful of the Queen – Clinton ‘*wisht my Queene and Countries welth*’ – and stressed their past and possible future benefit to the country.¹¹⁸ Such attributed speeches alluded to the ambivalence with which piracy

¹¹⁷ Holinshed, pp. 1354-1355.

¹¹⁸ *To their countrymen whersoever*, B1^v.

was treated and the real, yet for Purser and Clinton unrealised, possibility of last-minute pardons.

Unlike Purser and Clinton, who demonstrated scant penitence, James Harris went to the gallows a repentant man. His time in prison, as described in his narrative, and his reported behaviour at the gallows followed all of the required conventions for a good death. In 1609, the year when James I issued *A Proclamation against Pirates*, which stated explicitly that anyone committing piracy would ‘suffer death, with confiscation of land and goods’, a pardon was increasingly unlikely.¹¹⁹ When asked at the gallows if he was expecting a pardon, Harris answered, insouciantly, in the negative. He was seemingly unconcerned at his impending death as for him it represented a release from a life of commodification. In a world of developing mercantilism and increasingly international trade, the mariner too became an object to be bought and sold. In life Harris was objectified, and only by embracing death could he exert agency. In death he became himself, free from servitude and bondage. Harris ‘went bouldly up the ladder’ as for him the scaffold was a portal to another, better, world.

By the time of William Fly’s death, mariners were a brutalised workforce. The majority of those turning pirate worked as merchant seamen or served in the Royal Navy where conditions were harsh, rations were meagre and rotten, pay was infrequent, and discipline was violent – often murderous.¹²⁰ More pirates were being tried with the establishment of Vice-Admiralty courts for this purpose in the colonies. Between 1700 and 1721, successive Acts were passed with the aim of more effectively suppressing piracy. Merchantmen were financially rewarded for

¹¹⁹ *A Proclamation against Pirates*, 1609.

¹²⁰ Rediker, *Villains of All Nations*, p.43.

defending themselves against piracy, and also for initiating aggression against pirate vessels.¹²¹ Despite the war on piracy, many more seamen, including Fly, turned pirate due to the brutal conditions on the merchant and naval vessels. Fly and his crew had mutinied and killed their vicious captain, Captain Green, before turning pirate. This act of mutiny, the seizing of his own destiny, seems to have caused Fly to call the existing order to account and to demonstrate his contempt publicly at the scaffold. Unlike Purser and Clinton courting favour, Fly criticised his superiors.

Unlike James Harris with his penitent practice, Fly refused to confess:

I shan't own myself Guilty of any Murder.- Our Captain and his Mate used us Barbarously. We poor Men can't have Justice done us. There is nothing said to our Commanders, let them ever so much abuse us and use us like Dogs. But the poor sailors-.¹²²

Fly also refused to admit murder, stating that the fatal blow to Captain Green was made by his co-accused, Mitchel.¹²³ Yet more than this, Fly inferred that this was not murder but a killing justified by the cruelty of Green. Daniel E. Williams has commented of Fly:

Unable to preserve his life, he concentrated on preserving his independence of mind by denying the significance of death and damnation. Using contempt as a weapon, he fought back against the forces that had condemned him by reveling in irreverence.¹²⁴

Building on this, it can be argued that Fly was positing an alternative justice, one which is for the 'poor Men'. Fly was unrepentant and irreverent as he had no other weapons with which to expose the hypocrisy of a system which would hang him for murder whilst the viciousness of captains went unchecked. Though he was unable to

¹²¹ Peter T. Leeson, 'Rationality, Pirates, and the Law: A Retrospective', *American University Law Review*, 59 (2010), 1219-1230, (pp.1222-1224).

¹²² Mather, *The Vial Poured out*, p.21.

¹²³ Mather, *The Vial Poured Out*, p.8.

