

OF PYRATES AND PICAROS: THE LITERARY LINEAGE OF CHARLES
JOHNSON'S *A GENERAL HISTORY OF THE PYRATES*

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of English
Sam Houston State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
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December, 2017

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated, first and foremost, to my parents, Bobby and Donna. Without the loving and stimulating environment in which you raised me and your continued support, none of my successes would have been possible. It is also dedicated to my former, current, and future students. You all are the very reason I do what I do.

ABSTRACT

Morris, Adam R., *Of pyrates and picaros: the literary lineage of Charles Johnson's A General History of the Pyrates*. Master of Arts (English), December, 2017, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas.

Charles Johnson's *A General History of the Pyrates* is a text that exists at the nexus of Atlantic history, Atlantic literary studies, and oceanic studies. Though the study of Johnson's work has most often been the province of historians, this thesis establishes the need to reconsider it as a literary artefact and explores its literary legacy and lineage through the use of material history and genre theories.

The initial chapter examines the evolution of *A General History* in transnational and transatlantic contexts, with an emphasis on its material history. This approach affords the opportunity to examine how changes to the text serve the rhetorical purposes of girding Johnson's credibility with his audience and of emphasizing the critical socio-political themes in the text, namely European culpability in the rise and perpetuation of piracy, and how these changes reflect a fluctuation in eighteenth-century concerns with piracy. Chapters two and three maintain a generic focus. Chapter two establishes the work as a piece of literature with divivable characteristics belonging to many genres and specifically acknowledges the picaresque novel's influence on the text, noting that the work borrowed from the Spanish literary tradition and that some figures in the text, Bartholomew Roberts in particular, function as English picaros. Chapter three focuses on the text's distinct political commentary and Johnson's mobilization of the English picaro as a vessel of criticism. The socio-political criticism evident in the English picaro female pirate narratives—those of Mary Read (and Anne Bonny, to a lesser extent)—is the manifestation, illustration, and extension of criticisms introduced in the preface and

introduction, both of which mark the text as a critique of English/European imperial practices and inefficiencies.

A close reading of Johnson's text reveals a nuanced view of eighteenth-century piracy. Ultimately, Johnson leverages the picaresque and other fictional elements for the sake of socio-political criticism and satire and argues that the scourge of piracy is a byproduct of the structural and administrative shortcomings of the European state at large, emphasizing the English role in the incubation of piracy.

KEY WORDS: *General History of the Pyrates*, Charles Johnson, Picaresque, Piracy, Satire, Atlantic studies, Oceanic studies, Bartholomew Roberts, Mary Read, Anne Bonny, Edward Teach, Sam Houston State University, Graduate School, Texas

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with the utmost pleasure that I thank the individuals who have made this thesis possible. I would like to thank my thesis committee members for their encouragement and invaluable feedback. I would also like to thank the English Department administration for granting me the opportunity and the funds to visit the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University for archival research. That experience was enjoyable, informative, and extremely fruitful. To the staff of the John Carter Brown Library, particularly Kimberly Nusco and Meghan Sullivan-Silva: thank you for getting me set up in the archives and for your assistance during my time there.

I cannot thank my parents, Bobby and Donna; my girlfriend, Lindsey; my sister, April; and my friends and colleagues enough. To my parents: thank you for always believing in me and encouraging me, in all things. To Lindsey: thank you for your patience, encouragement, and support; you inspire me to do more and to be more. To April: thank you for being the best older sister I could ever ask for; I aspire to be more like you.

Lastly, I would like to thank my thesis director, mentor, and friend, Dr. Jason Payton. I likely would not even be writing this if it were not for your recognizing my potential and your encouraging me to pursue a further academic career. Your unwavering support, honest feedback, and invaluable insight have been foundational and have rendered this process immensely enriching and fulfilling.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DEDICATION	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
 CHAPTER	
I FROM “NOTORIOUS” TO “NOTED”: THE MATERIAL EVOLUTION OF A <i>GENERAL HISTORY OF THE PYRATES</i>	1
May 1724: <i>Most Notorious Pyrates</i> and Initial Success	2
Late 1724 and 1725: Second and Third Editions and Waning Domestic Interest	9
1725: International Interest, Translations, and <i>Historie der Engelsche Zee- roovers</i>	15
1726 to 1728: Fourth English Edition, Volumes One and Two, and <i>Captain Misson</i>	21
1730s and 1740s: <i>A General History of the Lives and Adventures of the Most Famous Highwaymen, Murderers, Street-Robbers, Etc.</i>	27
Legacy	30
Notes	32
II THE GREAT PICARO ROBERTS: A <i>GENERAL HISTORY OF THE PYRATES</i> AND THE PICARESQUE	40

Of Captain Bartholomew Roberts, English Picaro, and the English Picaresque Tradition	45
Conclusion	60
Notes	62
III “A LIFE OF SO MUCH PERIL”: THE LIFE OF MARY READ, ENGLISH PICARA, AS SOCIO-POLITICAL SATIRE	
“Our Glorious <i>Britain</i> , My Dearly Loved Country”: The Preface and Introduction as Constructive Criticism	72
Atlantic Picaras and Socio-Political Critique	83
Conclusion	93
Notes	95
WORKS CITED	105
VITA	116

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1	B. Cole’s first-edition engravings of Bartholomew Roberts (left) and Edward Teach (right)	5
2	B. Cole’s engraving of Ann Bonny and Mary Read. The caption reads, “Ann Bonny and Mary Read convicted of Piracy Nov ^r . 28 th . 1720 at a Court of Vice Admiralty held at S ^t . Jago de la Vega in y ^e Island of Jamaica.”	6
3	B. Cole’s updated second-edition engravings of Bartholomew Roberts (left) and Edward Teach (right)	14
4	Engravings of Anne Bonny (left) and Mary Read (right) as rendered by an unnamed artist for <i>Historie der Engelsche Zee-roovers</i>	18
5	A comparison of the title pages of the first (left), second (middle), and fourth (right) editions of <i>A General History of the Pyrates</i>	85

CHAPTER I

From “Notorious” to “Noted”: The Material Evolution of *A General History of the Pirates*

In the opening chapter of *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800*, David Armitage professes that “[w]e are all Atlanticists now,” noting how the “explosion of interest in the Atlantic” is currently shaping the study of not only history, but also “literature, economics, and sociology” (11). “During the past decade,” Eric Slauter similarly notes, “literary scholars have produced an impressive list of books and articles in the emerging field of Atlantic literary history” (153). Slauter recognizes, however, that “[w]hile literary studies once served as a major exporter of ideas and methods to the human sciences, especially history, literary scholars now import more from historians than they export to them” and that “a trade deficit now exists on the side of literary studies” (153). The critical paradigm shift towards oceanic studies is similarly impacting the study of literature. Margaret Cohen acknowledges that “despite the preeminence of maritime transport in making the modern world, literary scholars across the twentieth century passed over its impact with their gazes fixed on land” and advocates for more attention to be paid to maritime works (“Literary Studies” 657). Hester Blum argues that a shift to an oceanic approach “would allow for a galvanization of the erasure, elision, and fluidity at work in the metaphors of the sea that would better enable us to see and to study the *work* of oceanic literature” (670). It is in this liminal space—in the nexus of Atlantic history, Atlantic literary studies, and oceanic studies—that Captain Charles Johnson’s *A General History of the Pirates* exists.¹ As the title might suggest, historians of both the Atlantic world and piracy have long looked to this text as a credible source of

information. Though study of this text has been by and large the province of historians, I aim to establish its literary history and explore the literary forces at work in the text.

This chapter examines the evolution of *A General History* in transnational and transatlantic contexts, with an emphasis on its material history. This approach affords the opportunity to examine the relationship between the shifting material form of the text, the shifting ideas about piracy contained therein, and the shifting popular perception of piracy during the early eighteenth century. I explore how changes to the text serve the rhetorical purposes of girding Johnson's credibility with his audience and of emphasizing the critical socio-political themes in the text, namely European culpability in the rise and perpetuation of piracy, and how these changes reflect a fluctuation in eighteenth-century concerns with piracy.

May 1724: *Most Notorious Pyrates* and Initial Success

The initial edition of *A General History of the Pyrates* was published in London on May 14, 1724 (Cordingly, *Pirate Hunter of the Caribbean* 204; *Under the Black Flag* xix).² The first edition consists of a brief introduction and preface, both of which would be expanded upon in the second edition; fourteen chapters, thirteen of which are dedicated to pirate narratives; and "A [S]hort Abstract of the Statute and Civil Law, in Relation to Piracy" (Johnson, *General History of the Robberies*; ed. 1, title page). The second chapter, titled "The Rise of the Pyrates," is bookended by chapters dedicated to Captain Avery and Captain Martel, chapters one and three respectively, a jarring organizational move that is rectified by Johnson and printer Thomas Warner in the second edition. This emendation serves to maintain the focus on the pirate narratives themselves, the true draw of the text.

The pirate narratives are presented in the following order: Avery, Martel, Bonnet, Thatch (changed to Teach in later editions), Vane, Rackam, England, Davis, Roberts, Worley, Lowther, Low, and Evans. Interestingly, though Johnson emphasizes Roberts's importance in and centrality to the text in his preface, noting that Roberts "*made more Noise in the World, than some others,*" he is not among the pirates singled out on the title page and presumably in marketing material (*General History of the Robberies*; ed. 1, preface). That distinction goes to "the famous Captain Avery" and "the two Female Pyrates, Mary Read and Anne Bonny" (*General History of the Robberies*; ed. 1, title page). Read and Bonny are among the more recognizable pirates to emerge from *A General History*, yet neither woman has a chapter dedicated to her exclusively. Rather, both pirates' tales are nested within that of John Rackam—more commonly referred to as "Calico Jack" Rackam—who served as their captain. However, both are immortalized in one of the three engravings included in the text.

The three images incorporated into early editions of *A General History* depict four of the more infamous pirates represented in the text: Edward "Blackbeard" Teach, Anne Bonny and Mary Read, and Bartholomew "Black Bart" Roberts. Other than providing a visual representation of the pirates themselves, these images serve as a window into the contemporary perception of pirates as simultaneously a part of and an existential threat to the imperial machine. Credit for the images goes to B. Cole, an artist who, according to Carolyn Eastman, "borrowed aspects of earlier pirate images—fierce scowls, drawn weapons, aggressive postures, and dramatic background action," yet "set a new pattern with his strong emphasis on 'erect' swords, pistols, and hatchets" (107). All four pirates depicted in Cole's engravings bear this out: Roberts holds his unsheathed rapier aloft,

Blackbeard and Anne Bonny bear their cutlasses similarly, and Mary Read brandishes a hatchet. All stand with legs apart and feet firmly planted on the foregrounded land while behind each lies a body of water littered with vessels in various states of combat. Teach and Roberts are even posed similarly—swords held at the ready in right hands with left hands placed upon the hip. Bonny and Read are depicted together in similar garb and in equal states of combat readiness. Of Bonny and Read, Sally O’Driscoll notes that this representation “emphasizes their ferocity and their masculine aspect” as they are pictured “brandishing their weapons, dressed in jackets and wide-legged pants, and ready to fight” (357, 359). (See Figures 1 and 2.)

