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Jacob Miron

**More Monsters Than Men? Uncovering the
Meanings of Piracy and Sodomy in
Early Modern England**

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More Monsters Than Men? Uncovering the Meanings of Piracy and Sodomy in Early Modern England

One was *hostis humani generis* - the enemy of all mankind - 'the most inhuman, bloody and desperate creature that the world could produce', guilty of 'the worst and most intolerable of Crimes that can be committed by Men'.¹ The other was 'mortal Enemie to humane Nature, and the humane Race', the perpetrator of 'a detestable, and abominable sin, amongst christians not to be named'.² Such was the lot of the pirate and the sodomite in early modern England and its Atlantic empire - two figures that stand out for the vilification they received, and this in an age that was not slow to spy demonised 'others' around every corner. Their practices were intolerable yet unavoidable facts of life, threats long-established in the collective consciousness. But the fears and hatreds of a society are of course made in its own image. They are a mirror that reflect its conventions and preoccupations, the ways of thought that structure its very being - the greater the fear, the greater the hatred, and the clearer these are revealed. Piracy and sodomy, though on the surface completely different - one an economic crime out on the high seas, the other sexual and lurking within society - will, placed together in a comparative study, offer us a more nuanced and complete window through which to observe the past.

My aim is threefold. Firstly, to uncover the pirate and the sodomite as *subjects* of discourse: culturally constituted figures given meaning across a broad range of contemporary texts - from polemics, poems and plays to religious and legal documents - between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Secondly, to examine the *uses and needs* of these discursive subjects - the functions, either intended or subconscious, that they served in normative society. And finally, to shift focus from subjects to *selves* - to move beyond the obfuscating ambiguity of discourse and acknowledge the fact that piracy and sodomy were in fact real-life practices that

¹ Edward Coke, *The Third Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England* (London: Brooke, 1797), p.113; Daniel Defoe, *An Account of the Conduct and Proceedings of the Late John Gow* (London: Applebee, 1725), p.23; *The Arraignment, Tryal, and Condemnation, of Capt. John Quelch, and Others* (London: Ben. Bragg, 1705), p.5.

² Daniel Dolins, *The Second Charge of Sr. Daniel Dolins, Kt. to the Grand-Jury* (London: Samuel Chandler, 1726), p.39; *Institutes*, p.58.

could be attached to real-life individuals and identities. With this broad remit I hope to reconstruct the ever-changing, complex and often contradictory webs of meanings that surrounded our two figures - and to situate their evolution within that of a society which is, at the beginning of the period, quite alien to us, but by its end begins to offer glimpses of our own.

The Sodomitical Subject

Michel Foucault argued that *sexuality* is 'the name that can be given to a historical construct', something discursively constituted and reconstituted over time. This was particularly true, he argued, in the case of sodomy, 'that utterly confused category', an unstable yet potent nexus of ideas, behaviours and discursive practices.³ His approach will be of use as we first approach sodomy and its meanings in an early modern context - by uncovering the 'sodomitical subject' I hope to recreate the ways in which sodomy and its perpetrators were presented and comprehended by normative society, however detached from reality they may have been. As we shall see, the sodomite as a subject of discourse was a figure of immense evil - fundamental to his being were several metaphysical characteristics, terrible and all-encompassing in nature, which determined the ways in which he revealed himself in the temporal domain.

It has become almost a historiographical truism to note the importance of binary opposition in the construction of the early modern worldview; Stuart Clark in his landmark study of demonology described it as one of the 'distinctive mental and cultural traits of the age'.⁴ Indeed, a tendency to construct the universe in terms of stark polarities was only exaggerated when society was confronted with its most abhorrent 'demons', real or imagined. In this way, the sodomitical subject's essential structure was defined *against* the two things it most disturbed, both of which weighed heavy in the early modern mind: order and nature. According to the preeminent legal

³ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), p.101.

⁴ Ethan Shagan, 'Beyond Good and Evil: Thinking with Moderates in Early Modern England', *The Journal of British Studies*, 49 (2010), 488-513 (p.488); Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), p.35.

authority Sir Edward Coke, sodomy was 'against the ordinance of the Creator, and order of nature', while an early eighteenth-century pamphleteer wrote of a 'Wicked Crime of Un-natural Leudness [...] contrary to the order of Humane Nature'.⁵ These accusations had such a terrifying power because of the way in which contemporaries conceived of their reality. According to Sir Thomas Browne, nature was the 'universal and public manuscript' of God, within which, said Sir John Fortescue, 'there is nothing which the bond of order does not embrace'.⁶ Sodomy then, far from being a simple sexual act, was a conduit for *all* that was disordered and unnatural; it was not a part of the created order at all, but of its dissolution. The most vivid evidence of this belief was the biblical tale of Sodom and Gomorrah, whose inhabitants had 'sought after every opportunity, to gratifie their brutish desires' before their apocalyptic destruction.⁷ According to Du Bartas, they had been led onto sodomy by lesser sins of 'plenty and pleasure' - this is indicative of the way in which, associated with the whole spectrum of unnatural sin, the word was given meaning beyond its literal definition as a specific sexual act.⁸

With this in mind it's easier to understand the term's broad conceptual sweep - in different contexts it could be associated with any number of things that seemed to threaten the natural order. A poet, Walter Kennedy, spoke in the same breath of a sodomite, a werewolf and a basilisk, while Coke depicted a terrible trio of 'sorcerers, sodomites, and heretics'.⁹ 'More Monsterlike, then e're was Devill yet', there was a 'separate Hell' for 'Blasphemers, Atheists, and Sodomites'; such dehumanisation is a common trope.¹⁰ Likewise, sodomy could signify a wide range of practices, including prostitution, rape, incest, adultery, coitus interruptus, and transvestism - those same 'vile vices' with which the peoples of Sodom and Gomorrah had become 'glutted' - all

⁵ *Institutes*, p.58; *An Account of the Tryal, Examination, and Conviction of Several Notorious Persons Call'd Sodomites*, 1707 (London, 1707).

⁶ Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* (Oxford: J. Vincent, 1831), p.31; Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (New York: Columbia UP, 1995), p.34.

⁷ *A Flaming Whip for Lechery: Or, The Whoremasters Speculum* (London: Eliz. Harris, 1700), p.13.

⁸ Guillaume Du Bartas, *The Divine Weeks and Works of Guillaume De Saluste, Sieur Du Bartas*, ed. by Susan Snyder (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), pp.518, 522.

⁹ William Dunbar, *The Poems of William Dunbar*, ed. by James Kinsley (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), pp.85, 94; Edward Coke, *The Twelfth Part of the Reports of Sir Edward Coke* (London, 1656), p.36.