¹²⁴ Daniel E. Williams, 'Puritans and Pirates: A Confrontation between Cotton Mather and William Fly in 1726', *Early American Literature*, 22:3 (1987), 233-251 (p.234).

realise it, he could imagine another way of being, a different way of living. The only way left for him to express this was a performance of resistance at the scaffold which Cotton Mather recorded, thus unintentionally memorialising Fly.

Between the execution of Purser and Clinton and that of William Fly, the context of piracy had changed. The often tacit approval of piracy during the Elizabethan era was gradually succeeded by increasingly severe punishment in the hope of extirpating the threat to the network of maritime trade. The political landscape had also changed – England experienced a revolution and the execution of a king. As legislation and policing increasingly restricted the space of the seas, a tension was created which brought previously disparate pirate identities together into a culture which, under the banner of King Death, embraced the inevitability of the gallows. The three pirate executions discussed here in detail all demonstrate a determination on the part of the condemned to perform and memorialise something of themselves, sometimes adhering to convention, sometimes breaking with it. But they also tell us something wider about the times these men lived and died in. The legal machinery which brought Purser, Clinton, Harris and Fly to their identical ends was unable to prevent them asserting their individuality and making their own choices in their last moments. While strutting their final hour on the scaffold stage, each of these men played to audiences – both those immediately present and those more distant who would only know of their end through print.

Conclusion

This thesis began by asking what it meant to choose to be a pirate in early modern England and how such a decision was perceived. Responding to this question, the thesis has focussed on pivotal moments of life choice, ranging from the initial decision to become a seaman through to final agency at execution and, in taking such an approach, it has analysed a wider range of texts in a more discursive context than is usual and from an earlier period. This has shown that maritime mobility contained within it the possibility of enabling men to shape their own lives, resulting in something that we might describe as social mobility. Moving outwards from decisive moments in the lives of individual seamen, often described in their own words, this study has traced what the textual responses to their choices reveal about the aspirations and fears provoked by the potential of a seafaring life to make men mobile not only in location, but in terms of attitude, law and custom. Making connections across a wide variety of texts, including seamen's own writing, legal texts, sermons, popular pamphlets and drama, has allowed us to pinpoint in each of the four chapters a perceived challenge to authority – parental, legal, religious and state – posed by the decisive actions of seamen.

From the outset the thesis identified the importance of narrative in seamen's lives. Chapter one saw the youthful Edward Barlow, Edward Coxere, and Richard Norwood inspired by seamen's stories of riches and adventure to defy their parents and pursue a career at sea. In his journal Norwood described this choice as aspirational, based on a 'hope for better things' and this study has shown that the critical decisions made in the lives under discussion – to go to sea, to turn pirate, to become a renegade – were made in the hope of a better life (Norwood, p.45). We examined how Norwood and other poor seamen began to write their own lives, each

giving prominence to the account of their decision to go to sea, indicating the centrality of this event to their lives. We saw how these young men began to assert agency for the first time in their lives, breaking with apprenticeships and family to choose a life which they believed would be better. Reading their journals in tandem with other texts has allowed more than a study of representation alone in bringing to the fore issues such as filial disobedience as well as the better-known issues such as the unruliness of sailors. Considering these texts together, the mistrust with which seafarers were widely viewed and the tensions caused within families by the determination to choose such a life became evident. Closer analysis revealed that although the decisions of these men placed considerable stress on the relationships with their families the relationships recovered and endured, inverting the characterisation of the seaman as suffering from a disconnectedness.¹ We saw in subsequent chapters how these networks of family and friends were retained and remained supportive when seamen turned to piracy or became renegades, and continued to the gallows.