Significantly, as noted, all are depicted on land rather than at sea. Positioning the pirates on land serves to emphasize Johnson’s critique that imperial practices gave rise to the pirates. European powers held dominion over the land in ways they did not, and possibly could not, over the sea. Depicting the pirates on land, on imperially dominated grounds, as it were, suggests that their creation and continued existence is squarely in control of these landed European powers, a sentiment established in Johnson’s preface and introduction. Despite their landedness, their readied weaponry and general combat readiness paint them in a menacing, threatening light. It is as if they are not merely existing on these beaches but storming them, invading them. To Johnson, they are at once born of the empire and a threat to its prosperity, a critique embodied in Cole’s imagery. Even though, as the text was updated and corrected for later editions, some changes were incorporating into Cole’s engravings, the essential elements of the pirate images—their landedness and their threatening poses—remained consistent.

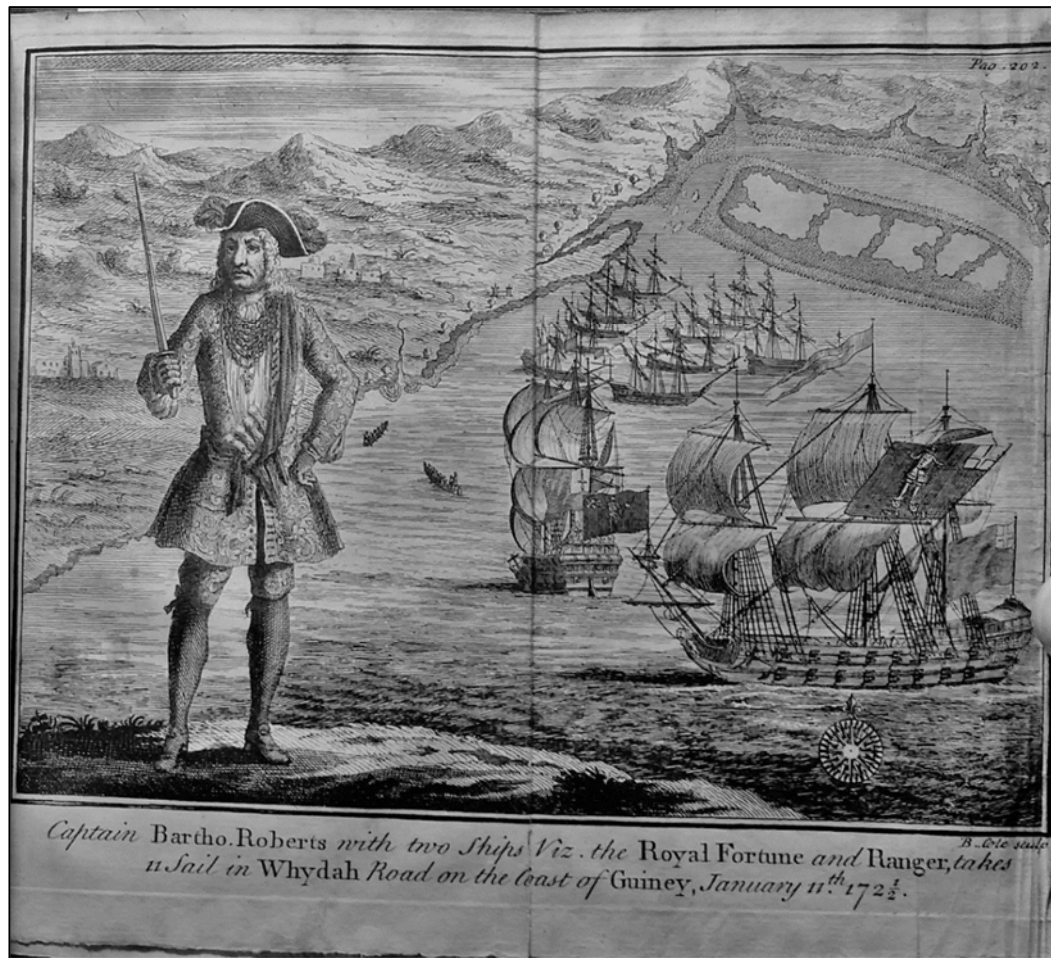


Figure 1: B. Cole's first-edition engravings of Bartholomew Roberts (left) and Edward Teach (right). Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University. From Charles Johnson's *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pyrates, and Also Their Policies, Discipline and Government, from Their First Rise and Settlement in the Island of Providence, in 1717, to Present Year 1724* (1st edition). Used under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 / Desaturated from originals.



Figure 2: B. Cole's engraving of Ann Bonny and Mary Read. The caption reads, "Ann Bonny and Mary Read convicted of Piracy Nov^r. 28th. 1720 at a Court of Vice Admiralty held at S^t. Jago de la Vega in y^e Island of Jamaica." Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University. From Charles Johnson's *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 Present Year 1724* (1st edition). Used under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 / Desaturated from original.

Printed for “[Charles] Rivington at the *Bible and Crown* in *St. Paul’s Church-Yard*,” the first edition suffered from “disorganization . . . discontinuity and . . . numerous errors” (Johnson, *General History of the Robberies*; ed. 1, title page; Schonhorn xxxii).³ Some of this can be attributed to the fact that Johnson was pulling from a litany of sources, among them “witness accounts, newspaper reports, trial records, personal letters, and manuscript sources,” and that information, even from the London press, was “often confusing, contradictory or simply wrong” (Hanna 398; Schonhorn xxxiii).⁴ “By 1717,” writes historian Arne Bialuschewski, “England had a vibrant newspaper culture, largely based in London,” and “[j]ournalists picked up all kinds of stories that promised to interest a wide readership,” many of which were “highly exaggerated or false” (“Blackbeard: Creation of a Legend” 47). Despite the prevalence of inaccurate information, some “factual errors” can likely also be chalked up to Johnson’s liberal enweaving of fiction throughout the pirate narratives. Flaws inherent in the text aside, this edition would prove successful and served as a competent skeleton for the richer, more expanded editions that soon followed.

The success of this first edition is well-documented.⁵ Perhaps this fact was anticipated and expected. Bialuschewski explains,

Starting in the middle of the sixteenth century the Stationers’ Company kept a series of registers into which all books printed by members were required to be entered before publication. In reality, however, only a small proportion of new books were registered. The ever growing number of publishers, who usually bought manuscripts for a lump sum from authors, presumably wanted to save the costs involved and only entered books when they intended to secure the property

rights of the work. The *General History* was evidently published in expectation of its becoming a commercial success, as it was registered with the Stationers' Company on 24 June 1724 "for Nathaniel Mist" by his foreman John Wolfe. ("Daniel Defoe, Nathaniel" 26)

Indeed, it proved so popular that a second, expanded edition was "concluded and published in August" of 1724, a mere three months after the initial release of *A General History* (Schonhorn xxxiii). According to Johnson himself, "*The first Impression having been received with so much Success by the Publick, occasioned a very earnest Demand for a second*" (*General History of the Pyrates*; ed. 2, preface). In the months following the second edition's publication in London, advertisements cropped up in Philadelphia's *American Weekly Mercury*, running from December 29, 1724 to January 12, 1725.⁶ Advertisements for the text's first edition had not appeared in the weekly paper, but by the time the second edition had been published, it had apparently gained popularity and notoriety enough to warrant publication and advertisement outside of the British mainland.⁷

The circulation of the text alone is telling in that it suggests Johnson's depiction of piracy and the social critique inherent in the text struck a particular resonance with contemporary English readers. Johnson's influence extended beyond readers, however. Mark Hanna maintains that *A General History*, particularly the narrative of Captain Low, served as inspiration for Daniel Defoe's *The Four Years Voyages of Capt. George Roberts*, "an entirely fictional tale of a captain taken prisoner by Low" (401). Taken together, the ubiquity of the text and its influence on authors whose works would also inform the contemporary conversation on piracy give credence to the idea that Johnson's

work serves both as a cornerstone of the popular perception of piracy and as a window into early eighteenth-century views of both piracy and empire.

Late 1724 and 1725: Second and Third Editions and Waning Domestic Interest

With the second edition, now titled *A General History of the Pyrates, from Their Rise and Settlement in the Island of Providence, to the Present Time*, Johnson expanded the scope of the text, revising previously existing chapters in ways that would appear to emphasize his objectivity and journalistic integrity but truly serve the purpose of bolstering his rhetorical ethos. Printed by Thomas Warner, “one of Defoe’s most important printers,” this edition was a “reordered . . . rearranged” and expanded version of the first edition (Schonhorn xxxiii, xxxiv).⁸ Both title page and preface refer to the additional material: in a postscript to the original preface, Johnson informs his readers that additions of new material and up-to-date information necessitated an increase in both the bulk of the volume and the overall price (*General History of the Pyrates*; ed. 2, preface).⁹ The reasoning for the additions? “[S]everal Persons who had been taken by the Pyrates, as well as others who had been concerned in taking of them,” Johnson writes, “have been so kind to communicate several Facts and Circumstances to us, which had escaped us in the first Impression” (preface).¹⁰ As Johnson notes—in an effort to ameliorate his audience’s reaction to the increased price tag and to instill confidence in him as a credible source of information—the added material was not of an immaterial nature. For one, the second chapter, “The Rise of the Pyrates,” was removed from the body of the text and much of the information therein moved to the introduction. Moreover, substantive additions, notes Schonhorn, “were made in almost every biography; the excursions of Anstis were completely revised; and two new chapters, on

Phillips and Spriggs, were added, with news of the latter carried right down to the date of publication” (xxxiv).

The language of the original preface and its newly addended postscript evinces that authenticity, or at least the appearance thereof, is a concern for Johnson. The attempt to be as current as possible and to inject into the text information that “*escaped [him] in the first Impression*” presents Johnson as a humble, disinterested party whose only intentions are preserving authenticity, “*satisfy[ing] the Publick,*” and “*making the Book useful*” (*General History of the Pyrates*; ed. 2, preface). His highlighting of the newly included descriptions of Brazil and St. Thomas serves a similar function; of all the new material incorporated, he directs his readers to the more objective, scientific additions to the text, presenting himself as an author interested in chronicling and communicating factual information.¹¹ He even goes so far as to defend the authenticity of the pirate biographies against what appears to be contemporary criticism directly, noting that though “*some Gentleman have rais’d an Objection against the Truth of its Contents,*” every fact in the text is provable by “*credible Witness*” (preface). Given that Johnson had clear rhetorical purposes, his attempt to establish a credible ethos reads as a move designed to render his socio-political critiques more believable and powerful.