¹⁰ *A Treatise, Wherein Are Strict Observations upon That Detestable and Most Shocking Sin of Sodomy* (London: A. Moore, 1728), p.36.

of which stemmed from an unnatural kind of desire.¹¹ Somewhat conversely, despite these being 'filthy' actions 'not fit to be named in a Civilized Nation', sodomy could also represent what was *too* civilised, if equally unnatural and rapacious - the vices, for example, of luxury and decadence.¹² A sodomite would 'value no Expenditure or Charge,/To purchase sinful Pleasures', wrote one satirist; in the allegorical *The Conspirators*, the sodomitical villains 'work their more remote Designs by poisoning the State with a general Taint of Debauchery' - the people are 'stupified with Shews, Feasts, Vanity, Luxury'.¹³ What is essential to understand is that, though the sodomitical subject's multifaceted and often contradictory nature seems to render him almost meaningless to modern eyes, this ambiguity is precisely what gave the construction its power. As Cameron McFarlane writes, 'sodomy signifies confusion by confusing signification' - its many inconsistencies both attest to and account for the power and resilience of its foundational structures.¹⁴

A key subdomain of confusion concerned power and its distribution. Sodomy was often and consistently linked with tyranny and enslavement, when normal hierarchies were perverted and overturned. Writing about Francis Bacon's supposed sodomitical habits, Sir Simonds D'Ewes described an 'admirable instance how men are enslaved by wickedness and held captive by the devil'.¹⁵ The same sentiment is displayed graphically in the notorious *Sodom, or the Quintessence of Debauchery*, in which King Bolloxinion declares that 'buggery may be used, O'er all the land' and is thus able 'with [his] prick' to 'govern all the land'.¹⁶ Meanwhile, in Nathaniel Lee's *Tragedy of Nero*, the emperor's tyranny is linked with his sodomitical love for Sporus, 'now Lady, once Lord of my heart' - 'Who but a GOD, like me, could Sexes change?' he cries.¹⁷ This confusion of gender highlights another aspect of sodomy's relation to power - contemporaries often associated the act with effeminate behaviour and a

¹¹ Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004), p.238; *Sieur Du Bartas*, p.518.

¹² *Trial, Examination, and Conviction of Several Notorious Persons Call'd Sodomites*.

¹³ Edward Ward, *The Modern World Disrob'd* (London: G. S., 1708), p.216; Thomas Gordon, *The Conspirators, Or, The Case of Catiline* (London: J. Roberts, 1721), p.21.

¹⁴ Cameron McFarlane, *The Sodomite in Fiction and Satire, 1660-1750* (New York: Columbia UP, 1998), p.26.

¹⁵ Thomas Hearne, *Historia Vitæ Et Regni Ricardi II* (Oxford, 1729), p.287.

¹⁶ John Rochester, *Sodom, or the Quintessence of Debauchery* (Paris: H. Welter, 1904), pp.13, 3.

¹⁷ Nathaniel Lee, *The Tragedy of Nero* (London: Magnus and Bentley, 1675), p.8.

disordering of the power structures underlying traditional gender roles, as when John Marston referred to 'yon effeminate sanguine Ganymede' or a moralist complained of 'enervated effeminate Animals' engaged in 'unnatural Vices one with another'.¹⁸ To be effeminate was to be everything that 'real men' most detested, including but not limited to deviant sexual acts: to abandon the power and control that was man's natural right. Indeed, in a deeply misogynistic society, men tolerated such behaviour in women only because of their established status as the weaker, irrational sex - but in sodomitical men it became an insidious and transgressive threat to normative culture, blurring the accepted line between male and female.¹⁹ This was most clearly symbolised in the sodomitical act itself, legally defined as '*penetratio*, that is, *res in re*' by Coke.²⁰ As David Halperin has argued, contemporary sexual relations were typically classified in terms of hierarchy and gender rather than sexuality itself - the dominant masculine *a/ways* penetrated the submissive feminine.²¹ Thus sodomy, with its passive yet male partner, was a site of confusion - gender norms were left in disarray by the act of penetration.

The sodomitical subject was thus a potent symbol of metaphysical chaos, whose demonology encompassed far more than sex. I now want to explore how this creation acquired a distinct temporal shape and form in the specific historical context of early modern England. Often, discourses of sodomy and xenophobia intersected quite organically, reflecting the ease with which various signs of difference were collated. Various travellers described in horrified detail the sodomy they witnessed in the Orient, the Arab world and Russia, while others espied it closer to home, in the lands of European rivals. Hence Italy was 'the Mother and Nurse of Sodomy' and 'in France, which copies from them, the Contagion is diversify'd'; it was the 'Lumbards', thought Coke, who 'had brought into the realm the shamefull sin of sodomy'; sodomy was indeed 'there esteemed so trivial [...] that not a Cardinal or Churchman of Note

¹⁸ John Marston, *The Works of John Marston*, ed. by A. H. Bullen (London: J.C. Nimmo, 1887), p.350; *Plain Reasons for the Growth of Sodomy in England* (London: A. Dodd, 1728), p.9.

¹⁹ Randolph Trumbach, 'London's Sodomites: Homosexual Behavior and Western Culture in the 18th Century', *Journal of Social History*, 11 (1977), 1-33 (p.11).

²⁰ *Institutes*, p.59.

²¹ David Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago, UoC, 2004), p.113.

but has his Ganymede'.²² Xenophobia here was joined by anti-Catholicism - the 'popish sodomite' was a recurrent figure during the confrontational process of post-Reformation confessionalization, and Rome a 'second Sodom', a 'cistern full of sodomy'.²³ The power of binary opposition is again apparent - popery was the total inversion of true religion, the ultimate source of theological disorder, and was thus naturally associated with sodomy. This featured heavily in John Bale's anti-Catholic morality play, *A Comedye Concernynge Thre Lawes*, where 'Pope, Cardinall and pryst' live 'within the bownes of Sodomye', and in this way 'assaulte' nature's law. A principal reason, thought Bale, for the Catholic clergy's sodomy was their vow of celibacy - 'Detestyng matrymonye,/They lyue abhomynablye' and thus 'for want of wyves' indulge in sodomy.²⁴ This accusation highlights another common feature of contemporary sodomitical discourse: the belief that sodomy was a direct threat to marriage, a crucial institution of spiritual and social order, and the only godly outlet for human sexuality. Foucault described matrimony as a 'deployment of alliance', a system of rules whose primary objective was the maintenance and (literal) reproduction of the societal status quo.²⁵ In this sense, sodomy not only defied God's will but also imperiled the temporal domain. 'The sodomites', claimed one pamphleteer, 'endeavour to destroy the World backward [...] by stopping Procreation'; 'Children (Natures End) and Posterity are utterly lost to it', deplored another.²⁶

These fears also had an economic edge - in the expanding economy, marriage, intimately linked with established systems of property and inheritance, played a crucial role in the flow of capital and the growth of the labour force. The sodomite, left out of this circuit, thus endangered the economic prosperity of the whole nation.²⁷ Such a seemingly irrational fear, that all of society would suffer through the activities of a sodomitical minority or even one sodomitical individual, was in fact a ubiquitous

²² *Plain Reasons*, p.17; *Institutes*, p.58.

²³ William Lithgow, *The Totall Discourse of the Rare Adventures and Painful Peregrinations of Long Nineteene Yeares Travayles* (Glasgow: James Maclehose & Sons, 1906), pp.12; David Lindsay, *The Works of Sir David Lindsay* (Edinburgh, 1776), p.117.

²⁴ John Bale, *A Comedye Concernynge Thre Lawes* (London, 1538), pp.32, 28.

²⁵ Foucault, p.106.

²⁶ *A Treatise, wherein are strict observations*, p.37; *The Shortest-Way with Whores and Rogues* (London, 1703), p.31.