The strength of these support networks in the face of criminalisation highlighted the equivocation with which piracy was regarded. The analysis of legal texts alongside accounts of participants in piracy in chapter two allowed us to explore piracy in law and practice to reveal the mutability of the definition of the term. Examination of accounts by those such as Coxere and Harris, who participated in robbery at sea, revealed that piracy was viewed as one component of the complex income of seamen, complementing and extending their legitimate trade. We showed

¹ A.L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England, 1560-1640* (London: Methuen, 1985); Matthew Dimmock, *New Turkes: Dramatizing Islam and the Ottomans in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 100; Patricia Fumerton, *Unsettled: the culture of mobility and the working poor in early modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

that many viewed plunder as a possible route to riches and status, hoping to emulate the heroic, piratical and ennobled Elizabethan seadogs. We also saw that men rarely defined themselves as ‘pirate’, and the term was mostly applied as a label to others. Analysis of legal texts showed how the boundaries between privateering and piracy, lawful and unlawful robbery at sea, were indistinct, and that seamen often engaged with the law, in court or by obtaining licenses, to legitimise their activities. Analysis of legal texts revealed the attempt to define piracy in law in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as part of a wider debate about jurisdiction over the seas, fuelling perceptions of the sea as a lawless space and pirates as outside the law. We have shown, however, that the official narrative criminalising piracy failed to dominate the debate. The broad familial and social networks of pirates meant that piracy was enmeshed within the fabric of many communities with many supporting, trading and profiting from their plunder. Seamen often made a conscious choice to turn to piracy but rather than doing so from an overtly radical ideology they did so for reasons of pragmatism and financial gain.

The potential of the agile maritime workforce to transgress became more overtly apparent when, in chapter three, we turned to examine the choices and perceptions of those who became renegades. We saw that contact with Muslim societies structured around merit rather than birth offered new opportunities for wealth and social advancement to skilled men and that substantial numbers of seamen apostatised. For many this was a positive choice resulting in increased wealth and status. This study’s consideration of sermons and ecclesiastical texts showed that although the Church made an outward display of condemnation towards apostates, they were readily readmitted to the Church on return to England. Reading these texts alongside other accounts of those who ‘turned Turk’ revealed more of the bonds which prevailed between renegades and their families. As the evidence shows,

rather than being outcast, those overseas sent remittances to their families at home whenever possible, while those who subsequently returned to England were welcomed back into their communities and supported by family and friends. On the other hand, it is clear that popular texts treated renegades with ambivalence. Many vilified renegades for their apostasy, and in doing so demonstrate concerns about social and religious stability; others, in particular popular ballads, cast the socially mobile figure of the renegade as heroic and successful. This study of the renegade, in particular the case study of John Ward, reveals a cultural construction of the demonized figure of the renegade which was at odds with how they were treated in practice. At the same time it shows us clearly that to more fully understand piracy we cannot consider external representation alone, but need to set life-writing and closer associates' descriptions alongside documents of exclusion.

This thesis has examined how men chose to make their lives at sea and the cultural responses to their choices. Our investigation of pirate executions in chapter four considered responses to the consequences of those choices. Throughout this study we have shown the space of the sea was textually constructed as an alternate realm, outside of the law of any nation, and was perceived as a space where poor seamen had agency, making choices that could potentially challenge kings. At pirate executions, in the liminal space of Execution Dock, the realm of the land met that of the sea. Through consideration of a broad range of texts, this thesis has read the official narrative against the experiential in each chapter enabling us to show how seamen navigated the space between the two in practice. At Execution Dock in particular, where faced with the full force of the state we might expect to find the demise of choice, we instead find the condemned as agents exerting choice over how their own lives and deaths might be articulated. This study's reading of Execution Dock has shown it to have a textual duality whereby it was simultaneously occupied

by two theatres of execution, that of the state and that of the pirates, each performing their own narratives.

The duality of Execution Dock encapsulates the paradoxical perceptions of seamen who turned pirate or renegade. We have shown they were viewed as agents of trade, skilled men integral to England's mercantile expansion, yet were simultaneously perceived as a threat to trade. Mobile in the unregulated space of the sea and beyond control of the state, such men were the first to have sustained contact with other societies and witness the possibility of other ways of living. The choices they made based on this new knowledge became the focus of England's expectations and fears of increased geographical and social mobility. Seamen, pirates and renegades were, as we have seen, frequently cast in official and popular texts as individualist, disconnected from society, the enemy of all mankind. This study's investigation of a wealth of textual material, including the writings of seamen and pirates, has shown this to be a false construction and that despite their mobility they remained connected through their networks to England thus rendering them more of a threat as their example encouraged others.

