PIRATES, TRAITORS, AND APOSTATES

Renegade Identities in Early Modern English Writing

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Running Down the "Runagate"

John Ward grew up in Plymouth, England, as the son of a poor fisherman and became a fisherman himself, an occupation that Elizabethans scorned as "masterless" – paltry, contingent, and outside protective guild structures. Fishermen were highly susceptible to impressment into the navy – an institution hated for its meagre pay and slave-like conditions. The navy conscripted Ward in 1603, but he would not serve for long. One night after a drinking bout, he and several comrades seized a merchant ship in Portsmouth Harbour and sailed away. Elected captain, Ward thus began his career as one of the age's most dreaded pirates. He terrorized Mediterranean merchants, sold his own countrymen in slave markets, and, most notoriously in the eyes of his Christian contemporaries, converted to Islam.

In a 1609 play treating Ward's life, Robert Daborne imagined the corsair dying in ignominy on African shores, betrayed by his alliances and bemoaning the day he ever aspired above his lowly station. But according to the shipmaster Andrew Barker, the real Captain Ward had retired in a Tunisian palace, living "in a most princely and magnificent state," wearing "curious and costly" clothing, and eating "sumptuous" food. "I do not know any Peere in England," Barker wrote, "that beares up his post in more dignitie, nor hath his Attendants more obsequious unto him" (C2ᵛ). John Ward died not in the humiliating state that Daborne assigned him, but rather as a wealthy apostate, as far from the Plymouth fishing waters as the English could imagine.

Of Ward's many crimes, the worst of all in Daborne's view was his conversion to Islam, as the play's title – *A Christian Turned Turk* – suggests. This act made Ward a "renegado" – a person who, in renouncing the Christian faith, also renounces his country and thus becomes a traitor.

But the several contemporaneous texts that detailed Ward's story suggest something else – that his aspirations above his social station in fact constituted his worst sin. They portray him as the vilest of overreachers, a vulgar man never content with the lot decreed by his birth. The alleged defiance that led Ward to desert the queen's service links him to another version of the word "renegado" – that is, the "runagate" – defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "a vagabond, a wanderer; a restless roving person" who defies the stabilizing norms of his society. This older cognate of "renegade" roots Ward's colourful legend in a more homely phenomenon – that of the runaway apprentice or disobedient labourer, the fearsome and unruly "masterless man" that statutes such as the 1563 Statute of Artificers, the 1572 Vagrancy and Poor Relief Act, and the 1601 Poor Relief Act all sought to manage. Effectively, the term "runagate" situates the transnational figure of the "renegado" in a history of resistance to domestic oppression.

This book explores how literary representations of renegades in late Tudor and early Jacobean England – an era of both "masterlessness" at home and increasing commercial activity abroad – marshalled history to make the renegade speak provocatively to diverse audiences. In tracing the projection of domestic discourses outside English borders, I make several claims. First, by expanding the repertoire of vagrancy to include mercenaries, pirates, and adventurers, *Pirates, Traitors, and Apostates* argues that these figures do not merely threaten English identity through their "outsider" status, as some critics claim. Rather, I find a pattern that at first may seem counterintuitive – that renegades invite critical reflection on English identity by demonstrating their enduring *connection* to the land and its people, a bond expressed through languages of social class. From this stems my second claim: that the commonalities, not the differences, between renegades and their public made these tales successful, leading writers to produce multiple versions of renegades' individual stories across decades or even centuries. Third, I find that versions of renegade tales change in significant ways not only across time but across different types of writing – ballads, plays, travel accounts, romances, and polemical prose. This mutability argues for the centrality of genre in renegade representations. Finally, I note that the narrative capaciousness enabled by generic diversity accompanies a rhetorical construction of audiences that are themselves socially diverse, sharing with the renegade a range of experiences, including poverty, itinerary, and social and economic aspiration. The blurring of distinctions between the settled English subject and the

putative English "other" expands the political conversation about renegades beyond standard moral condemnations into new and subversive directions. In fact I have discovered that these tales, by drawing connections between the renegade and the obedient English subject, foreshadow emancipatory potential in England's transition to a capitalist economy – a revelation that stokes, rather than contains, the cultivation of renegade desire.