²⁷ McFarlane, p.21.

element of the contemporary mindset, a corollary of the aforementioned belief in a single universal order. This was the theory of the microcosm and macrocosm - in Browne's words, 'There is no man alone, because every man is a microcosm and carries the whole world about him'.²⁸ Thus the actions of one sinful individual could have repercussions throughout the whole, because the two were intrinsically and reciprocally connected, and functioned in parallel. In the case of the sodomite and, as we shall see, the pirate, this amplified and generalised their dreadful impact as cultural constructs.

The Piratical Subject

Although the early modern pirate as a figure of discourse has received much less historiographical attention than the sodomite, I argue that in reality the two were structured and functioned in a revealingly similar manner. The piratical subject's inherent metaphysical characteristics, and the ways these manifested themselves in the secular world, made him an equally dangerous and general threat. While this representation, like that of the sodomite, was in many ways unrealistic, it still offers valuable insight into the mindset of the society that created it.

In the first instance, the same two core binary oppositions we have already seen were essential to the pirate's construction as *hostis humani generis*: the pirate, like the sodomite, signified disorder and unnaturalness. He 'destroyeth [...] all government and all order', said Matthew Tindal; his crime, thought Charles Johnson, was 'contrary to the light and law of nature, as well as the law of God', it 'debases humane Nature'.²⁹ This was evidenced by the litany of sins pirates were commonly accused of: 'profanes, cursing and bitterness, swearing and blasphemy, drunkenness and revellings, contempt of religion and profanation of the Lord's Day, whoredom and uncleanness'.³⁰ Indeed, piracy was 'a Crime so enormous' that it 'include[d] almost all

²⁸ Browne, p.69.

²⁹ Matthew Tindal, *An Essay Concerning the Laws of Nations, And The Rights of Sovereigns* (London: Richard Baldwin, 1694), p 26; Charles Johnson, *A General History of the Pyrates* (London: T. Warner, 1724), I, p.229.

³⁰ Benjamin Colman, *It Is a Fearful Thing to Fall into the Hands of the Living God* (Boston: John Phillips and Thomas Hancock, 1726), p.27.

others, as Murder, Rapine, Theft, Ingratitude, &c'.³¹ Unsurprisingly, such and unnatural and demonic figures were often stripped of their humanity - their life 'sets them upon a Level with the wild Beasts of the Forest'; the pirate was 'a monster, rather than a man [...] a merciless, cruel, and inexorable wretch'; pirates were in fact 'under the Conduct of [...] Satan'.³² This was most obvious in their supposed propensity for violence, which was typically depicted in lurid, over-the-top detail. Not content with robbing merchants, pirates 'often threw their goods overboard, burnt their ships, and tortur'd and massacred the owners'; Exquemelin described at length Henry Morgan torturing his Spanish captives, 'so cruelly, that many of them died on the rack'.³³ Much like the sodomite, the pirate was controlled by his excessive and unnatural desire - for violence, plunder and all life's other vices.

In his state of desirous disorder, the piratical subject was a potent source of transgression. Like the sodomite, he was a figure who contravened the rules laid down by normative society. Politically, he rejected the God-given sovereignty of monarchical government, and erected perverse and anti-hierarchical bastardisations in its place. Johnson describes 'infinite Disorders, every Man being in his own Imagination a Captain, a Prince, or a King' while in his play, *The Successful Pyrate*, he mockingly has his cast declare that 'we our sovereign Lord the People will bear Authority over our Sovereign Lord the People' and therefore 'all be Kings'.³⁴ Likewise, the spiritual jurisdiction of the church was discarded - Bartholomew Roberts apparently declared that his crew 'should accept no Act of Grace; that the K[ing] and P[riest] might be damned with their Acts of G[od]'.³⁵ And even in death, the pirate rejected natural authority. 'Heaven, you fool', laughed Captain Sutton, 'did you ever hear of any Pirates going thither? Give me H[e]ll, it's a merrier place'.³⁶ In the economic domain the pirate was also a transgressor, pulling down the walls that protected the 'natural' economy and kept every man in his place. As many legal

³¹ *General History*, I, p.113.

³² *General History*, I, p.113; *An Account [...] of the Late John Gow Alias Smith*, p.23; Cotton Mather, *The Converted Sinner* (Boston: Nathaniel Belknap, 1724), p.3.

³³ Alexandre Exquemelin, *The History of the Bucaniers of America* (London, 1704), p.130.

³⁴ *General History*, I, p.248; Charles Johnson, *The Successful Pyrate* (London: Bernard Lintot, 1713), p.38.

³⁵ *General History*, I, p.239.

³⁶ *General History*, I, p.275.

minds agreed, piracy 'much exceeds theft or robbery at land, as the interests and concerns of kingdoms and nations are above those of private families'; indeed, 'to a trading nation, nothing can be so Destructive as Piracy'.³⁷ Here the familiar notion of the microcosm and macrocosm is at play - the pirate figure, enactor of chaos, poses an existential threat, far beyond his own individual actions, to an early modern economy that was based on property and commerce.

In a more seductive yet equally threatening manner, the piratical subject also subverted norms of gender and sexuality. He is, as Hans Turley has argued, a site of sexual ambiguity - a hypermasculine figure living in a homosocial world, neither implicitly nor explicitly outlawing deviant sexual desire, who instead suggests an uncomfortably different paradigm of masculine identity.³⁸ While the English editor of the *Bucaniers of America* warned that the characters within lacked 'tolerable morals', he still assured readers that 'a bolder race of men both as to personal valour and conduct, certainly never yet appeared'.³⁹ The *General History* is equally typical in its description of pirates' martial masculinity: Blackbeard is a 'courageous Brute' looked upon by his fellow pirates as 'a person of a more extraordinary gallantry' for his wicked deeds.⁴⁰ Sexually, the pirate was defined by his uninhibited, unnatural desires. Captain Avery's crew reportedly wedded 'the most beautiful [...] Negroe Women; not one or two, but as many as they liked'; Blackbeard took fourteen wives, and enjoyed forcing the fourteenth 'to prostitute herself [...] one after another, before his Face' to 'five or six of his brutal Companions'; the infamous pirate John Ward was even accused in one poem of 'Filthy sins of Sodomy'.⁴¹ Indeed, Turley has shown the parallels between the figures of the pirate and sodomite, both cultural deviants gravitating towards homosocial worlds. For the latter this attraction is explicitly erotocised; for the pirate it is 'tantilisingly implicit', his sexuality never being fully

³⁷ William Cobbett, *A Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings* (London: Hansard, 1812), XIII, p.453; *General History*, I, p.298.

³⁸ Hans Turley, *Rum, Sodomy, and the Lash: Piracy, Sexuality, and Masculine Identity* (New York: NYU, 1999), p.42.

³⁹ Exquemelin, p.ii.

⁴⁰ *General History*, I, pp.84, 88.