Though, as noted, Johnson draws attention to the description of Brazil that was inserted early in Roberts’s chapter, a different alteration to the chapter strikes me as more significant, at once serving to better characterize Roberts and his relationship with his crew and to provide narrative motivation for some crew members’ disgruntled departure from his services. After describing some successes Roberts and crew had experienced, Johnson inserts the following:

Notwithstanding the successful Adventures of this Crew, yet it was with great Difficulty they could be kept together, under any kind of Regulation; for being almost always mad or drunk, their Behaviour produced infinite Disorders, every Man being in his own Imagination a Captain, a Prince, or a King.

When *Roberts* saw there was no managing of such a Company of wild ungovernable Brutes, by gentle means, nor to keep them from drinking to excess, the Cause of all their Disturbances, he put on a rougher Deportment, and a more magesterial Carriage towards them, correcting whom he thought fit; and if any seemed to resent his Usage, he told them, *they might go ashore and take Satisfaction of him, if they thought fit, at Sword and Pistol, for he neither valu'd or fear'd any of them.* (*General History of the Pyrates* 248; ed. 2, ch. 9)

This is then followed by the description of Roberts's killing of a crew member who, in a drunken stupor, had insulted the captain, and of the subsequent fallout of this incident, particularly with Captain Anstis (248). This entire episode is absent from the previous edition. Instead, in its place, Johnson had incorporated the brief careers of Captains George Bradley and John Fenn, who were among the seventy who absconded with the *Good Fortune*, one of the brigantines sailing under Roberts's flag. Bradley is recognized as the instigator of this sudden severance, but Johnson provides little in the way of justification for his actions (*General History of the Robberies* 187–91; ed.1, ch. 10).

However, the second edition alters this narrative, removing it from Roberts's chapter and repurposing elements for the newly included chapter on Captain Anstis, which runs from pages 330 to 341 of the second edition, immediately following Roberts's chapter.

Whether these additions and emendations are reflective of Johnson's procurement of

more accurate information or of his taking artistic liberties—or both, for that matter—they certainly enrich the texture and coherence of the work.

This alteration bears thematic and rhetorical significance, as well. This incident highlights the threat to order and the empire that pirates represent. Whether true or not, the added anecdote injects into Roberts's narrative a heightened sense of chaos and disorder that was not nearly as pronounced previously. The behavior of the crew devolves to such a state that even Roberts, a generally respected and successful captain, has but a tenuous grasp of control over them, and in trying to regain some order, he is forced to adopt a more hardline, combative stance with his own men. Even the more level-headed, meritocratic among them cannot suppress the boiling anti-establishment sentiments, sentiments that, in Johnson's estimation, represent an existential threat to the British empire and need to be quashed.

In addition to alterations of the core text, two of Cole's engravings were altered for the updated second edition. A minor alteration was made to the fold-out engraving of Captain Bartholomew Roberts: the flags on Roberts's flagship are rearranged. Johnson describes one flag as follows: Roberts "ordered a new Jack to be made, which they ever after hoisted, with his own Figure pourtray'd, standing upon two Skulls, and under them the Letters *A B H* and *A M H*, signifying a *Barbadian's* and a *Martinican's* Head, as may be seen in the Plate of Captain *Roberts*" (*General History of the Pyrates* 243–44; ed. 2, ch. 9). A subsequent description of Roberts's flags as he approached Whydah reads,

They came to *Whydah* with a *St. George's* Ensign, a black Silk Flag flying at their Mizzen-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,
subscribed *A B H* and *A M H* i.e. a *Barbadian's* and a *Martinican's* Head, as has
been before taken Notice of. (259)

The engraving within the first edition interpreted the latter description as two separate flags, one depicting death, the other depicting Roberts standing atop two heads. However, the updated engraving combines the imagery, incorporating both death and Roberts into one flag. A minor change, to be sure, but one that perhaps reveals the artist's desire to more accurately reflect the textual description.

The more noticeable change to the second edition's artwork is Blackbeard's reworked imagery. Bialuschewski notes that “the first edition showed Blackbeard with a feathered hat and pistols on only one side of his body,” and Philip Gosse writes that the second edition “plate of Blackbeard [was] altered to accord with the description in the text, the one in the first edition being incorrect” (“Blackbeard: Creation of a Legend” 45; 21).¹² In the second edition, Blackbeard is depicted as sporting a tri-corner hat. Further, in accordance with Johnson's description, he wears slings over both shoulders, as opposed to the one sling over his left shoulder. Given the change to his pistol holsters, his right hand, which is placed on his hip, is clearly visible, no longer obscured behind the single sling. Little else, if anything at all, about the image is altered. This image was clearly the preferred iteration, as it was reproduced in subsequent domestic versions of the text. (See Figure 3.)

The numerous additions and corrections did not translate into sales, however.



Figure 3: B. Cole's updated second-edition engravings of Bartholomew Roberts (left) and Edward Teach (right). Images courtesy of the Biodiversity Heritage Library. <http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>. From Charles Johnson's *A General History of the Pyrates, from Their Rise and Settlement in the Island of Providence, to the Present Time* (2nd edition). Used under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 / Desaturated from originals.

Consequently, the second edition of *A General History of the Pyrates* was not the commercial success its predecessor was (Schonhorn xxxiv). Despite the tepid reception at home, an American edition was printed and sold in New York by William Bradford in late 1724, and Johnson printed and released a third edition, to which was added a seventeenth chapter covering the “celebrated but short-lived . . . Captain John Smith, alias Gow, who was executed for piracy and murder in June 1725” (Schonhorn xxxiv).¹³ Other than the addition of Smith, there seems to have been little augmentation of the text for this edition: the title page indicates no major changes, unlike that of the second edition, which noted “considerable Additions”; and the pagination from the second edition remains largely consistent through the fourth edition. For example, the illustration of Bonny and Read is placed opposite page 157 in both second and fourth editions in order to mark the commencement of Read’s narrative, and, in his quite comprehensive bibliography of Johnson’s work, Gosse notes an engraved plate “facing . . . 157” (22). This suggests that, while there was no doubt some changes—the first engraved plate in the third edition, likely that depicting Blackbeard, which was more often placed opposite page 70, faces page 71, for instance—they were neither major enough to be noted by author or printer, nor substantial enough to effect the length of the pirate narratives (22).

In spite of every effort to promote both the second and third editions, “sales of the *General History* did not meet expectations,” and “[w]hen Warner died, in December 1733, there were still numerous sets of sheets of the [*General History*] left among his stock” (Bialuschewski, “Daniel Defoe, Nathaniel” 35).

1725: International Interest, Translations, and *Historie der Engelsche Zee-roovers*

If by late 1724 domestic interest in *A General History* was beginning to wane, the

international interest was on the opposite trajectory. The text “was immediately translated into Dutch, French, and German,” and “published and republished in London, Dublin, Amsterdam, Paris, Utrecht, and elsewhere” (Rediker, *Villains of All Nations* 105). A reprint of the first edition was published in Dublin by J. Watts in 1725, and German (1725/1728) and French (1726) editions soon followed (Gosse 23, 25, 29). It is, however, the Dutch translation of the text, *Historie der Engelsche Zee-roovers* (1725), printed in Amsterdam by Hermanus Uytwerf, that has garnered the most scholarly attention, due in part no doubt to the foundational role the Dutch played in molding the genre of the pirate narrative (Gosse 24). Of the influence of Dutch pirate narratives and the resulting popularity of the Dutch translation of *A General History*, Sally O’Driscoll writes,

The importance of Dutch renditions of pirate stories begins with the very first pirate narrative of the period, Alexandre Exquemelin’s 1678 *De Americaensche Zee-Rovers*; this was quickly translated into English as *Bucaniers of America*. . . . Thus it is not surprising to find a reciprocal Dutch interest in Johnson’s English pirate narrative, which borrowed conventions and materials from Exquemelin’s original and achieved a similarly long-lasting popularity. (376) ¹⁴

Much of the scholarly attention paid to this translation focuses on one distinct Dutch influence on the text, namely its more sexualized representation of the two female pirates.

As noted earlier, Anne Bonny and Mary Read are two among the four pirates visually represented in the English editions of *A General History*. Where Cole depicts both female pirates fully clothed in their “manly,” more sexually ambiguous garb, his Dutch counterpart, who remains unnamed, does no such thing. Both Read and Bonny are

shown, this time separately, “heavily armed, . . . striking jaunty and mildly threatening poses” with jackets open, shirts unbuttoned, and exposed breasts “deliberately frame[d] and present[d] . . . as the first thing a viewer notices about the figures” (Eastman 110; O’Driscoll 359). (See Figure 4.) The effect induced by the Dutch rendition, O’Driscoll argues, results in a markedly different reading experience:

In the 1724 British illustration, Bonny and Read occupy an indeterminate space: their clothes present their gender as masculine, while the caption names them as female. Their martial aspect dominates the image; the women’s more feminine attributes . . . do not register until after that, thus creating a teasing ambiguity that the viewer can continue to enjoy once the caption has clarified the “truth.” That frisson of ambiguity remains as a pleasurable tension for the viewer. . . . In the 1725 Dutch images, that frisson of ambiguity is no longer possible; Bonny and Read are immediately read as female, and their masculine attire seems to the modern eye more like an erotic party costume than real clothes. The 1724 image hints at a narrative that is in fact delivered. . . . The 1725 images present a static erotic spectacle for the reader’s enjoyment; they foreclose the narrative of revelation by anticipating it, so that Bonny and Read are left as women whose “truth” (their femaleness) is already known, and the mystery of their cross-dressing is paradoxically no longer of great interest. (359)

In O’Driscoll’s estimation, the blatantly sexualized “femaleness” of the Dutch depictions of Bonny and Read serves not to enhance their narratives but to undermine them.



Figure 4: Engravings of Anne Bonny (left) and Mary Read (right) as rendered by an unnamed artist for *Historie der Engelsche Zee-roovers*. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University. From *Anne Bonny op Jamaica Gevangen* and *Mary Read op Jamaica in de Gevangenisse Overleden* (1725). Used under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 / Desaturated from originals.

While there is a certain narrative dissonance created by the juxtaposition of Johnson's text and the Dutch engravings, one could argue that their exposed, open representation enhances Johnson's embedded social criticism.