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Barker's sneering description of Ward's ersatz "dignitie" lends a distinct class-based dimension to Ward's religious and political transgression. As such, Barker extends the domestic languages of hierarchy to rhetorically rein in a figure who is, strictly speaking, no longer domestic. This transposition anticipates habits of thought that David Cannadine finds in later centuries. Specifically, Cannadine argues that the British Empire's very organization reflected a preoccupation with status that made the entire empire into a projection of the British class system. This extension of hierarchical thinking across borders, he elaborates, characterizes a people "at least as likely to envisage the social structure of their empire – as their predecessors had done before them – by analogy to what they knew of 'home,' or in replication of it, or in parallel to it, or in extension of it, or (sometimes) in idealization of it, or (even, and increasingly) in nostalgia for it." Cannadine characterizes this thinking as "hallowed by time and precedent." Thus his argument invites a look backwards into the early modern roots of a deeply embedded mindset (4–5, 4).

I propose that the conceptual link between the domestic vagrant and the world traveller resides in the concept of *mobility* as a pressure point on the coherence of "Englishness." The specter of "masterlessness" – that is, the omnipresence of the itinerant poor in the towns, in the countryside, and on the roads – presented a major crisis to Tudor society. The late medieval enclosure laws led to a sharp increase in destitute men, women, and children migrating from town to town, begging for relief, and attempting to eke out meagre wages for daily subsistence.[1] The poor flocked especially to London in search of such relief, resulting in a population boom that the city's institutions and infrastructure strained to accommodate.[2] Statutes imposing harsh labour discipline on the poor and punishing those who shirked service, ran away from a master, or bilked parishes out of poor relief reflected these pressures.

Writers such as Thomas Awdeley, Thomas Harman, Robert Greene, and Thomas Dekker appropriated the moral category of the undeserving poor for popular entertainment, as their "coney-catching" tales of criminal trickery detailed the alleged cleverness of shifty migrants.[3] The possibility that such men and women would transform their itinerary into opportunity, as Ward had, helped construct poverty as inchoate criminality awaiting discipline.

At the heart of it all lurked a deep layer of cultural anxiety about social mobility. As Linda Woodbridge argues, "[F]ulminations against vagrants' geographical mobility project or displace other kinds of change and mobility: religious and intellectual change, social mobility" (26). That writers such as Daborne would cast Ward's religious apostasy as an internationalized form of domestic masterlessness then comes as no surprise. Vagrancy was a fruitful topic for writers because it made England's political and economic difficulties manifest and visible. Contemporaries saw vagrancies as a blot on the health of the nation and an embarrassment. Woodbridge describes "upbeat Renaissance publicists" who struggled to incorporate this aspect of social reality into their vision; these nationalists considered vagrancy a threat to national pride (13).

Cultural suspicion towards the itinerant poor raises the question of the degree to which normative English identity was a matter of being (in Patricia Fumerton's term) *settled*, and how exactly that settledness was meant to register in the context of an individual life. English attitudes towards travellers hint at expectations similar to those governing perceptions of the masterless. Despite the country's rapidly increasing commercial and diplomatic openness to the rest of the world, English culture and attitudes remained notably insular throughout the period. There was a general resistance towards travel.[4] Newly returned English merchants and sailors attracted suspicion owing to their recent exposure to strange customs, fashions, and religious practices; travellers thus faced intense pressure to demonstrate a core of orthodox "Englishness" uncorrupted by foreign contact.[5] To English people, Andrew Hadfield argues, travellers resembled "nomads who have no rooted sense of place and no means of establishing proper, settled communities" (106).[6]

Different types of travellers were regarded with suspicion. "Factors," for example, who negotiated on behalf of English merchants with foreign agents, required a great deal of trust from their employers, owing to the factor's potential to deceive, flatter, and assimilate.[7] English

prejudices against foreign contact extended such suspicions of cultural malleability to merchants themselves and even passengers on trading ships, particularly those outside the nobility.[8] Even peers of the realm who undertook diplomatic missions had to do so with clear royal dispensation and had to demonstrate their resistance to the influences of foreign culture and religion. Travel advice aimed at such emissaries instructed readers to remain stolidly "English" when conducting business abroad, even while, paradoxically, attributing a veneer of learned sophistication to exposure to the best of foreign cultures.[9]