⁴¹ *General History*, I, pp.58, 75; *The Seamans Song of Captain Ward the Famous Pyrate of the World* (London, 1658).

determined.⁴² This undercurrent can also be seen in the way in which pirates profaned the sanctity of marriage - Stede Bonnet supposedly turned pirate because of 'some Discomforts he found in a married State' and *The Successful Pyrate's* chorus proclaim that 'we will have no Arbitrary Wives to control our Commands'.⁴³ In all, what the piratical subject presents us with is an alternative masculinity, both troubling and titillating, in which heterosexual monogamy is cast aside. This was quite unlike the conventional English model of manliness - which stressed fiscal responsibility, sexual control and social conservatism.⁴⁴

The pirate and the sodomite as discursive subjects thus shared some fundamental similarities. In a world of binary oppositions they signified, on a metaphysical level, all that was disordered, unnatural and wrong - thus they were associated with many of the sins and demons that preoccupied the early modern mind. Because of this terrible potency, both were also threats of a more worldly sort - in the politico-religious, economic and sociocultural spheres the piratical and sodomitical subjects were transgressive forces: overturning conventions, evading institutions of control, and destabilising categories of gender and sexuality that were assumed to be incontrovertible.

Uses and Needs

Representational figures do not exist in a discursive vacuum, isolated from the real world - rather, they reveal and respond to certain facts of life within it. I argue that our two subjects played a dual role in early modern English society: they had both a practical *use* - as tools of control and criticism - and responded to certain, more subliminal *needs* - to displace, for example, the anxieties which arose when the black-and-white certitude that characterised the contemporary mindset was uncomfortably at odds with social realities.

⁴² Turley, p.85.

⁴³ *General History*, I, p.91; *The Successful Pyrate*, p.37.

⁴⁴ *New Men: Manliness in Early America*, ed. by Thomas Foster (New York: NYU, 2011), p.100.

Firstly, we must appreciate the extent to which the construction and demonisation of the sodomitical and piratical subjects benefited the state - in enabling and justifying the disciplining of subjects' bodies and minds they were powerful tools of its ongoing process of formation. As Kai Erikson has argued in his sociological study of New England Puritans, deviants had a social use, to not only define the boundaries of a society, but repeatedly confirm them.⁴⁵ This is apparent in the exemplary literature which circulated after criminals were captured and condemned. Humphrey Stafford, who in committing sodomy had acted 'unnaturally and feloniously, contrary to the laws of God and the king' was reported to have prayed 'with a loud and audible voice [...] that his death might be a warning to all others'.⁴⁶ During the trial of the Earl of Castlehaven, the Attorney General accused the sodomitical Earl of betraying obligations to God, his gender, his status, and his country, thus endangering the social order; he exhorted God to 'let this wicked man be taken away from amongst us'.⁴⁷ Pirates received similar treatment - the New England minister Cotton Mather was a prolific author of texts that would, in his words, 'render the Condition of the Pirates, lately executed, profitable'. 'Oh! Take a due Notice of these *Wicked men*' and their 'fearful End', he cried - only in their 'dying lamentations' did they repent for all their supposed sins those sins - from drinking and cursing to unchastity and atheism.⁴⁸ Indeed, the piratical subject's status as inhuman *hostis humani generis* could conjure up a powerful legal fiction. While *hostis* legally denoted a 'public' enemy of war belonging to a sovereign political entity, the pirate, enemy of *all* mankind, no longer belonged to any legitimate entity at all: he was subject to the liabilities of formal war but exempt from any of its benefits.⁴⁹ This understanding was invoked by Stede Bonnet's judge - unlike other public enemies, the pirate was someone 'with whom neither faith nor oath is to be kept', and thus, if far from land, 'it is lawful for anyone that takes them [...] to put them to death'.⁵⁰ Whether pirate or sodomite then,

⁴⁵ Kai Erikson, *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Wiley, 1966), p.12.

⁴⁶ *The Arraignment, Judgement, Confession and Execution of Humfrey Stafford, Gentleman* (London: Printed by E. A., 1607), p.8.

⁴⁷ *State Trials*, III, pp.409-414.

⁴⁸ Cotton Mather, *The Diary of Cotton Mather* (New York: Ungar, 1957), p.490; Cotton Mather, *Useful Remarks. An Essay upon Remarkables in the Way of Wicked Men* (New-London: Tim. Green, 1723), p.21.

⁴⁹ Jody Greene, 'Hostis Humani Generis', *Critical Inquiry*, 34 (2008), 683-705 (p.693).

⁵⁰ *State Trials*, XV, p.1235.

their fearful reputations could be expropriated by the state in order to better control and coerce its subjects.

Both figures also served as effective conduits of social criticism, recognised symbolic figures used to make points closer to home. Johnson's *General History* is an obvious example - his characters often become satiric norms by which immoderate desire for wealth and power is recognised and reprobated; one early reviewer indeed noted that the book could be interpreted as having 'gone to Sea to attack People under the borrowed Name of Pyrates'.⁵¹ Thus Captain Bellamy complains that while pirates 'plunder the rich under the protection of our own courage', rich men 'rob the poor under the cover of Law', for they 'have not the courage otherwise to defend what they get by their knavery'.⁵² Describing the exploits of Captain England, Johnson more directly targets the unscrupulous men involved in the South Sea Bubble, writing that 'whatever robberies they had committed, they might be pretty sure they were not the greatest villains then living in the world'.⁵³ In both cases the pirate's infamy is used as a rhetorical device to reveal through similarity the immorality of less obvious wrongdoers. Elsewhere, in Robert Daborne's play, *A Christian Turn'd Turk*, we see the piratical subject used to criticise contemporary political culture. 'Pirate king' John Ward becomes a tyrant and adopts Islam, persuaded by the counsel of a nefarious Turkish female lover, before receiving his final comeuppance - arguably this implicitly parallels and condemns the absolutist tendencies of James I himself, and the potentially corrupt influence of the favourites he kept at court.⁵⁴

Daborne's critique also has a sexual edge - the Islamic world was commonly associated with sodomy, and when one character remarks that Ward resembles an 'Italian captain' because of the 'sore night' he endured after 'Mahomet had the handling of him', the implication is clear.⁵⁵ Ward, rendered sodomitically passive by his Turkish dalliance, can be seen to reflect James, whose 'unnatural' closeness with

⁵¹ *Mist's Weekly-Journal*, 29 August 1724

⁵² Charles Johnson, *The General History of the Pyrates* (London: T. Woodward, 1728), II, p.220.

⁵³ *General History*, I, p.139.

⁵⁴ Claire Jowitt, *The Culture of Piracy, 1580-1630* (Ashgate Group, 2010), p.144.