There are many studies which investigate early modern piracy and this thesis contributes to this body of work in a number of ways. In its use of literary techniques it has built an understanding of how writing articulated the perceptions of piracy, the sea and mobility and, in doing so, it has recovered something of the experiential narrative of seamen, pirates and renegades. The attention this study has paid to seamen's writing has uncovered the dense social networks which sustained them, and has opened up the possibility of a more detailed study of the written lives of ordinary seamen.

Above all, this thesis has been interested in textual representations of self-determination and has revealed the early modern sea to be a space of both

geographical and social mobility containing potentially transformative possibilities. The sea offered choices and opportunities to men where previously there had been only the certainties of continuity. This study has shown that although maritime plunder was interwoven into the social fabric of communities many texts sought to assert an official narrative by defining participants as other in terming them 'pirate' or 'renegade'. This thesis has aimed to recover other voices, of those ordinary seamen who made seemingly extraordinary choices, and in doing so convey the polyphony of responses to social change during this period.

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Image Appendix

**Piracy, the Sea, and Self-Determination in
Early Modern English Writing**



Figure 1. 'Edward Barlow leaving home', from Edward Barlow's *Journal* (1657), London, National Maritime Museum, MS JOD/4: E7894. © NMM



Figure 2. Miniature of a Whale and a Sailing Boat in *Bestiary* (13th century), London, British Library, Harley MS 4751 fol.69r. © BL

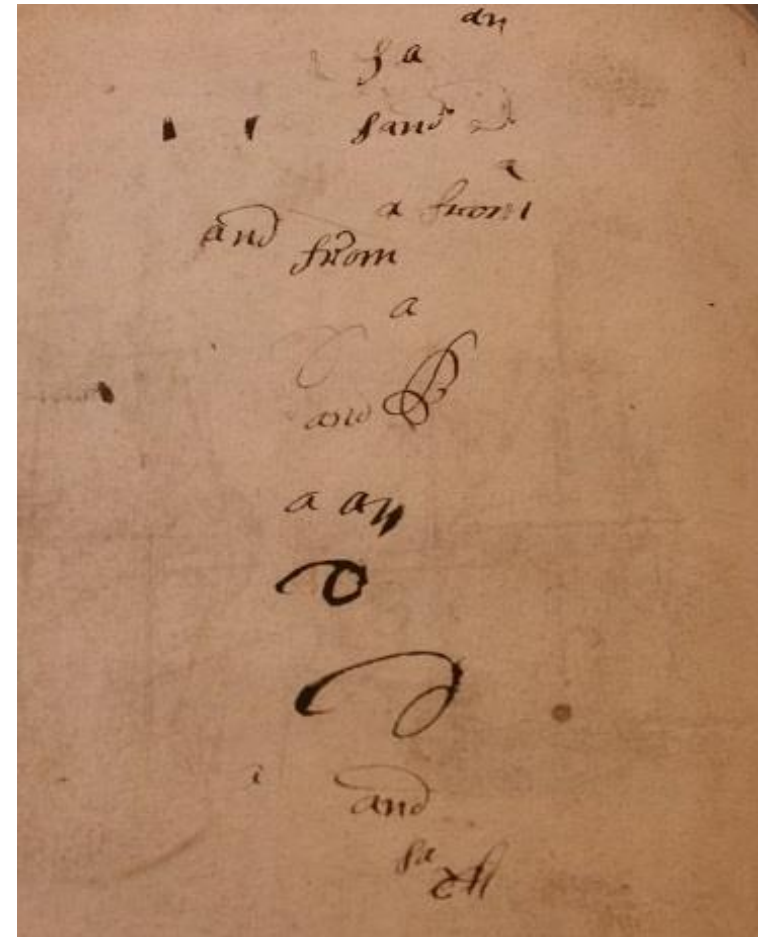


Figure 3. Detail of Edward Coxere's handwriting practice, London, Library of the Society of Friends, MS VOL S 281 fol.10v. © Library of the Society of Friends (photograph by the author)