Bonny's and Read's narratives afforded him a platform to raise questions about gender roles and perhaps advocate for increased female agency in society. Both female pirates are depicted as capable and particularly courageous in instances where their male counterparts appear to lack all courage.¹⁵ For instance, "When any Business was to be done in their Way [i.e., pirating]," Johnson writes in Bonny's narrative, "no Body was more forward or courageous than [Bonny], and particularly when they were taken; she and *Mary Read*, with one more, were all the Persons that durst keep the Deck" (*General History of the Pyrates* 172–73; ed. 2, ch. 7). Their defiant last stand is depicted in greater detail in Read's narrative:

[S]ome of the Evidence against [Read], upon her Tryal, who were forced Men, and had sail'd with her, deposed upon Oath, that in Times of Action, no Person amongst them was more resolute, or ready to board or undertake any Thing that was hazardous, than she and *Anne Bonny*; and particularly at the Time they were attack'd and taken, when they came to close Quarters, none kept the Deck except *Mary Read* and *Anne Bonny*, and one more; upon which, she, *Mary Read*, called to those under Deck, to come up and fight like Men, and finding they did not stir, fired her Arms down the Hold amongst them, killing one, and wounding others.

(161–62)

These are the actions of courageous, if at times brutal, individuals. In this final encounter, save one additional pirate who was likely male, only the women proved brave enough to

take the deck and face their opponents. Hanna observes, “The women’s mettle contrasts with their counterparts’ spinelessness” and argues that Johnson’s account “focuses less on lionizing women pirates and more on emasculating their male crewmates” (405).

There is certainly an ironic inversion taking place here: the women are literally wrapped in the garb of men, operating in a traditionally “masculine” manner, while the men refuse to do so. This interpretation, however, ignores the fact that Mary Read had already been established as a strong, militarily capable individual prior to becoming a pirate, and separate of her comparison to her male pirate counterparts. Johnson refers to Read as “bold” and “strong” and as having often acted with “Bravery” (*General History of the Pyrates* 158, 159; ed. 2, ch. 7). He does not qualify those descriptors as “as bold/strong/brave *as a man*.” Rather, he assumes their universality. Bonny does belittle Rackam before his execution, noting “*that she was sorry to see him there [prison], but if he had fought like a Man, he need not have been hang’d like a Dog*” (173). Here, however, she categorizes his cowardice as being an act unworthy of *any* human being. The dichotomy she establishes is not that of man/woman but rather that of Man/Beast. In Johnson’s mind men do not have a monopoly on courage; it is an attribute that all humans can possess and display equally. These two infamous women just so happened to possess a lion’s share of it.

With the narratives of Mary Read and Anne Bonny, Johnson simultaneously recognizes the patriarchy in which they lived and claims that their actions were just as “*worthy of Record*,” their bravery in combat just as fierce, as any male pirate included in the text (*General History of the Pyrates*; ed. 2, preface). An additional layer of irony to Bonny’s and Read’s narratives that cannot go unstated, however, is that even though both

are repeatedly represented as more capable than the men around them, they were only afforded the opportunities to prove themselves because they often dressed as men. Neither would even have had the chance to serve on a vessel had she done so as openly female. Those doors were opened, however limitedly, because they were being opened to a “man.” This in and of itself calls into question the true agency of females in male-dominated spaces and leaves Johnson’s commentary more ambivalent and open-ended than definitive.

The original English engravings, while more historically accurate, are less thematically significant.¹⁶ The Dutch images can be interpreted as enhancing Johnson’s previously established theme of female equality. Instead of presenting Bonny and Read as they were, obscured in the guise of male pirates, the Dutch artist renders them as they *should* be—unashamedly female yet still powerful and imposing. Taken in this regard, their exposed breasts become a symbol not of “their sexual appeal and availability,” but of their—and Johnson’s—rejection of the status quo (Eastman 110).¹⁷

1726 to 1728: Fourth English Edition, Volumes One and Two, and *Captain Misson*

Commercial struggles of the second and third English additions notwithstanding, “a fourth edition was published sometime in 1726,” this time by Thomas Woodward, “a printer relatively new to London” (Bialuschewski, “Daniel Defoe, Nathaniel” 36; Schonhorn xxxvi).¹⁸ This edition’s significance lies in its being divided into two separate volumes and in its introduction of complete fictionality in the form of Captain Misson’s narrative. Misson’s narrative signifies a shift in not only Johnson’s methodology and technique but also in his representation of piracy; in Misson’s narrative, pirates and their practices are as hypocritical and problematic as society at large.

This edition included an updated title page that demarcated it as “Vol. I,” but, according to Schornhorn and Bialuschewski, while there were “some minor corrections” made to the text, there was no serious attempt to bring the new edition up to date and many of the previous errors were left uncorrected (Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates* 1: title page, ed. 4; Schonhorn xxxvi; “Daniel Defoe, Nathaniel” 36). Likewise, the text did not receive any visual update, Cole’s three engravings from the second edition remaining unaltered and returning to their second-edition pagination. Johnson did, however, “now indicate the immediate release of the forthcoming second volume by pointing the reader to an Appendix in Volume II which would conclude in great detail the biographies of Teach and Anstis” (Schonhorn xxxvi). This second volume had been referred to as early as August of 1724, when the second edition was published. At the close of the second edition’s amended preface, Johnson indicates that, should public demand necessitate it, he “intends to venture upon a second Volume” (*General History of the Pyrates*; ed. 2, preface). Though Johnson had referred to volume two in 1724 and had indicated its eminent release in 1726, and though he had previously written that he was awaiting arrival of “*some Materials to make [the additional pirate narratives] compleat, (which he shortly expects from the West-Indies),*” the second volume “was delayed two years, not appearing until July 1728, and when it did it contained less than one quarter new material on West Indian piracy” (*General History of the Pyrates*; ed. 2, preface; Schonhorn xxxvi).

What volume two—published under the title *The History of the Pyrates*—lacks in the way of new historical information, it makes up for with the inclusion of the narrative of Captain Misson, a fictional pirate whose adventures span two separate chapters, nearly

“a fifth of the volume” (Schonhorn xxxvi). It is in this multi-chapter narrative that Johnson levels some of his more targeted criticism of piracy and imperialism alike, an objective established from the initial publication of the first edition of the text. Richard Frohock characterizes Johnsonian pirates as both “satirists and objects of satire,” the implication being that with *A General History* Johnson intended to dole out criticism to all parties involved (“Satire and Civil Governance” 475). Johnson’s preface and introduction clearly establish a position critical of the failings of traditional European power structures to suppress, contain, and eradicate piracy, but my contention is that Johnson’s criticism is constructive rather than destructive, intended to build up rather than tear down. Johnson acknowledges the English role in the rise and incubation of piracy, while also heavily implying that piracy itself is a destructive evil that should not persist.¹⁹ It is for this reason that Johnson comes across as quite harsh when categorizing and cataloging the various inadequacies of the British and their European brethren. In order to learn truly from a failure and to evolve beyond the experience, one has to acknowledge and understand the nature of that failure. The extent to which Atlantic pirates were allowed to prosper is, for Johnson, an unacceptable failure. Misson’s narrative is at once an exploration of that systemic failure and an indictment of the piratical ethos.

Though Johnson vouches for the narrative’s authenticity, claiming to “have got into [his] Hands a *French Manuscript*, in which [Misson] himself gives a Detail of his Actions,” scholarly consensus holds it as no more than a work of fiction (*General History of the Pyrates* 2: 1). Johnson’s satire becomes all the more biting when one considers that he was in full control of the narrative and not beholden to historical accuracy. Just as in

the case of Read and Bonny, in the absence of historical documentation—or in this case, in the absence of actual historical figures—Johnson is free to create.²⁰ In this case, he utilizes his creations—Misson himself; his lieutenant, Caraccioli; and the failed pirate state of Libertia—to skewer imperialist and pirate alike.

Misson's revolutionary crusade begins upon his becoming captain of the *Victoire* when, during an engagement, “the first Broadside killed the Captain, second Captain, and the three Lieutenants” (Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates* 2: 12). Misson seizes the opportunity, taking up both sword and mantle of captain, and names Caraccioli as his acting lieutenant. Upon the conclusion of the engagement, Caraccioli salutes Misson as captain and begs that he recognize the opportunity before him, claiming that

he might with the Ship he had under Foot, and the brave Fellows under Command, bid Defiance to the Power of *Europe*, enjoy every Thing he wish'd, reign Sovereign of the Southern Seas, and lawfully make War on all the World, since it wou'd deprive him of that Liberty to which he had a Right by the Laws of Nature: That he might in Time, become as great as *Alexander* was to the *Persians*; and by encreasing his Forces by his Captures, he would every Day strengthen the Justice of his Cause. (12–13)

Though the chapter bears his name and he serves as captain of the vessel, Misson is merely the figurehead to Caraccioli's revolution, as the previous speech evinces; Caraccioli is the intellectual and ideological engine of the machine and the true visionary of their mission. Johnson's critique of imperial practices manifests itself in the form of Caraccioli's subversive rants.

Being a member of the clergy upon Misson's first meeting him, Caraccioli is most critical of the Church, particularly the practice of Catholicism. He refers to the practice as farcical and notes the hypocrisy evident in the clergy, opining

Don't imagine that the Purple makes [our Statesmen] less Courtiers than are those of other Nations; they know and pursue . . . Self-interest . . . with as much Cunning and as little Conscience as any Secular; and are as artful where Art is required, and as barefaced and impudent when their Power is great enough to support 'em, in the oppressing the People, and aggrandizing their Families.

(Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates* 2: 3–4)

This criticism supplements that which was laid out in Johnson's preface and introduction. Though Caraccioli's indictment overtly names the Church, the subtle comparison of clergymen to secular courtiers links his criticism of papal bureaucracy to Johnson's earlier critique of the state at large. Essentially, his disdain for the Church and its agents stems from its functioning as a corrupt governmental body does, which is to say valuing that which is "beneficial, not [that which is] meritorious and virtuous" (3). Caraccioli's distaste for the corrupt Church and state is important to Misson's narrative, as it is the driving force behind their "righteous" crusade, as evinced by Caraccioli's call for Misson to "bid Defiance to the Power of *Europe*" "lawfully" (13). Here Johnson again returns to the theme of European governmental/state practices giving birth to pirates, albeit via a slightly different avenue.

For all of Caraccioli's—and Misson's, largely by proxy—righteous indignation and revolutionary rhetoric, however, their endeavor proves just as flawed as the imperialistic nations from which they mean to break. After some time pursuing their

“brave,” “just,” “innocent,” and “noble” cause “For God and Liberty,” Misson and his men arrive “at the Place where *Misson* designed his Settlement, which he called *Libertalia*” (*General History of the Pyrates* 2: 16, 47). Frohock characterizes *Libertalia* as one of the “few exceptional cases of pirates who establish egalitarian societies and administer them effectively” presented in *A General History*, but notes that, “like all utopias,” it “is not without shortcomings” (“Satire and Civil Governance” 475, 476). All too often, the *Liberi*—the settlers of *Libertalia*—are willing to compromise their principles in the name of benefit or self-interest, just as do those corrupt powers against which Caraccioli rages. In one telling episode, Caraccioli executes captured Portuguese captains in order to send a message, even though “they were all sensible how tender the Commadore, Monsieur *Misson*, was in shedding of Blood; and that it was a Tenet of his Faith, that none had Power over the Life of another, but God alone, who gave it” (Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates* 2: 97–98). In this instance, Caraccioli is willing to eschew their stated practices and principles in the name of “Self-Preservation” (98). The irony is that his hypocrisy mirrors that of the Church and the state for which he espouses so much abject distaste.