⁵⁵ Robert Daborne, *A Christian Turn'd Turke* (London: William Barrenger, 1612), p.54.

his favourites invited accusations of political and sexual disorder. The suspicion of a deviant sexuality constantly hovered, for example, over the Duke of Buckingham's head - he had an 'over-great familiarity with the Prince', who 'seemed to have him a large room in his heart'.⁵⁶ According to one poem mockingly addressed to the Duke, 'The king loves you, you him;/Both love the same [...] Of sports the king loves games,/Of games the duke;/Of all men you; and you/Solely, for your looke'. The ambiguous use of pronouns indicates the extent to which the proper power relations between king and courtier have been confused, and the double entendres of 'sports' and 'games' hint at homoeroticism.⁵⁷ As we've seen, sodomy at root signified systemic disorder, and thus serves here to warn of dangerous disruptions, only partially sexual, in the body politic. This can be further explored in early Stuart narratives of Edward II and his potentially sodomitical relationship with Piers Gaveston, used to criticise Buckingham's elevated political role and demonstrate the need for virtue and self-restraint in government.⁵⁸ 'For never doted Jove on Ganymede/So much as he on cursèd Gaveston', wrote Christopher Marlowe in *Edward II*, also stressing Gaveston's foreign birth and italianate ways - both sodomitical tropes.⁵⁹ Elizabeth Cary in her *History* wrote that 'the sovereign's vice begets the subject's error, who practise good and ill by his example', emphasising the micro-to-macro link between a monarch's private behaviour and the general well-being of society. Edward's problem was that, with 'all his thoughts entirely fixt upon his *Gaveston*', he had 'neglected the rights due to his crown and dignity'. This condition led him to 'estrangle himself' from his rightful peers and instead, in an act of 'base commixtion', make the lower-born Gaveston an earl, 'to level their conditions'.⁶⁰ Thus legitimate male and class bonds are repudiated for an emotionally and socially illegitimate one - sodomy works beyond itself to violate good government. Edward is *subject* to his passions for Gaveston, and this places him in a position of passivity, graphically illustrated by his death in Marlowe's play - he is 'too weak and feeble to

⁵⁶ *Historical Collections*, ed. by John Rushworth (London: 1659), I, p.102.

⁵⁷ *Early English Poetry, Ballads, and Popular Literature of the Middle Ages* (London: Percy Society, 1851), p.49.

⁵⁸ *Sodomy in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Tom Betteridge (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2007), p.61.

⁵⁹ Christopher Marlowe, *Edward II*, ed. by Martin Wiggins and Robert Lindsey (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), 4. 180-81.

⁶⁰ Elizabeth Cary, *The History of the Life, Reign, and Death of Edward II* (London: Harper, 1680), pp.6, 9, 15.

resist' being sodomised by a 'red-hot spit'.⁶¹ The subtext in both accounts is that Buckingham poses much the same threat as Gaveston did.

The examples above work effectively as allegorical warnings because they show how easily the patriarchal, largely homosocial order upon which early modern society was built could be upended by sodomy and the wide-ranging disorder it signified. But behind this there is an uncomfortable implication. Proper patriarchal order and abhorrent sodomitical *disorder* paralleled each other in an uncanny way - a society whose values are partly created and defined in opposition to (and therefore also *at*) the margins is inherently vulnerable *to* marginality. This poses a fundamental question - what were the essential, largely subconscious *needs* the figures of the sodomite and the pirate fulfilled in their sociological context? To answer it will be useful to consider Jonathan Dollimore's incisive formulation of the social order - 'an almost permanent condition of dislocation stemming directly from its own contradictions'. This *internal* dislocation is then displaced, made to seem an effect of society's *external* enemies, ensuring that the status quo proceeds without being forced to question contradictory realities.⁶²

Such dislocation is apparent if we look beneath the surface of early modern English society. Many of the institutions that supported patriarchal power, and relations between men generally, were structured in a way that made sodomitical purposes unnervingly easy to serve. Alan Bray has for example shown the surprising affinity between sodomy and much-encouraged male friendship and patronage.⁶³ Both were based on an emotional and physical closeness, even intensity; to be someone's 'bedfellow' suggested influence, as when Archbishop William Laud happily dreamed that his patron, Buckingham, 'seemed to me to ascend into my bed, where he carried himself with much love towards me'.⁶⁴ Likewise, public physical affection was a sign of friendship and respect - in Edmund Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calender*, the

⁶¹ Marlowe, 24. 107-10.

⁶² Dollimore, p.221.

⁶³ Alan Bray, 'Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England', *History Workshop Journal*, 29 (1990), 1-19 (p.4).

⁶⁴ William Laud, *The Works of William Laud*, ed. by James Bliss (Oxford, 1853), III, p.170.

editor writes of the poet that 'soone [...] he shall be not only kiste, but also beloued of all, embraced of the most'.⁶⁵ Such ambiguity also existed in two primary parameters of social life - the household and the education system. In the former, a strict and patriarchal institution, unmarried men, either servants or children of the house, would generally not leave to start households of their own before their late twenties. Bray argues that in such circumstances, with available sexual outlets severely limited, sodomitical relationships had certain advantages: they were of less interest to local Justices of the Peace than the illegitimate children of heterosexual liaisons falling on the poor rate, and prosecutions were rare; male bed-sharing was also a common practice.⁶⁶ In a similar manner, stern patriarchal authority lapsed into sodomy in schools. Eton headmaster Nicholas Udall, known for his fondness of corporal punishment, was prosecuted by the Privy Council in 1541 when 'he did confesse that he did comitt buggery' with several of his pupils, 'sundry tymes hertofore'.⁶⁷ Notably, Udall's career was little affected - while he lost his job at Eton, full arrears were paid, he would later receive patronage from Mary and then Edward, and was appointed head of Westminster School in 1554.⁶⁸ The metaphysically monstrous image of sodomy, and all its various associations, left untouched the ordinary institutions and relations that permitted actual sodomitical acts to be disseminated through early modern England. Normative society, so reliant on clear-cut binaries and distinctive enemies to define itself and its values, could not acknowledge a reality that was grey rather than black and white, and more chaotic than ordered. Against this tension, the figure of the sodomite acted as a sort of bulwark, creating a conceptual gap that totally dissociated myth from reality.

This kind of function was not limited to the sodomite. In the form of the piratical subject we can again see society's internal dislocation repackaged as the fault of its external enemies. Johnson, though he often stressed the barbarity of his protagonists, also pointed to certain socioeconomic issues that precipitated their

⁶⁵ Edmund Spenser, *The Shepheardes Calendar* (London: Wolfe, 1586), p.3.

⁶⁶ *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, p.47.

⁶⁷ Harris Nicholas, *Proceedings and Ordinances of the Privy Council of England* (London, 1837), VII, p.153.

⁶⁸ Alan Stewart, *Close Readers: Humanism and Sodomy in Early Modern England* (NJ, Princeton UP, 1997), p.118.

piracy. There were 'Multitudes of Seamen' jobless, 'cast off' by former employers. 'Merchants take their Advantage of this, lessen their Wages, and those few who are in Business are poorly paid, and but poorly fed'.⁶⁹ A century earlier, Henry Mainwaring had noted the same problem, that 'the common sort of seamen are so generally necessitated and discontented'.⁷⁰ These were accurate portrayals - merchantman employment was never guaranteed, with much maritime traffic seasonal, and men often hired for a single voyage only. The lot of naval sailors was equally poor - abuses were legion, pay miniscule, and conditions deplorable, with more men dying from malnutrition and disease than in battle.⁷¹ In such circumstances, piracy was often a logical mode of survival. An equally internal problem was that of privateering, and its ambiguous link to piracy. Daniel Defoe bemoaned the fact that state-sponsored piracy was 'now the Custom of Nations' and that 'Men of Trade themselves put it forward by furnishing out Fleets of Pyrates to rob, plunder and destroy one another'. Mather observed how 'the Privateering Stroke, so easily degenerates into the Piratical', with Johnson agreeing 'that Privateers in Time of War are a Nursery for Pyrates against a Peace'.⁷² Certainly it seems that as states sought both maximum freedom and minimum responsibility in their use of violence at sea, the distinction between honest seaman and evil pirate became entirely subjective.⁷³ However, it was far *easier* to believe in this diabolical enemy of all mankind - to avoid the kind of mental reshuffling required in recognising that piracy was in large part the product of socioeconomic factors mismanaged by the state, and an equivocal, even hypocritical policy regarding privateering.