Thus, on the one hand, English travellers risked corruption merely by the act of transporting themselves physically abroad; yet, as books and pamphlets offering advice to travellers commonly suggested, remaining "English" was largely a matter of stolid inward character. This nexus of ideals converges on – and is disrupted by – the renegade as a creature both English *and* foreign. Renegade texts, as they struggle to describe a transnational social identity, respond by deploying class descriptions that bind the renegade to the home country. The 1682 poem "Apostasy Punish'd," which treats the "deserved death" of the renegade Jonas Rowland, illustrates the pattern. Rowland's story mingles the temptations of foreign religion with suggestions of underclass insubordination. The poem's anonymous author asserts that Rowland's alleged murder of the Morrocan ambassador was a natural consequence of his apostasy, "A thing that's against the Rules of Nature," and thus affirms Rowland's "unnatural" disposition (n.p.). Invoking the spectre of the runaway apprentice to characterize Rowland's crimes, the poem describes him as a "Renegado" who "from his Master run [*sic*]" – in other words, as a "runagate" who fled his country, his god, and perhaps his literal master in order "to be free." Ultimately, the poem explains this will to freedom as resulting from "travells of the brain" – that is, a disposition towards roaming. "Apostasy Punish'd" assigns a series of causes and effects to the moral fable of Jonas Rowland – *first*, he possesses "travels of the brain," and *then* he breaks away from his "Master," making himself "free" to betray his god and *then* commit murder.

"Apostasy Punish'd" provides one example of how doctrines of religious and social obedience mutually reinforced one another, casting social rebellion as violation of divine order. The Judeo-Christian scriptures rely heavily on vocabularies of debt, bondage, and redemption to articulate religious authority; these references are not mere metaphors but reflective of actual master-servant and master-slave relationships

at the time of the scriptures' writing.[10] Early modern sermons address-ing renegades similarly conflate the religious and the economic. Wil-liam Gouge's *Recovery from Apostasy* (1639), for example, invokes the putative sinfulness of "abandoning" or "running" from one's economic obligations and, by extension, one's obligations to society. Drawing on the parable of the prodigal son, Gouge uses the term "Father" to con-flate God, father, and master into something from which the renegade runs: "when [the renegade] went out of his Fathers house he proved an Apostate. His Fathers house was the church, wherein alone were the means of salvation" (C). This church, Gouge later comments, was "a prison" to the apostate, who rails against it in quest of some illu-sory notion of liberty until he returns to obedience and thus, paradoxi-cally, becomes "the Lords freeman," subject to a master who "dearely bought" him (I4^v, C2^v, D4^v). In a rhetorical move that denies the specific-ity of captive experience – a situation in which a captured Englishman, especially a common one unlikely to be ransomed, might accept his captor's religion to free himself – Gouge renders the actual experience of chains, torments, and confinement illusory when compared to "slav-ery under sinne and Satan" (C4). For Gouge, who compares the peni-tent apostate to a wife returning to her husband after having "formerly lived loosely" (M3^v), apostasy represents rebellion against patriarchal control, an act of defiance that belies the physical and psychological hardships that might lead one to "turn" in the first place.[11]

Renegade tales similarly appropriate, extend, and refigure literary tropes of masterlessness within the rapidly expanding sphere of inter-national commerce, but the range of texts addressed in this book reveals a more complex conversation about mobility than "Apostasy Punish'd" or Gouge's sermon indicate on their own. *Pirates, Traitors, and Apostates* adds an overlooked but crucial dimension to previous scholarly dis-cussions that draw on interlocking discourses of race, religion, gender, and nationality to account for renegade behaviour. According to Ania Loomba, converting to Islam violated the trifecta of "common heri-tage, bloodline, and religion" that defined the English as a "race," thus awakening a nexus of religious, racial, and national anxieties about invasion, miscegenation, and foreignness in general (*Shakespeare* 24). Apostasy also raised the threat of English emasculation, as Jonathan Burton shows in his discussion of dramatic episodes that portrayed "compromised Christian male bodies," especially the circumcision rituals (widely misunderstood as castration) prevalent in the period's "Turk" plays (*Traffic* 111). Daniel Vitkus, who also notes themes of