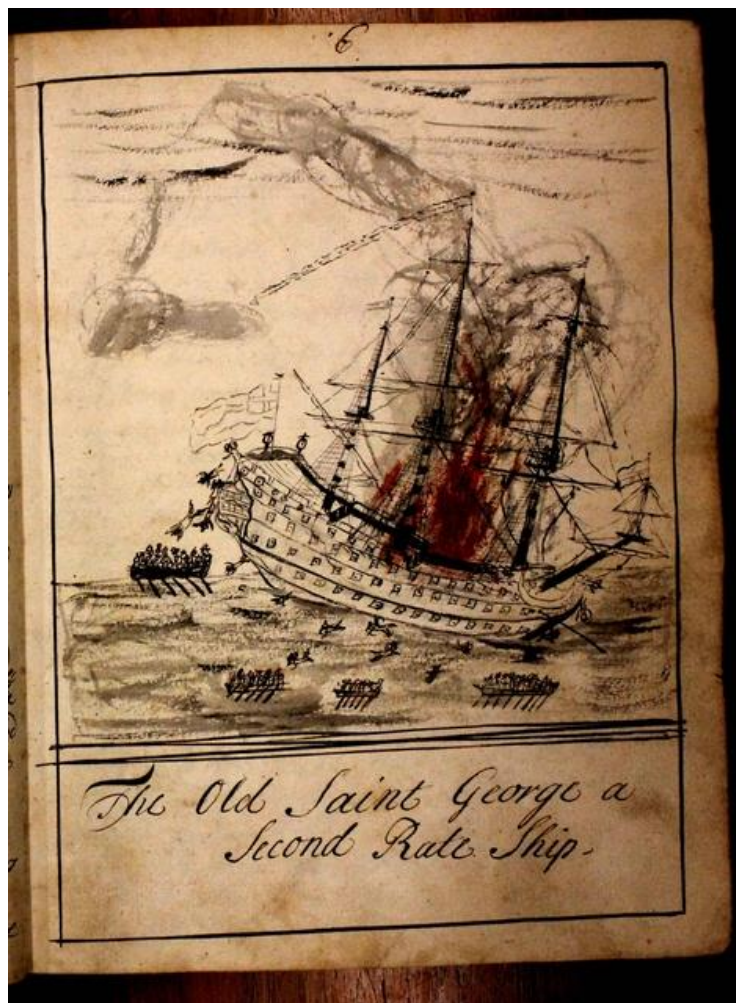


Figure 4. 'Explosion in the *Saint George*', London, Library of the Society of Friends, MS VOL S 281 fol. 6r. © Library of the Society of Friends (photograph by the author)