In another ironic episode, Misson allows his men to “keep all the unmarried” women from a captured Moorish ship (Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates* 2: 94). Of this episode, Johnson writes, “This Resolution was put in Execution, and they brought off 100 Girls, from 12 to 18 Years old, who designed to make the Pilgrimage with their Parents. The Lamentations this Separation caused among the Prisoners, had such Effect on Misson, that he was for letting them go, but every one of his Men were against him” (94). Prior to this incident, Misson had previously moved his men to agreeing with him.

Here, however, his dissent is born of pity, not principle, and he makes no move to dissuade his men once he realizes that they are all “against him.” One could argue that Misson’s deferral is consistent with the governmental structure he, Caraccioli, and the men had previously constructed—one that does not elevate the captain over the crew—but this action cuts directly against the grain of their supposed “noble Cause,” which has seen them liberate slaves and bring them willingly into the fold. If liberty is so important, how can this group condone this—the essential kidnapping and enslavement of young women? Apparently, as was evident with the Portuguese executions, their principles are not absolute and are often at best negotiable and at worst dispensable.

Throughout Misson’s narrative, Johnson utilizes irony to highlight the flaws of both the imperial and piratical ethos, and he does so while being in complete control of the narrative. Knowing that he is not tethered to historical truth makes his decision to allow Misson’s crusade and his piratical utopia of Libertalia to fail all the more telling. Even when given the opportunity to represent the pirates in a completely complimentary and progressive light, he opts for an ironic characterization that paints them as just as flawed and hypocritical as the traditional European power structures. That being said, he did provide a glimpse of how a more egalitarian, more meritocratic, more democratic society could function, provided it could avoid the pitfalls of corruption and compromise.

1730s and 1740s: *A General History of the Lives and Adventures of the Most Famous Highwaymen, Murderers, Street-Robbers, Etc.*

The next time an English printer would take up the material of *A General History of the Pyrates* for publication would be in 1734, and this edition, printed by J. Janeway and titled *A General History of the Lives and Adventures of the Most Famous*

Highwaymen, Murderers, Street-Robbers, Etc., is indicative of a sea change in the perception of piracy as an exceptional and unique form of criminality.²¹ The new edition was a compilation of two previously independent works—Johnson’s *A General History of the Pyrates* and Alexander Smith’s *The History of the Lives of the Most Noted Highway-men*—and was presumably published without the material of volume two included (“Brown University Library”).^{22, 23} Interestingly, Johnson is the named author, with seemingly no mention of Smith appearing in the text. Also of interest is the fact that this marks the first instance of Johnson’s *A General History* being packaged and published with another work, at least in England.²⁴ It’s possible that this was a calculated business decision, one made to increase the circulation of the material by pairing it with a historically popular entry into a historically popular genre. “The early-eighteenth-century reading public,” Andrea McKenzie states, “eagerly devoured collections of the lives of semi-fictionalized seventeenth-century highwaymen who robbed such traditional villains as lawyers, moneylenders, and crooked tradesmen as well as regicides, ‘committee men,’ and Charles II’s mistresses,” and Smith’s *Highwaymen* was just such a text (584). Business-conscious decision or not, the inclusion of the pirate narratives in this novel context appears to mark a shift in the collective British attitude toward piracy.

By 1726, the year in which the fourth edition of *A General History* was published, all the leading pirate captains described in Captain Johnson’s *General History of the Pyrates* and almost all those whose names featured in the newspapers or colonial office reports of the period had been executed, killed or had retired. This did not mean the end of piracy in the Caribbean. There were still occasional attacks on merchant vessels (usually by rogue elements of the Spanish

coastguard) but pirates were no longer a serious threat to the trade of the region.

(Cordingly, *Pirate Hunter of the Caribbean* 235)

Where once pirates were viewed as a particular threat to all, exceptional figures “who sailed beneath the Jolly Roger, the flag designed to terrify the captains of merchant ships and persuade them to surrender their cargo”; seafaring furies who “consciously used terror to accomplish their aims”; figures whose executions were once widely publicized and propagandized for the sake of public edification; perhaps now, in the wake of the successful War on Pirates, they were viewed through the same lens as other “common” criminals (Rediker, *Villains of All Nations* 5).^{25, 26} The construction of this text and its subsequent revisions/reprintings would suggest that this was indeed the case.

The 1736 edition of the text interrupts Smith’s criminal biographies with a section dedicated to the pirate narratives of the first volume of *A General History*. The most notable addition to the pirate narratives is that of Sir Henry Morgan, who did not appear in any previous addition of the text, but whose life and actions would have already been widely known. Johnson very clearly used Exquemelin’s *The Buccaneers of America* as a source text, and his version of Morgan’s narrative is little more than a repurposing and retelling of Morgan’s exploits as reported by Exquemelin.²⁷ Johnson, however, effects a far rosier tone than does Exquemelin, opening his narrative by admiring that Morgan had “perhaps, distinguished himself in the Free-booting Way as much as any Man that ever engaged in it, and had as large a Share of personal Courage and Bravery” (*General History of the Lives* 278). By the time the 1742 “Birmingham Edition” of the text was released, Morgan’s narrative had been shifted to a more prominent position in the text, moved from the beginning of a dedicated pirate section to the very beginning of the

volume. Johnson eschewed the pirate section itself, and the other pirate narratives were no longer segregated from those of Smith's criminals. Instead, they were interspersed more organically throughout the text, though some were still grouped in chunks. Additionally, the pirates were now described as "Noted" rather than "Notorious," a descriptor that had graced both the first edition of *A General History of the Pyrates* in 1724 and the original printing of *A General History of the Lives and Adventures of the Most Famous Highwaymen* a decade later (Johnson, *General History of the Robberies*; ed. 1, title page; *General History of the Lives*; title page; *General and True History*; title page). Taken together, Johnson's nostalgic tone, the intermixing of the pirates with the other "common" criminals, and the exceedingly more positive descriptor applied to the pirates makes manifest a waning concern with the existential threat that pirates once represented.

Legacy

Over the course of its lifespan, *A General History of the Pyrates* has seen both interest in and concern over pirates ebb and flow, wax and wane, but the 1742 edition of *A General History of the Lives and Actions of the Most Famous Highwaymen* was by no means an end for Johnson's pirate narratives. The text, in both its forms, was "[c]onstantly reprinted and pirated throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" and remains in print to this day, typically in its original, pirate-centric form (Williams, "Refuge upon the Sea" 75). Its influence on modern conception of pirates cannot be denied. *A General History*, Cordingly notes, "has been much plundered by writers and film directors" and "has had a far-reaching effect on the popular view of pirates. It is the prime source for the lives of many pirates of what is often called the Golden Age of

Piracy. It publicized a generation of villains, and gave an almost mythical status to men like Blackbeard and Captain Kidd” and other figures who have gone on to grace stage and screen (*Under the Black Flag* xix, xx). Its impact is in no way limited to popular culture, however.

The critical discourse surrounding Johnson’s work has long been rich in the field of history and is becoming increasingly so in the field of literature, particularly as early American literature studies shifts from a traditionally landlocked, nation-centric perspective to a more transatlantic, oceanic one. As will be explored in subsequent chapters, there is much progress to be made on the literary front. With this thesis, I aim to reinsert Johnson’s *A General History of the Pyrates* into the critical conversation and establish its literary history and lineage by exploring the influence of one specific literary genre, the picaresque, and the text’s satirical qualities.

Notes

1. The authorship of this particular text is problematic. *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pyrates* was initially credited to Captain Charles Johnson. The text was later attributed to canonical author Daniel Defoe. The idea of Defoe authorship became so widely accepted that the most recent Dover edition of the text—last updated in 1999—not only credits Defoe as the author, but also dedicates two of the four introductory subsections to Defoe’s life and maritime interests (Schonhorn xi–xl). The last twenty or so years have seen a renewed interest in the issue of authorship, however, largely thanks to the work of P. N. Furbank and W. R. Owens, who claim that Defoe’s “canon is the construction of bibliographers” (276). According to Stephanie Jones, “In their *Defoe De-Attributions*, [Furbank and Owens] list 252 items for which they doubt there is sufficient evidence of Defoe’s authorship,” one of which is *A General History of the Pyrates* (72). She does note, however, that their “brusque” and “measured” arguments have “not led to much relief,” and that Defoe is “still commonly cited” as the author of the text (72). While some may still be citing Defoe as the author, others are embracing Johnsonian authorship. Fairly recently, however, Arne Bialuschewski has thrown Nathaniel Mist’s hat into the ring as a contender for authorship (“Daniel Defoe, Nathaniel Mist”). When referring to the author of *A General History*, I will refer to Captain Charles Johnson, the author to which the text was originally attributed.
2. The complete title of the first edition as it reads on the title page is as follows: *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 Present Year 1724.*

3. According to C. M. Owen, Charles Rivington was a well-connected English printer who had a working relationship with both Samuel Richardson and Daniel Defoe (163).
4. With regards to possible contemporaneous newspaper sources, Cordingly writes, “Johnson took most of his information from the transcripts of pirate trials and from the reports in contemporary newspapers such as the *London Gazette* and the *Daily Post*” (*Under the Black Flag* xix).
5. “The first edition . . . was so popular that other editions followed in rapid succession” (Cordingly, *Under the Black Flag* xix). Margaret Cohen refers to the text as “a wildly successful collection of pirate biographies” (*The Novel and the Sea* 93). Similarly, Colin Woodard notes that “English readers were captivated by the activities of the pirates, even as they were taking place,” and “[i]t was an enormous hit on both sides of the Atlantic, going through numerous editions” (325).
6. William Bradford is the stated printer of the American edition of the text. “William Bradford, ‘Printer to their Majesties King William and Queen Mary’ was the first printer of the Colonies of Pennsylvania and New York, and one of the earliest printers in what is now the United States. Living to the age of 92, he died in 1752, after a long and useful life” (McGuire 344). Andrew Bradford, printer of the *American Weekly Mercury*, was William Bradford’s son (Ferree 215). It makes complete business sense that he would use his newspaper to promote his father’s printing business.
7. A surveying of the March 1724 to December 1724 issues of the paper reveals that the first edition was not advertised in any issues save those already mentioned. It seems

likely that an earlier American edition would have been advertised in the paper, given the Bradford family connection.