From Subjects to Selves

Thus far our two deviant figures, the pirate and the sodomite, have been treated as *subjects* - textual constructions often far-removed from reality, that tell us more about

⁶⁹ *General History*, I, p.1.

⁷⁰ Henry Mainwaring, *The Life and Works of Sir Henry Mainwaring* (London, 1922), II, p.14.

⁷¹ C. M. Senior, *A Nation of Pirates: English Piracy in Its Heyday* (Newton Abbot, 1976), pp.16-17.

⁷² Daniel Defoe, *Defoe's Review*, ed. by Arthur Wellesley Secord (New York: Columbia UP, 1938), p.502; Cotton Mather, *Faithful warnings to prevent fearful judgments* (Boston, 1704), p.37.

⁷³ Janice Thomson, *Mercenaries, Pirates, and Sovereigns: State-building and Extraterritorial Violence in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1996), p.43.

their creators than the groups they claimed to depict. However, pirates and sodomites in the most literal sense - extralegal maritime plunderers and men who loved or made love to other men - *did* exist. How these individuals chose or chose not to construct their *own* identities, and the ways in which their conception of self changed over time, will give us a more complete picture of the meanings that piracy and sodomy could hold, and of the milieu in which they existed.

In the first instance what's clear is, at least until later in our period, the absence of individual *self*-identity expressed by either category. This was particularly true of the sodomite, the reasons for which will become apparent if we revisit his essential characteristics as a cultural construct. As argued, sodomy signified a wide range of debauched and disordered actions and persons, only some sexual in kind; the disproportionate fear it provoked was explained by the microcosm and macrocosm, where any trace of sodomy endangered all of society. But this logic worked both ways - if sodomy existed as a metaphysical force in the universe at large, so did it have the potential to spring up in each individual human heart. Sodomy was, according to the churchman John Rainolds, a sin to which 'men's natural corruption and viciousness is prone'. It was indeed inherent in their 'deprav'd' nature 'that when Lust [...] puts Mankind upon the *search of Unnatural Methods* to satisfy it'.⁷⁴ Thus sodomy was thought to be part of *human* rather than *individual* nature, something all minds were susceptible to - particularly those already disadvantaged by other sins and circumstances, which, for example, 'never had any Refinement by Learning, Education, or Religion', or as Coke thought, were guilty of 'pride, excesse of diet, idlenesse, and contempt of the poor'.⁷⁵ Rather than representative of a distinct sexual identity, sodomy was a general disease - referring to an 'outbreak' in Plymouth Colony in 1642, William Bradford warned 'how one wicked person may infecte many'; 'it's a hard matter to touch pitch and not to be defiled', wrote another.⁷⁶ This total absence of sexual self-identification is borne out in the testimonies of many of those

⁷⁴ John Rainolds, *Th'overthrow of Stage-Playes* (Middelburg: Richard Schilders, 1600), p.10; *A Flaming Whip*, p.37.

⁷⁵ Josiah Woodward, *Sodom's Vices* (London: Simpson, 1697), p.vii; *Institutes*, p.59.

⁷⁶ William Bradford, *Bradford's History "Of Plimoth Plantation"* (Boston, 1901), p.476; *A Flaming Whip*, p.15.

actually brought to trial. Humphrey Stafford 'denied the fact, affirming and protesting that he was guiltless therein, excusing himself that if he had offended it was in wine'.

⁷⁷ If drunkenness was cause for denial, then so was marriage: one William Griffin 'denied the Fact for which he died [...] saying that the abominable Sin was always the Aversion of his Soul, for he had lived many Years with a good virtuous Wife'.⁷⁸ Most revealing is the defence of William Marriot, who claimed that 'he never had the least thought of Committing the wicked Act of Sodomy [...] but only used a Foolish Custom as he had got, of handling Young Mens Flesh, & that was all he ever was Guilty of'.⁷⁹ The complete and utter disconnect between sodomy's extreme construction and the innocent homoeroticism of 'foolish custom' is starkly evident - and thus the very possibility of a specific sexual identity emerging is foreclosed.

Until at least the early eighteenth century, the formation of a piratical self-identity was similarly complicated and to an extent precluded. Richard Blakemore writes that it is for much of the period 'difficult to talk about "the early modern pirate" except as a literary or theoretical figure', largely because of the long-term and inherent ambiguity between piracy and privateering already discussed.⁸⁰ Exploiting this judicial grey area, which belied the supposedly clear distinctions of maritime law, most seafarers cultivated a certain expertise in representing their actions as legitimate and the assets they seized as legal prizes.⁸¹ Despite sailing with the piratical crews of Bartholomew Sharp and Charles Swan, William Dampier saw himself as an 'adventurer', not a pirate. Preparing for a raid on the Spanish Main in the 1680s, he describes Swan trading provisions with the French at Petit Goave in order to obtain 'a lawful Commission of his own to right himself'.⁸² Likewise, Exquemelin tells us that before his Panama raid Henry Morgan was sure to give each of his squadrons 'letters patent, or commissions to act all manner of hostilities against the Spanish nation'.⁸³ In

⁷⁷ *The Arraignement, [...] of Humfrey Stafford, Gentleman*, p.14.

⁷⁸ *Select Trials at the Sessions-House in the Old-Bailey* (London: J. Applebee, 1742), II, pp.365-6.

⁷⁹ *Trial, Examination, and Conviction of Several Notorious Persons Call'd Sodomites*.

⁸⁰ Richard Blakemore, 'The Politics of Piracy in the British Atlantic, c. 1640-1649', *International Journal of Maritime History*, 25 (2013), 159-72 (p.171).

⁸¹ Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400-1900* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), p.113.

⁸² William Dampier, *A New Voyage round the World* (London: J. Knapton, 1699), p.192.

⁸³ Exquemelin, p.176.

fact, so eager to avoid the label of pirate was Morgan that he sued the book's English publishers in 1685, claiming that for those 'who subsist by piracy, depredation and evil deeds of all kinds without lawful authority' he 'had the greatest abhorrence and disgust'.⁸⁴ The corollary of this is that 'pirate' denoted not a chosen identity but an accusation, used to imply all the negative qualities of the piratical subject already covered. This was particularly evident during the English civil war: *Mercurius Aulicus*, the royalist newspaper, claimed that a parliamentary order to issue letters of marque would 'fill the Seas so full of *Pirates* [...] they will in conclusion destroy all trade', and described one parliamentarian captain as 'a Native Turke, who having been a Pyrate, is thereby so qualified for the Rebels service'.⁸⁵ On the other side, a pamphlet published on the 2nd Earl of Warwick's authority in 1643 castigated the royalists as 'Arch-Pirates' who had made a 'kind of *Algier*' at a captured base in Cornwall.⁸⁶ What we have is a kind of semantic satiation, in which the generic and excessive use of the word loses it any specific meaning. This, along with the ever-changing and ambivalent definition of what piracy was - which enabled most seafarers to avoid the label entirely - foreclosed the construction of a coherent piratical self-identity. But this state of affairs was not static. In fact, it's telling that self-conscious and tangible identities associated with piracy and sodomy, grounded in real life rather than preternatural demonology, emerged at roughly the same point in time. Though the particular historical circumstances of these developments were different, there were certain broad changes at work in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to which both are attributable.