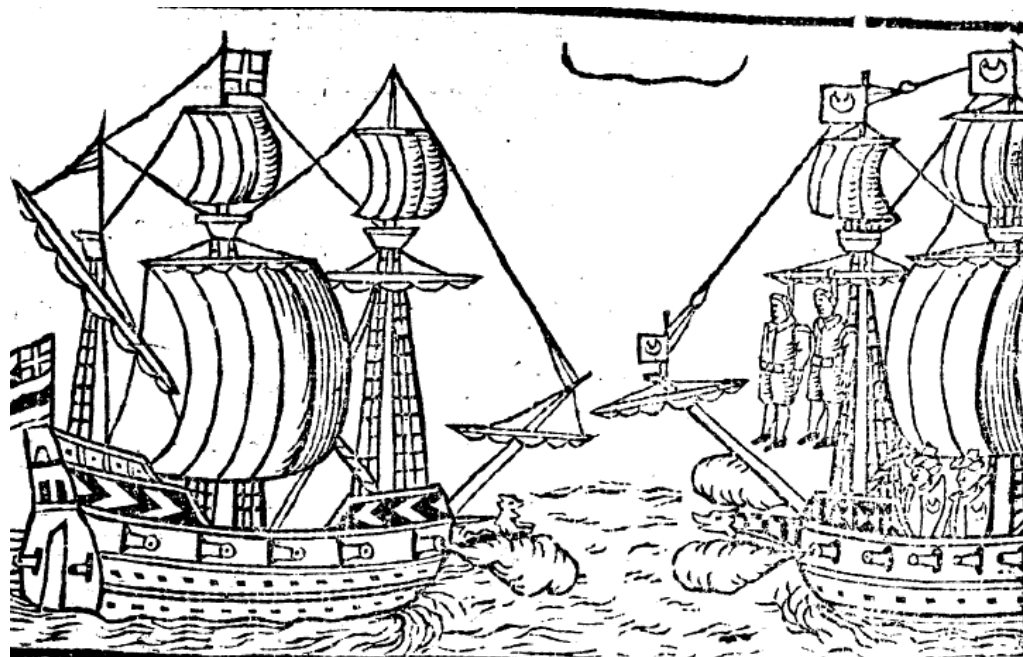


Figure 5. Detail from Anon. *Ward and Danseker, Two notorious Pyrates* (London, 1609), A1r. © BL

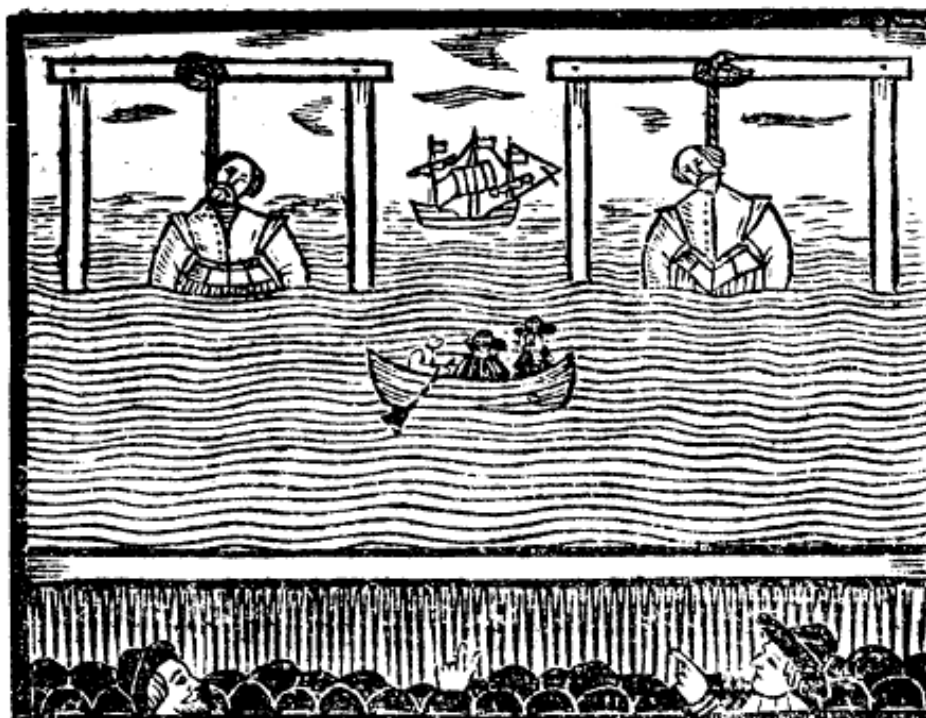


Figure 8. Detail from Anon, *A True Relation, of the Lives and Deaths of the two most Famous English Pyrats, Purser, and Clinton, in the reign of Queen Elizabeth* (1639), C5r. © BL



Figure 9. Skull gatepost finial at St Nicholas Church, Deptford.
(Photographer E. Lyon)