8. A bit of history on Thomas Warner:

In 1716 Warner became partners with John Baker, and succeeded to his business at the Black Boy in Paternoster Row when Baker died in April 1717. Warner continued running the shop until his death in 1733 when he was succeeded in turn by Thomas Cooper. Baker, it is worth noting, was [Daniel] Defoe's chief publisher at this time as well as publishing *The Review* between 1710 and its cessation in 1713. Warner . . . maintained the association the Black Boy had with Defoe, but we find him closely involved with both Baker and Defoe even a few years before he takes over Baker's shop. (R. Griffin " 258)

9. Arne Bialuschewski reports that, "[a]long with the increase in bulk, the price went up from four to five shillings" ("Daniel Defoe, Nathaniel" 35). See Faller's *Turned to Account* 207 for an exploration of pricing.

10. For information on the possibility of Captain Woods Rogers as a contributing source to *A General History*, see Cordingly, *Pirate Hunter of the Caribbean* 251–53 and Woodard 325–26.

11. Of the descriptions of St. Thomas and Brazil Johnson writes, "*We shall not enter into a Detail of all the new Matter inserted here, but the Description of the Islands St. Thome, &c. and that of Brazil are not to be passed by, without a little Notice*" (*General History of the Pyrates*; ed. 2, preface).

12. Blackbeard's original hat appears more furred than feathered. Regardless, in the second edition, Johnson describes Blackbeard's appearance in some detail:

This Beard was black, which he suffered to grow of an extravagant Length; as to Breadth, it came up to his Eyes; he was accustomed to twist it with Ribbons, in small Tails, after the Manner of our Ramilies Wiggs, and turn them about his Ears: In Time of Action, he wore a Sling over his Shoulders, with three brace of Pistols, hanging in Holsters like Bandaliers; and stuck lighted Matches under his Hat, which appearing on each Side of his Face, his Eyes naturally looking fierce and wild, made him altogether such a Figure, that Imagination cannot form an Idea of a Fury, from Hell, to look more frightful. (*General History of the Pyrates* 87–88; ed. 2, ch. 3)

For more on Edward Teach, see Bialuschewski's "Blackbeard: The Creation of a Legend" and Brooks's "'Born in Jamaica, of Very Creditable Parents' or 'A Bristol Man Born'?: Excavating the Real Edward Thache, 'Blackbeard the Pirate.'"

13. See note 6 regarding William Bradford, Andrew Bradford, and the American edition.
14. "Originally published in Dutch in 1678," writes Jason Payton, "Exquemelin's *Buccaneers* enjoyed immediate and widespread fame for its exposé of the lives of the infamous Caribbean buccaneers whose raids were sending shock waves of terror throughout the Caribbean and South Seas" (339).
15. Read is often represented as more capable and courageous than the men whose company she kept. In one instance, her lover having been challenged to a duel, she took it upon herself to intervene in the conflict in order to prevent his death. "[I]n this Dilemma," Johnson writes, "she shew'd, that she fear'd more for his Life than she did for her own; for she took a Resolution of quarreling with this Fellow her self, and having

challenged him ashore, she appointed the Time two Hours sooner than that when he was to meet her Lover, where she fought him at Sword and Pistol, and killed him upon the Spot” (*General History of the Pyrates* 163–64; ed. 2, ch. 7). In her mind, she was more capable of handling this challenge than was her lover. This ironic inversion of the “damsel in distress” trope suggests that Johnson was of the mind that women are just as capable as men and not inherently and perpetually in need of men to take care of them.

16. Bonny and Read were known to don their masculine attire when in battle and above deck, a fact reflected in Cole’s engraving.

17. Daniel Williams notes that “several of the pirate captains depicted in its pages were presented as outspoken critics of the authority systems they opposed” (“Refuge upon the Sea” 75). Similarly, Schonhorn, working under the assumption that Defoe was the true author of the text, addresses what he refers to as a “changed tone” in volume two: “But in Volume II Defoe approached his rogues in fact as he did his rogues of fiction, for he now used them to indict and judge the hypocrisy, injustice and cowardice of his English society” (xxxvii). I would argue, as I have throughout, that the tone does not change to the extent Schonhorn suggests and that the entire work, both volumes one and two, perform the function of social criticism.

18. Woodward also had a relationship with Defoe. See Howell’s “Eighteenth-Century Abridgements of *Robinson Crusoe*” for more information.

19. See chapter three, “‘A Life of So Much Peril’: The Life of Mary Read, English Picara, As Socio-Political Satire” for an extended analysis of Johnson’s socio-political concerns.

20. Chapters two and three explore the fictionality of the text in greater detail.

21. According to Gosse's bibliography, the full title of the text is *A General History of the Lives and Adventures of the Most Famous Highwaymen, Murderers, Street-Robbers, Etc. To Which Is Added, a Genuine Account of the Voyages and Plunders of the Most Notorious Pyrates* (30).
22. Faller's extensive bibliography of English criminal narratives notes that the first edition of Smith's text was published in 1713 or 1714 and that second and third editions appeared in 1714. The fifth edition was published in 1719 (*Turned to Account* 311).
23. I have only had access to later editions of the text, those published in 1736 and 1742, both of which did not include any pirate narratives that first appeared in the second volume of Johnson's *A General History of the Pyrates*. It is possible, though unlikely, that the original 1734 edition included the likes of Misson, Tew, and Fly.
24. A 1726 French edition of *A General History (Histoire des Pirates Anglois)* had been "[p]ublished as a fourth volume appendix to [Exquemelin's] *Histoire des Aventuriers, Filibustiers*" (Gosse 29).
25. See the opening chapter of Rediker's *Villains of All Nations*, Mather's *The Vial Poured out upon the Sea*, and Pitt's "Cotton Mather and Boston's 'Seafaring Tribe'" for more insight into pirate executions/trials as a means of "public service announcements."
26. Angus Konstam writes,

The end of the golden age of piracy did not necessarily mean the end of pirate attacks. However, these became isolated incidents, and any such outbreaks were soon dealt with by the navies of the leading maritime powers, which for the most part meant Britain. The government campaign against the pirates had clearly been

successful, and in theory European and colonial ship owners could now sit back and watch the profits roll in. (272)

See Lane 191–92 and Woodard 311–28 for more on the end of the “Golden Age of Piracy.” See Hanna 365–415 for an examination of the War on Pirates. For a broad history on pirate hunting, see Little’s *Pirate Hunting: The Fight Against Pirates, Privateers, and Sea Raiders from Antiquity to Present*.

27. A comparison of the opening of Morgan’s narrative in the respective texts is telling. First Exquemelin’s:

Henry Morgan was born in that part of Wales known as Welsh England. His father was a well-to-do farmer, but Morgan, having no liking for farm work, decided to go to sea. He reached a port where ships leave for Barbados and signed on for the voyage. On arrival, he was sold as an indentured servant in the English manner. Having served his time he went to Jamaica, where he found several buccaneer ships ready to put to sea. He joined the expedition and soon learned their manner of life. After making three or four voyages with the buccaneers, he and his comrades had made enough money out of loot and dicing to buy a ship of their own. Morgan was made captain, and they went marauding along the coast of Campeche, where they captured several ships. (119)

Now Johnson’s opening:

This Gentleman was born in *Wales*, and descended of a very good Family there, as indeed are almost all of that Name. His Father was a rich Yeoman or Farmer; but young *Morgan* had no Inclinations to follow that Employment, and therefore left his Country, and went to seek his Fortune on the Seas, which he imagin’d

would better suit his Temper. He was entertain'd in a certain Port where several Ships lay at Anchor, that were bound for the Isle of *Barbadoes*. With these Ships he resolved to go into the Service of one, who, according to what is commonly practised in those Parts by the English and other Nations, sold him as soon as he came on Shore. He served his Time at *Barhadoes*; and when he had obtain'd his Liberty, thence transferr'd himself unto the Island of Jamaica, there to seek new Fortunes. Here he found two Vessels of Pyrates that were ready to go to Sea. Being destitute of Employ, he put himself in one of these Ships, with Intent to follow the Exercises of that Sort of People. He learn'd in a little while their manner of Living; and so exactly, that, having perform'd three or four Voyages with some Profit and good Success, he agreed with some of his Comrades, who had gotten by the fame Voyage a small Parcel of Money, to join Stocks and buy a Ship. The Vessel being bought, they unanimously chose him to be the Captain and Commander thereof. (*General History of the Lives* 278)

CHAPTER II

The Great Picaro Roberts: *A General History of the Pyrates* and the Picaresque

If texts that cross generic lines risk “monstrosity,” then Charles Johnson’s *A General History of the Pyrates* is Frankenstein’s monster—an amalgamated being of disparate parts that have been cobbled together and reanimated into something unique (Derrida 57). “Confusion over deformed and blurred categories,” Michael Sinding asserts, “greet[s] many books that play with genres in ambitious and complex ways” (467). Herein lies one critical issue with *A General History*: it operates in so many recognizable categories that it effectively renders itself unrecognizable.

In the broadest terms, the modes within which author Charles Johnson operates are non-fiction and fiction. These are, however, umbrella terms that can be further subdivided into more specific sub-genres. The text incorporates elements of many traditionally mimetic genres, among them the catalog, the criminal biography, the ethnography, the natural and moral history, and journalistic reportage.¹ Historian Mark Hanna writes, “More than just a history, it was a repository of witness accounts, newspaper reports, trial records, personal letters, and manuscript sources” (398). In the preface, Johnson attests to the accuracy of the text, stating that “*those Facts which he himself [Johnson] was not an Eye-Witness of he, had from authentick Relations of the Persons concern’d 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 Testemonies to support the Credit of any History*” (*General History of the Pyrates*; ed. 2, preface). It appears that many have taken that claim at face value, as the text has traditionally been approached, as the title might suggest, as a history. “Even

accomplished historians of piracy,” notes Stephanie Jones, “turn to this text, not just to evidence the wild popularity of pirate stories in the early 18th century, but as a source of fact” (72). Richard Frohock echoes those sentiments, writing that some “scholars have relied on the *General History* as a source of historical information about the practices of real pirates in the early eighteenth century” and that “[b]ecause the *General History* tells the stories of persons and events that often have been substantiated in other documents, some have drawn on it as an archive of credible information” (“Satire and Civil Governance” 467). Historian Marcus Rediker certainly views Johnson’s *A General History* as an authoritative source of fact. In the notes to the opening chapter of *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age*, he affirms his belief, and that of others, in Johnson as “a highly reliable source for factual information” (180).² Despite this fact, however, Frohock cautions that “confidence in the reliability of the *General History* needs scrutiny” (“Satire and Civil Governance” 468).

Frohock’s is an apt assessment of the work. Given the known fictional elements at work in the text, historical accuracy should not be assumed. There is, however, a veritable dearth of critical work that treats Johnson’s text as anything but history. “In spite of its foundational role in producing lasting images of the pirate,” Frohock notes, “scholars have rarely considered the *General History* as a literary work in its own right” (“Satire and Civil Governance” 467). One can only conjecture as to the reason for the lack of literary attention paid to the text. Perhaps scholars have been unable to negotiate the text’s particular blend of the mimetic and the poetic.³ Or perhaps the traditional reading of the text has become so entrenched in the scholarly subconscious that literary scholars feel no imperative to revisit it. Regardless, if the goal of academia and literary

criticism is to expand our collective knowledge base and cultural understanding, leaving a significant element of this text virtually unexamined is a critical oversight that needs attending to.