Our search for a sodomitical identity must begin with Foucault, who was among the first and certainly the most influential to apply a social constructionist paradigm to human sexuality; he argued that sexuality was not an essential biological quality, constant across time and space, but something whose shape and form, divisions and boundaries, were socially and culturally constituted. More particularly, he delineated

⁸⁴ Coram Rege Roll, King's Bench, No. 2041 m. 526, Easter Term I, James II (1685), *Malthus v. Morgan*.

⁸⁵ *Mercurius Aulicus*, 19-25 March 1643, sig. Yr; *Mercurius Aulicus*, 29 December - 5 January 1644/5, p.1321.

⁸⁶ *The Sea-Mans Protestation Renewed, Confirmed, and Enlarged* (London, 1643), sig. A4v.

the process by which sodomy transformed from a sin which anyone could commit, into an act associated with a specifically sexual identity - in his mind it was the nineteenth-century, pathologised conceptualisation of the *homosexual* that first 'became a personage [...] nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality'.⁸⁷ From this foundation various historians have looked for examples of Foucault's conceptual shift further back in time, one being the 'sodomitical subculture' of London's early eighteenth-century molly-houses. Though older, hidden forms of sodomy did not cease to exist, especially outside London, what we do have is a level of sexual specificity and visibility unprecedented in English society. The scene was infamously described by the satirist Ned Ward in 1709, who wrote of 'a particular Gang of Sodomitical Wretches [...] who call themselves the Mollies', who had a 'settled & constant Meeting' at a local tavern. These men made apparent their independence from the rest of society with their own distinctive conventions - of dress, language, gesture and act. According to Ward, they liked to 'mimic all manner of effeminacy', while a 1725 trial heard of 'men calling one another *my Dear* and hugging, kissing, and tickling each other', some 'completely rigged' in female clothing. Underlying all this was specifically sodomitical sexual attraction - a desire, said Ward, to 'commit those odious bestialities, that ought for ever to be without a name'.⁸⁸ One 1725 witness described how the mollies 'sat in one another's lap, talked bawdy, and practiced a great many indecencies', often leaving bedroom doors open so 'we could see part of their actions'.⁸⁹ Together, the various molly-houses constituted a coherent social underworld - one investigator recounted how an informer 'carried me and others to several Sodomitical Houses, in order to detect some Persons who frequented them', showing that circulation between the houses was common.⁹⁰ This was a society-within-society based on sexuality, not social background: members were drawn from the whole spectrum of lower and middle classes, and all of London's major occupations were represented; they could be old or young, effeminate or masculine, married or single.⁹¹ That the mollies possessed a

⁸⁷ Foucault, p.43.

⁸⁸ Edward Ward, *The History of the London Clubs* (London: J. Dutton, 1709), p.28; *Select Trials*, II, p.257.

⁸⁹ *Select Trials*, II, p.368.

⁹⁰ *Select Trials*, III, p.36.

⁹¹ Trumbach, p.19.

tangible sexual identity is also shown by the targeted persecution they suffered at the hands of the Societies for the Reformation of Manners. The Societies was a collective of London-based 'publick Confederacies', whose self-professed aim was 'to oppose associated, as well as particular Offenders' of vice, particularly sodomy. An 1738 account of its work credited it with a leading role since the turn of the century in the suppression of 'Sodomitical Haunts' and the purging of 'detestable Sodomites'.⁹² The Societies' efforts had no predecessor - while sodomy prosecutions were previously rare and diffuse occurrences, we now see active persecution concentrated on a distinct subculture; what had once been thought of as a universally potential sin had become the particular vice of particular people who could be recognised and targeted. Furthermore, the Societies' repression arguably only solidified this sodomitical identity. The endemic hostility it spearheaded ironically increased the need for a protective subculture and sense of belonging; 'mollies' would have found it increasingly hard to avoid the public image with which they were associated.

An almost coterminous campaign of persecution had an equally galvanising effect on piratical self-identification. This was the result of a gradual, late-seventeenth-century shift in English colonial policy: from a kind of 'adventure capitalism' that tacitly condoned plunder to a more settled mercantile imperialism which had room for neither privateer-pirates nor the non-state violence they practiced.⁹³ A succession of legal and institutional innovations, culminating in the 1700 'Act for the more effectual suppression of Piracy', eroded the ambiguity that had previously shielded the English practitioner of piracy from the label of pirate, meaning that for the first time he would be treated in a manner consistent with the previously only *discursive* vilification of the piratical subject. It was in these stark circumstances, at odds with the state, that a coherent pirate identity was formed - an identity which incorporated as *positive* the transgressive nature already associated with pirates. This echoes the arguments of Marcus Rediker, whose application of a Marxist model of class struggle to the Atlantic world - though overly dogmatic, and rose-tinted in its depiction of the

⁹² Samuel Smith, *A sermon preached to the Societies for Reformation of Manners* (London, 1738), p.24.

⁹³ Matthew Norton, 'Classification and Coercion: The Destruction of Piracy in the English Maritime System', *American Journal of Sociology*, 119 (2014), 1537-575 (p.1557).

pirate-as-revolutionary - does point towards the democratic, egalitarian and countercultural elements that the piratical identity embraced in its 'golden age'.⁹⁴ Evidence for this exists in ships' articles, some of the few first-hand sources pirates left behind. The very first item in Bartholomew Roberts's articles guaranteed that 'Every Man has a Vote in Affairs of Moment; has equal Title to the fresh Provisions, or strong Liquors'. As for the captain, the pirate crew, said Johnson, 'only permit him to be Captain, on Condition, that they may be Captain over him', giving him none of the preferments routinely claimed by merchant and naval captains.⁹⁵ Part of what allowed this transgressive sense of self to flourish was its release from the constraints of national loyalty - while pirates had always been known rhetorically as men of no country, with the punitive power of the English state now turned against them this really was the case. When hailed by another ship, pirates usually answered that they came 'from the seas', not any particular country; for the first time, many began to sail under the same black flag, signalling a radically different sense of belonging.⁹⁶ Pirates indeed had a discernible fraternal impulse, nowhere more forcefully expressed than in their acts of revenge: in 1720 Roberts' crew 'openly and in the daytime burnt and destroyed' some naval vessels near Basseterre to avenge the execution of 'their comrades at Nevis' and warned that 'they would Come and Burn the Town [...] for hanging the Pyrates there'. This was emblematic of the self-confidence these pirates had in who they were; a collectivist, transgressive identity forged in a mortal struggle for survival. By calling themselves 'Gentlemen' and 'Honest Men', by speaking proudly of their 'Honour' and 'Conscience', and by going 'to the Gallows without a Tear', pirates flaunted this new identity.⁹⁷

How then can we connect two developments that, while they took shape in the same few decades, seem on the surface so categorically different? The answer, I believe, lies in a broad and essential shift that English society underwent in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries - a shift that fundamentally redefined how

⁹⁴ Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh, *The Many-headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon, 2013), p.172.