anxious masculinity and sexual transgression, expands the context for apostasy to include Anglo-Ottoman commercial and cultural exchange. The renegade, in Vitkus's account, embodies the cultural and economic vulnerabilities that belied mutually beneficial commercial and diplomatic relations between England and the Mediterranean world.[12] In other words, the renegade testified to the cost of participating in the Mediterranean marketplace, which was both violent and multicultural and therefore placed intense pressure on concepts of national identity as fixed and innate (*Turning* 113, 162).

To be sure, contemporary writers drew on a multiplicity of overlapping discourses to understand and explain the confounding spectacle of the Englishman who "turned" to Islam. As Patricia Parker points out, they often applied the word "preposterous" to such conversions. Further, she writes, that word associates the phenomenon of Christians "turning Turk" with spiritual and sexual degeneracy as well as with aspiring above one's social class. As chapter 2 will describe, the case of *A Christian Turned Turk*'s renegade character, Gismund, who invokes what Parker terms "the original luciferic upstart," exemplifies this point.[13] The implied connection between religious apostasy and lowly ambition, as displayed by such figures, invites a more thorough investigation of how class discourses measured the renegade's divergence from social norms.[14]

Recent work on early capitalist expansion argues further for class as a category for analysis, because in the early modern period, states, merchants, diplomats, military personnel, and even criminal outliers such as pirates facilitated developments that persist today, such as capital's reliance on cheap labour across the world. Linda Colley demonstrates how enterprises in North Africa, the Americas, and India depended on the forced expulsion of the English poor to these sites, many of whom were eventually left to languish in captivity, unransomed, never seeing England again. David Armitage points to such practices to suggest that early English colonial enterprise had as much to do with managing the domestic population as it did the acquisition of wealth and power abroad.[15] Mark Netzloff also has examined underclass experience from the vantage point of global capitalism, noting in particular how texts "racialized" the poor as ethnically inferior and thus rationalized deportation and forced labour. Crucially, Netzloff's study demonstrates the evolving dialectical relationship between domestic social crises and international expansion – a just emphasis, given that the industries employing labourers at home had come to depend on expansion into

foreign markets. Patricia Fumerton's work on the English seaman as well as Amanda Bailey's and Crystal Bartolovich's work on indentured labour in the Americas further illustrate the evolving nature of socio-economic experience as both domestic *and* international.[16] These studies lend a material dimension to literary analyses that treat class on a more purely discursive level, such as Barbara Fuchs's study of pirates whose activities troubled class-based distinctions between the lowly pirate and the gentleman privateer.[17]

All of these analyses, while local and specific, also gesture towards enduring forms of labour and entrepreneurship in which global contexts both confirm and disrupt status hierarchies forged within national borders. Renegade tales make those disruptions not only visible, but entertaining, provocative, and even inspiring. Their capacity to evoke such responses resides not only in their fantastical subject matter, but in the particular ways they construct and engage diverse audiences.

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Some renegade texts address audiences with a clear didactic purpose, which is to portray the inhumanity of the renegade and dissuade audiences from following his path. But other texts borrow from these conventional approaches only to complicate the very moral message they impart. Such contradictions often follow the lines of admiring the renegade's defiance while at the same time critiquing the individualism thought to underpin that defiance. This complicated dynamic suggests that early modern English audiences may have been drawn to renegades for reasons that differ significantly from how audiences respond to renegades today.

The embeddedness of the apparently singular figure of the renegade in common experience – that is, in the *un*singular – largely has been lost to modern audiences. Today the word "renegade" carries a romantic connotation, suggesting independence, free thinking, and self-determination in the face of conformist pressures. Individualistic cultures frequently valorize renegade behaviour as an effort to preserve personal autonomy against totalizing ideologies and regimes. Looking forward to the cultural potency of today's renegades in Western popular culture, some scholars have viewed early modern renegades as harbingers of Western culture's love affair with individualism – that is, as figures who manage to individuate themselves in the face of politically absolutist, religiously universalist, and socially oppressive ideologies, face