Fredric Jameson theorizes that the literary structure of a text “tilts powerfully into the underside . . . , in short, into the very political unconscious, of the text, such that the latter’s dispersed semes . . . themselves then insistently direct us to the informing power of forces or contradictions which the text seeks in vain wholly to control or master” (49). In other words, the very structure and form of a text unveil the underpinning cultural, philosophical, and political forces at work on the text. In this way, all texts are political despite themselves and despite, often, the author.⁴ It follows then that the further examination and exploration of the literary form and structure of a text provides a window into the ideological and epistemological tensions that were present within the context of any given text’s creation. Ignoring elements of the text can only serve to occlude, while a deeper dive into the largely ignored elements of this text—i.e., those influenced by traditionally fictional genres—enriches our understanding of the culture that produced the work. Not only will further analysis of this text prove culturally illuminating, but it will also foster a greater understanding of the work’s place within the literary landscape, a place squarely within the confines of the maritime fiction tradition, the criminal literature tradition, and—most pertinently—the picaresque fiction tradition.

As generic analysis pertains to *A General History*, one would be remiss in reading the text as strictly historical/mimetic; Johnson operates in myriad narrative modes and leverages elements of fiction throughout. Regarding the fictionality of the text, Frohock writes, “Although most of its biographies concern real persons, its sources are unreliable

and its accounts are fictionalized to varying degrees, and at least one, the biography of Captain Misson, appears to be invented wholesale” (“Satire and Civil Governance” 469). Additionally, Daniel Williams refers to Misson and his pirate haven of Libertalia as “fictions created to engage the attention of readers” (“Refuge upon the Sea” 76). Even Rediker—whose implicit trust in Johnson’s reliability is further evident in his statement that Johnson “knew this generation of pirates (some of them individually) and chronicled their exploits in vivid detail”—acknowledges the fictional nature of Misson’s tale (*Villains of All Nations* 13, 180).⁵

Though there has been some limited recognition of the fictional elements of the text, critics have yet to specify which fictional movements informed the text, with the notable exception of Frohock, who analyzes the text’s satirical elements (“Satire and Civil Governance”).⁶ One important literary tradition that must be attended to if we are to create the literary history of *A General History* is that of the picaresque novel, as divivable elements of the picaresque are present throughout the text.⁷ The *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines the picaresque novel as follows:

In the strict sense, a novel with a picaroon (Spanish, *picaró*: a rogue or scoundrel) as its hero or heroine, usually recounting his or her escapades in a first-person narrative marked by its episodic structure and realistic low-life descriptions. The picaroon is often a quick-witted servant who takes up with a succession of employers. The true Spanish picaresque novel is represented by the anonymous *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554) and by Mateo Aleman’s more widely influential *Guzman de Alfarache* (1599–1604); its imitators include Johann Grimmelhausen’s *Simplicissimus* (1669) in German, Alain-Rene Lesage’s *Gil*

Bias (1715–35) in French, and Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) in English.
(Baldick, "Picaresque Novel" 257)

In "Origins and Definition of the Picaresque Genre," J. A. Garrido Ardila seeks to trace the genre's literary lineage and refine its definition. The picaresque, according to Ardila, must do the following: 1) recount the life of a *pizaro/picara*—a clever, roguish protagonist; 2) convey a narrative that leads to "a final situation"; 3) satirize modern society in a way that "reflects the social bias of the author" ("Origins and Definition" 15–16). There are some notable differences between these definitions. While the Oxford definition emphasizes the episodic nature of a "true Spanish picaresque," Ardila does not include that as one of his essential characteristics. Rather he notes that regardless of whether employed within an episodic or linear plot, the "hence" structure—that is, a narrative structure in which the protagonist undergoes a progressive psychological change—is considered to be a "main feature" of the picaresque novel (14). Additionally, he dispenses with the idea that first-person narration is essential to the genre (15). Ardila expands the definition of the picaresque in many ways while narrowing it in others.

Careful not to fashion "picaresque novel" into a catchall term, Ardila refers to Claudio Guillén's concept of "the picaresque myth," which is composed of "texts including only certain picaresque features" (Ardila, "Origins and Definition" 18).⁸ "Guillén," Ardila writes, "suggested that scholars should distinguish between the picaresque *genre* (i.e., the body of texts that reflect the core features of the first picaresque novels), and the picaresque *myth*," additionally noting that "[t]his distinction is essential to acknowledging different literary trends and to understand the developments of Western prose fiction" (18).

A General History functions within the picaresque myth in that it borrows heavily from the picaresque novel as well as various other literary traditions—both mimetic and poetic, non-fiction and fiction. The narrative of Captain Bartholomew Roberts, the central figure of the text, is a useful gauge by which to measure the extent of the picaresque's influence on the work.⁹ Roberts's narrative evinces the melding of the Spanish picaresque tradition with that of England's native criminal literature tradition, particularly the criminal biography, Roberts himself representing a prototypical English picaro.¹⁰

Of Captain Bartholomew Roberts, English Picaro, and the English Picaresque Tradition

Captain Bartholomew Roberts, colloquially referred to as Black Bart and considered by some to be “the scourge of the African coast,” serves as the central figure of *A General History*, particularly of the text's initial volume (Hanna 381).¹¹ According to Johnson, Roberts “was a tall black [i.e., dark complected] Man, near forty Years of Age, born at *Newey-bagh*, nigh *Haverford-West*, in *Pembrokeshire*, of good natural Parts, and personal Bravery, tho' he applied them to such wicked Purposes” (*General History of the Pyrates* 272; ed. 2, ch. 9). Though he eventually turned to piracy, Roberts is introduced as a sailor honestly employed as second mate aboard the *Princess*, under the command of Captain Plumb, who sails out of London and arrives in Guinea for the purposes of “taking in Slaves for the *West-Indies*” (208). It was during this voyage that Roberts was taken by Captain Howel Davis and was “forc'd himself . . . among” the company of Davis and his motley crew (272). “In the beginning” of his services under Davis's command, “he was very averse to this sort of Life, and would certainly have escaped from them, had a fair Opportunity presented it self; yet afterwards he changed

his Principles” (208). In the wake of Davis’s death—and after a “loudly applauded” speech from a member of the crew—Roberts “was accordingly elected” as captain “tho’ he had not been above six Weeks among them” (209). From this point until his final engagement, during which he gave his orders with “Boldness, and Spirit,” Roberts captained his crew in many “vile and ignominious Acts” that made much “*Noise in the World*” (273, preface).

Johnson himself establishes Roberts’s importance not only by insinuating that many of the intricacies of his narrative were similar to those of other pirates, but also by dedicating far more pages to his account than those dedicated to any other single pirate in the text. In the preface to the work, Johnson justifies the attention paid to Roberts:

It will be observed, that the Account of the Actions of Roberts runs into a greater Length, than that of any other Pyrate, for which we can assign two Reasons, first, because he ravaged the Seas longer than the rest, and of Consequence there must be a greater Scene of Business in his Life: Secondly, being resolved not to weary the Reader, with tiresome Repetitions: When we found the Circumstances in Roberts’s Life, and other Pyrates, either as to piratical Articles, or any Thing else, to be the same, we thought it best to give them but once, and chose Roberts’s Life for that Purpose. (General History of the Pyrates; ed. 2, preface)

This chapter is central, however, not only because of its “greater Length,” but also because of the content held therein.

It is the microcosmic nature of the chapter that truly makes this narrative so central. In addition to the narrative of Roberts’s exploits and endeavors, Johnson intermingles and incorporates elements of the natural and moral history, the catalog, the

ethnography, and journalistic reportage, each of which appears elsewhere in the text. The influence of non-fiction genres is clear, but Roberts's tale also satisfies portions of two of Ardila's essential conditions of the picaresque: 1) "the picaro as protagonist"; 2) "the narration of a life expounding the circumstances leading to a final situation" ("Origins and Definition" 16, 15).

Roberts is a picaro, but rather than being a traditional Spanish picaro, he is a hybrid of that archetype and the outlaw criminal of the English criminal biography, a character type I will refer to as "English picaro." Of the traditional Spanish picaro, Frank Wadleigh Chandler writes the following:

He is born of poor and dishonest parents, who are not often troubled with gracing their union by a ceremony, nor particularly pleased at his advent. He comes up by hook or crook as he may. Either he enters the world with an innate love of the goods of others, or he is innocent and learns by hard raps that he must take care of himself or go to the wall. In either case the result is much the same; in order to live he must serve somebody, and the gains of service he finds himself obliged to augment with the gains of roguery. So he flits from one master to another, all of whom he outwits in his career, and describes to satirize in his narrative. Finally, having run through a variety of human estates, he brings his story to a close. (qtd. in Sieber 2)

Though Chandler's is a fairly accurate characterization of an archetypal, ideal *Spanish* picaro, it remains pertinent to an examination of *A General History* and to Roberts as a character as there is an established lineage of the Spanish picaresque's influence on sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century English literature (2).

The picaresque novel made its way into England much as it did into France—via translation of pre-existing Spanish picaresques. *Lazarillo de Tormes*, for example, was translated into English by David Rowland in 1568 and published in 1576, and by 1586 a second edition was printed. This version was clearly popular as it was reprinted at least three additional times. The influence was evidently quite immediate, and native English stories like *Geystes of Skoggon* and *The Unfortunate Traveller or the Life of Jack Wilton* began adopting and adapting elements of the Spanish picaresque novel. The influence was only intensified with the introduction and translation of *Guzman de Alfarache* in 1622, which became an instantaneous best-seller and was reissued seven times from 1622 to 1656. The picaresque's influence continued into the eighteenth century (Sieber 50–52). Take, for example, Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722), an eighteenth-century work considered to be an English picaresque novel.

The titular character of Defoe's novel—"a serial monogamist, bigamist, confidence trickster, thief and occasional whore"—adheres very closely to Chandler's archetypal picaro—or picara, as it were (Hammond 140). "One typical characteristic of the picaresque novel . . . is Moll's origin as picara, her birth in prison as the daughter of a convicted felon, and hence a trajectory already marked out for her in the lowest strata of society" (Kuhlish 341). Moll is born to a mother who is "convicted of felony for a certain petty theft scarce worth naming" and who is subsequently sent to work on the plantations as a punishment (Defoe, *Moll Flanders*). Young Moll is then for a time taken in by a relative before being put out again, only to fall in with a band of "gypsies" (*Moll Flanders*). These dubious beginnings, along with other early formative experiences, give rise to her desires to become a "gentlewoman," not to have to work, and to live in a

fashion similar to those happy few who were granted a sweeter lot in life. Over the course of the narrative, her fortunes rise and fall, peak and valley, but she is always willing to rely on her wits to come up “by hook or crook.” Moll’s adherence to the typical Spanish *picara* model evinces the existence of a picaresque-informed literary tradition in England.