⁹⁵ *General History*, I, pp.230, 234.

⁹⁶ Marcus Rediker, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (London: Verso, 2012), p.8.

⁹⁷ *Villains*, pp.96-7.

early moderns conceptualised both their world and the place of the individual within it. We have already seen the extent to which society's fears are made in its own image - to Tudors and early Stuarts, pirates and sodomites were general, metaphysical threats, reflecting a mental framework that embraced divinely-ordained and universal truths and the symbiosis of microcosm and macrocosm. But now there was a great transition, perhaps best embodied in the writings of John Locke, something of a philosophical fulcrum for his age. 'Abstract ideas', said he, 'give us no knowledge of real existence at all'; for they were 'general and universal' and thus 'belong not to the real existence of things, which are all of them particular in their existence'.⁹⁸ Truth, in Locke's empirical paradigm, was something 'which the mind arrives at by deduction made from such ideas, which it has got by the use of its natural faculties' - only individual reason, not the dictates of church or state, could determine the true nature of things.⁹⁹ This outlook was supported by a number of coterminous developments. English intellectual horizons had, before the mid-seventeenth century, been strangely untouched by the discovery of the New World - the idea of a designed creation into which the Americas, however strange, had somehow to be incorporated, was instinctively accepted. Now though, clear evidence of difference began to challenge long-established English (and European) monopolies on truth.¹⁰⁰ Change also came from above - the invention and refinement of the telescope made apparent the existence of a plurality of planets, seriously challenging the doctrine that man and the Earth were God's singular and perfect creation.¹⁰¹ In a section entitled 'Of Faith and Reason, and their distinct provinces', Locke argued that the former, 'not made out by the deductions of reason', should be relegated to a much narrower scope, effectively abandoning religious language and its traditional demonology as an appropriate medium of intellectual investigation.¹⁰² The effect this sea-change had on two figures as significant as the sodomite and pirate should not be understated - in an atomised, pluralistic and increasingly secularised society, aware if not tolerant of novelty, the

⁹⁸ John Locke, *An essay concerning humane understanding*, 5th edn (London: Churchill, 1706), p.528.

⁹⁹ *An essay concerning humane understanding*, p.581.

¹⁰⁰ John Elliott Huxtable, *The Old World and the New: 1492-1650* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), p.29.

¹⁰¹ Grant Mccolley, 'The Seventeenth-century Doctrine of a Plurality of Worlds', *Annals of Science*, 1 (1936), 385-430 (pp.385, 426).

¹⁰² *An essay concerning humane understanding*, p.581.

two went from impersonal archetypes, more monsters than men, to particular kinds of individual, real and recognisable not just to external observers, but to themselves.

As important, and very much related to this new stress on particularity, was a radically different notion of the role and rights of the individual within society. Locke was again at the forefront of this intellectual movement, asserting in his *Second Treatise of Government* that 'all men are naturally in [...] a state of perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit [...] without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man'. The only role of government, empowered by the explicit consent of its people, was to protect these rights.¹⁰³ Here were the beginnings of a society characterised by individualism - no longer were all its members thought to be bound together in a great hierarchical chain of being, ultimately subordinate to the will of the universe. Now, said Locke, 'careful and constant pursuit of true and solid happiness [...] is the necessary foundation of our liberty'.¹⁰⁴ This was the result of a nebulous web of factors - the economic individualism that emerged alongside nascent capitalism; the reaction to the excesses of the Puritans' prolonged moral crusade after 1660 and the end of any desire for a monolithic national church; the slow dying away of the paranoid siege mentality that marked Europe during the painful process of confessionalisation - the result of which was, in Lawrence Stone's words, a trans-societal 'relaxation of psychological tension' that allowed a yearning for autonomy to flourish.¹⁰⁵ It is this impulse at work in a ballad extolling Captain Avery, 'Lately Gone to Sea to Seek his Fortune', first published in 1694. It begins with a cry to arms: 'Come all you brave Boys, whose Courage is bold,/Will you venture with me, I'll glut you with Gold?' As for Avery's commission: 'I made it myself [...] this is the Course I intend for to steer' - within the maritime community, there were few more clear signs of self-determination than these. Thus he and his crew represent the liberated *homo economicus* pursuing, in a Lockean fashion, this-worldly happiness - 'now sworn by the Bread and the

¹⁰³ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, 5th edn (London, 1728), p.145.

¹⁰⁴ *An essay concerning humane understanding*, p.169.

¹⁰⁵ Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), pp.258-266.

Wine,/More serious [...] than any Divine'.¹⁰⁶ And though it may have been apocryphal, Johnson's narrative of Captain Misson showed that pirates could mean something radically different to what they once had - theirs was 'a brave, a just, an innocent, and a noble Cause; the Cause of Liberty'; though Misson still declared 'War on all the World', this was a lawful fight to protect 'that Liberty to which he had a Right by the Laws of Nature'.¹⁰⁷ A quieter, yet equally radical sentiment is evident in the words of John Bowes in 1718 - accosted committing sodomy in Covent Garden he cried out: 'Sirrah what's that to you, cant I make use of my own Body? I have done nothing but what I will do again'. It's also present in the defence of William Brown in 1726, asked at trial why he took such 'indecent Liberties'. 'I did it because I thought I knew him,' he replied, 'and I think there is no Crime in making what use I please of my own Body'.¹⁰⁸ These men, whether pirates or sodomites, are making claims that would have been inconceivable a century before: claims that reflected a changing conception of man's place in the universe, in which the pursuit of individual desires - economic, sexual or otherwise - began to overpower the constraints of church and state.

Certainly, this is not to say that English society was on the cusp of a revolutionary age of personal liberation. Pirates were still criminals, and efforts to destroy them in the Atlantic would reach a peak in the early 1720s - between 1716 and 1726, more than 500 were hanged by the state.¹⁰⁹ Likewise, sodomy would continue to warrant prosecution for centuries, and execution, at least prescriptively, until 1861. However, it is at this moment, poised between two centuries that, as Paul Hazard once wrote, 'a new order of things began its course'.¹¹⁰ From hence emerged an intellectual framework that, in its individualism, its secularisation, its ability to conceive of plurality, is notably more modern and familiar than what came before. While the pirate and the sodomite had once been described in primarily religious language, as

¹⁰⁶ *A Copy of Verses, Composed by Captain Henry Every, Lately Gone to Sea to seek his Fortune* (London: Theophilus Lewis, 1694).

¹⁰⁷ *General History*, II, pp.16, 12.

¹⁰⁸ *The Proceedings on the King's Commission of the Peace, and Oyer and Terminer [...] on Friday, Saturday, and Monday, being the 5th, 6th, and 8th, of December, 1718* (London, 1718), pp.3-4; *Select Trials*, III, pp.39-40.

¹⁰⁹ *Villains of All Nations*, p.152.

¹¹⁰ Paul Hazard, *The Crisis of the European Mind 1680-1715* (New York: NYR, 2013), p.447.

preternatural, universal threats, they were now transformed from archetypes into individuals, with identities that acknowledged or even embraced real-world difference. Charting this evolution over the course of two centuries has, I hope, provided a new and revealing vantage point from which to view so significant and systemic a change in English social and intellectual life.

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