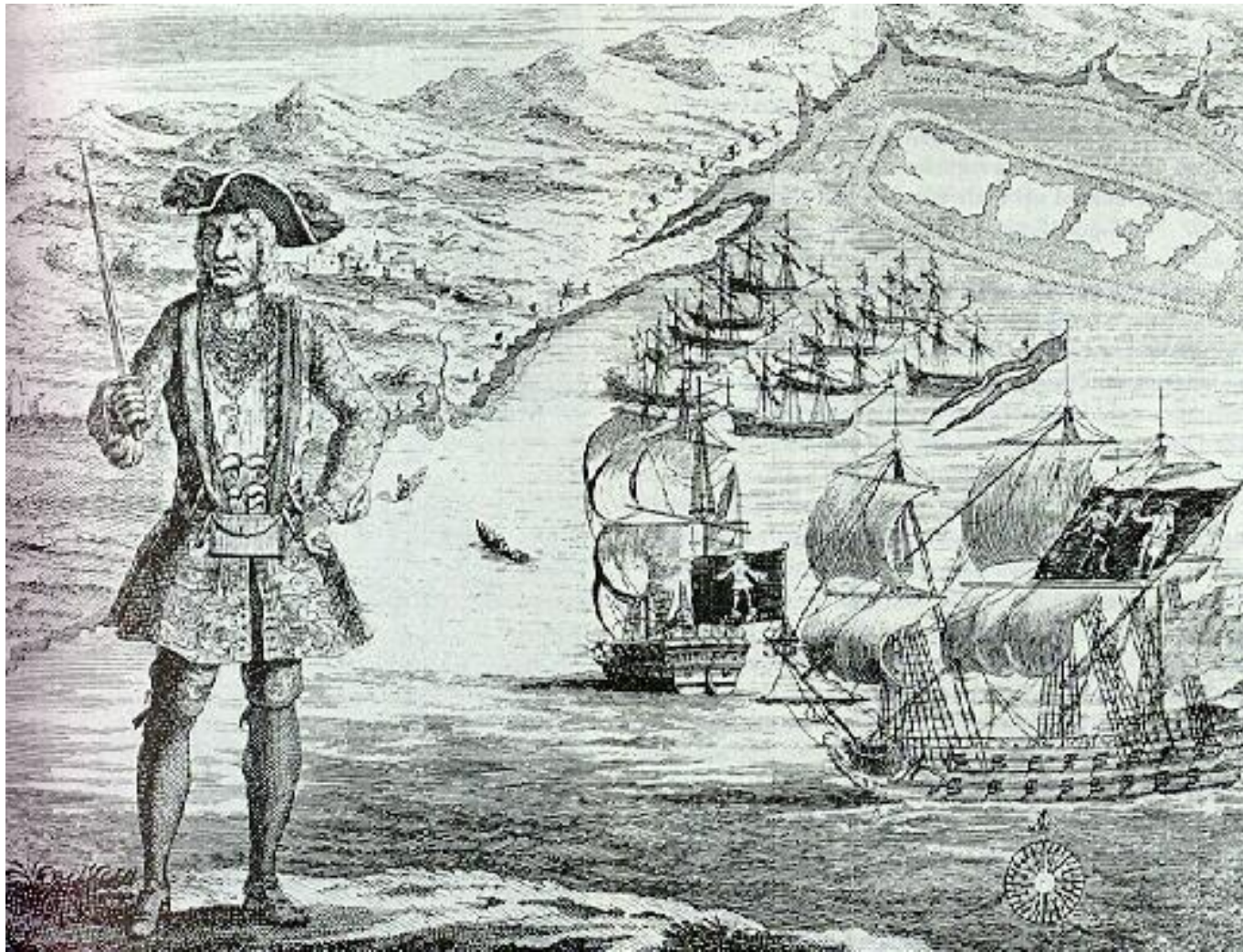


Figure 10. Detail showing Bartholomew Roberts from Charles Johnson, *A general history of the pyrates, from their first rise and settlement in the island of Providence, to the present time* (1724), p. 204. © BL