This is not to say that these two picaresque traditions—the Spanish and the English—were without their dissimilarities, though. Even “within the seventeenth century several authors distinguished between English ‘rogues’ and Spanish *picaros*” (Sieber 52).¹² The rogue’s potential for upward mobility and the *pizaro*’s ostensible inability to transcend “birth, lineage, and ‘blood’” is cited as one of the main disparities (52). Hammond recognizes that even though Defoe was indebted to the Spanish picaresque, his “fiction . . . is the product of a very different set of cultural circumstances from those that brought *Lazarillo* and *Guzman* into being” (141). She goes on to note that while “Defoe’s fictions postulate a relatively open society wherein individuals are,” to a certain extent, “able to transcend their origins” and “in some measure . . . [create] their own destinies,” “[i]t is not at all clear that real social mobility was a possibility for everyone in the Spanish society that generated the picaresque” (141). Ardila similarly observes that “whilst social mobility was relatively uncommon in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain, it was possible in eighteenth-century England, and hence English *picaros* succeed in their efforts to move up socially, whereas Spanish *picaros* do not” (“Origins and Definition” 15). The unique environmental and cultural contexts out of which these works were birthed shaped each text differently, and these thematic differences provide a glimpse into the anxieties and tensions extant at the moment of their respective conceptions and maturations. Anxiety regarding one’s ability to improve one’s

lot in life, or the futility of that pursuit, is not the only distinction between Spanish and English picaresque works, though.

While the influence of the picaresque was extending out from Spain across Western Europe, England was developing its own contemporaneous criminal literature tradition.¹³ This tradition, which includes cony-catching pamphlets and criminal biographies, among other genres, “complicates the issue of direct comparison with the Spanish picaresque” (Hammond 141). Though *Moll Flanders* was unequivocally informed by the Spanish tradition, it was further informed by native English criminal writing traditions: “The first-person narrative viewpoint, the concentrated interest on crime, crime reporting and courts of law are all part of the conventional elements of criminal biographies of the period,” and *Moll Flanders* borrows from this tradition (Sieber 55). This influence manifests itself in English works akin to *Moll Flanders* wherein “the *picaro*’s pranks and petty thievery are replaced with serious felonies” (Sieber 55). These English picaresques, it would appear, underwent an evolutionary period that resulted in a fusion of select elements of both traditional Spanish picaresques and English criminal biographies, the emphasis on serious criminality—sometimes vicious criminality—being an English addition. According to Walter Reed, the principal difference between the *picaro* and the criminal is that the “stratagems of the criminal are more vicious than those of the picaresque rogue, there is less cleverness, more violence, and more vice” (qtd. in Ardila, “The Picaresque Novel” 123). English *picaros* married these traditions, maintaining some elements of the traditional *picaro*, casting away others, and taking on elements of the criminal.

When considering Roberts as a character, it is evident that he exhibits qualities of the English picaro, particularly the qualities of cleverness, criminality, and occasional cruelty. Though there is an omnipresent undercurrent of violence in his narrative—a natural byproduct of the pirate’s tale—he is overwhelmingly depicted as exceedingly courageous and clever.

His stratagems for relieving traders based out of Martinico of their funds evince not only his mental acuity and strategic cleverness, but also his preferred *modus operandi* with regards to engaging his “Enem[ies]” (Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates* 243; ed. 2, ch. 9). After a bit of a rough patch, Roberts and crew sail into port at Martinico, Roberts knowing full well that “the Custom . . . for the *Dutch* Interlopers that have a Mind to Trade with the People of the Island” is “to hoist their Jacks when they come before the Town” (243). Knowing the signal and bending “his Thoughts upon Mischief,” Roberts proceeds to fly his flag in hopes of enticing the island traders to dispatch trading vessels to parlay with his approaching ship (243). The traders, being none the wiser and mistaking Roberts’s ship “for a good Market,” fall right into the trap (243). The scenario plays out as follows:

When *Roberts* had got them within his Power, (one after another,) he told them, he would not have it said that they came off for nothing, and therefore ordered them to leave their Money behind, for that they were a Parcel of Rogues, and hoped they would always meet with such a *Dutch* Trade as this was; he reserved one Vessel to set the Passengers on Shore again, and fired the rest, to the Number of twenty. (243)

Here Roberts achieves his ends not through violence and intimidation, as might be expected of a pirate, but through cunning and guile. He need not fire a shot nor brandish a cutlass—at least not according to the information with which the readers are privileged. The only act that can be read as destructive in any way is the torching of ships, and that act had no human toll, Roberts having afforded the swindled passengers a vessel with which to reach the shore. And this act was likely committed more out of prudence than out of vengeance: the fewer ships to pursue him, the better.¹⁴ The playful humor evident in his interaction with the traders further divorces his character from a traditional English rogue. While perhaps some may read this as Roberts's owning up to his own roguery, I take the "they" to be a reference to the traders and read it as his calling the men from whom he was stealing the actual "Parcel of Rogues" deserving of "such a *Dutch* trade as this," which is at once a witty, humorous, remark and an ironic commentary on the relationship between piracy and the "legitimate" mercantilist trading facilitated by various companies and empires.¹⁵

An earlier encounter further demonstrates his often cerebral, non-belligerent approach. Though this particular encounter devolves into violence, violence is clearly not Roberts's original intent. After spying a fleet of forty-two Portuguese ships, Roberts falls in with them by disguising his vessel and hiding the majority of his crew below decks. After having successfully mixed in with the other ships,

they came close up to one of the deepest, and ordered her to send the Master on Board quietly, threat'ning to give them no Quarters, if any Resistance, or Signal of Distress was made. The *Portuguese* being surprized at these Threats, and the sudden flourish of Cutlashes from the Pyrates, submitted without a Word, and the

Captain came on Board; *Roberts* saluted him after a friendly manner, telling him, that they were Gentlemen of Fortune, but that their Business with him, was only to be informed which was the richest Ship in that Fleet; and if he directed them right, he should be restored to his Ship without Molestation, otherwise, he must expect immediate Death. (Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates* 221–22; ed. 2, ch. 9)

Roberts then attempts to take the richest ship by having the captured Portuguese master hail its captain. It is only after this ruse fails that Roberts and crew resort to violence, resoundingly defeating the Portuguese ship in combat (222).

Roberts's penchant for leveraging his wits and wiles to lie, cheat, hoodwink, and steal his way to success is quintessential picaro. This fact becomes even more pronounced when viewing Roberts's narrative in the context of other representations of piratical behavior. In his *Buccaneers of America*, an influential first-hand account of piracy that predates *A General History* by nearly fifty years, Alexander Oliver Exquemelin paints a brutal and bloody picture of Caribbean piracy and of two notorious pirates in particular—Jean-David Nau (referred to as François l'Olonnais) and Henry Morgan. Both are depicted as committing unspeakable acts and subjecting captives to heinous torture.¹⁶

Exquemelin claims that “[w]hen l'Olonnais had a victim on the rack, if the wretch did not instantly answer his questions he would hack the man to pieces with his cutlass and lick the blood from the blade with his tongue, wishing it might have seen the last Spaniard in the world he had thus killed” (106). He further describes l'Olonnais's preferred method of interrogation:

Then he brought them before all the other prisoners and again asked about the way. The men answered that they knew of no other road. Then l'Olonnais, being possessed of a devil's fury, ripped open one of the prisoners with his cutlass, tore the living heart out of his body, gnawed at it, and then hurled it in the face of one of the others, saying, "Show me another way, or I will do the same to you." (107)

Morgan's tactics and those of his men, according to Exquemelin's account, were not unlike those of l'Olonnais in that they were similarly egregious and vile. When questioning a "poor cripple" captive about the "silver key tied to the point of his breeches," a group of Morgan's buccaneers becomes dissatisfied with the man's answers (200). Exquemelin describes the gruesome consequences:

When it became plain this was all he was going to tell them, they strappado'd him until both his arms were entirely dislocated, then knotted a cord so tight round the forehead that eyes bulged out, big as eggs. Since he still would not admit where the coffer was, they hung him up by his male parts, while one struck him', another sliced off his nose, yet another an ear, and another scorched him with fire—tortures as barbarous as man can devise. At last, when the wretch could no longer speak and they could think of no new torments, they let a Negro stab him to death with a lance. (200)

Though Roberts unquestionably displays a willingness to threaten violence and to use it if deemed necessary to achieve his ends, and even though Johnson refers to the purposes to which Roberts applied his talents as "wicked," violence is depicted as his last resort rather than his initial instinct—as a necessary condition of piracy, as it were—and the man himself is not represented as an embodiment of wickedness and evil, as were

Henry Morgan and Jean-David Nau. Roberts is not depicted as particularly vicious, and the overall representation of his violence is quite general, certainly when compared to the graphic representations of l'Olonnais's and Morgan's brutality, and even when compared to other pirates represented in *A General History*. Take Edward Teach—Blackbeard—for example. Teach is represented as far more cruel than Roberts, particularly in one instance wherein Teach and his men take “Liberties” with “the Wives and Daughters of . . . Planters” (Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates* 77; ed. 2, ch. 3). Teach's ruthless brutality was occasionally aimed at those among his crew, as well. Johnson recounts one such incident:

One Night drinking in his Cabin with *Hands*, the Pilot, and another Man; *Blackbeard* without any Provocation privately draws out a small Pair of Pistols, and cocks them under the Table. . . . When the Pistols were ready, he blew out the Candle, and crossing his Hands, discharged them at his Company; *Hands*, the Master, was shot thro' the Knee, and lam'd for Life; the other Pistol did no Execution.—Being asked the meaning of this, he only answered, by damning them, that *if he did not now and then kill one of them, they would forget who he was*. (86–87)

Unlike Teach, any acts of overt cruelty on Roberts's part—his setting fire to a slave ship before he was able to transport the slaves to safety, for instance—are more often than not depicted as born of pragmatism and self-preservation, not malice (Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates* 261; ed. 2, ch. 9). There is, however, one aberrational moment of violence in Robert's narrative. Having been insulted by one among his crew—a drunken crewman, to be exact—he, “in the Heat of his Passion,” kills “the

Fellow on the Spot” (248). As noted, this event is quite anomalous, the exception not the rule. It is there, though; thus, it cannot be ignored. Nonetheless, Johnson often does ignore, or at least obfuscate, the violence that must have been present in Roberts’s campaigns. Johnson’s depiction of Roberts’s violence is far more implied than it is overt; the narrator once refers to Roberts as being “more particularly severe to [a ship out of Barbados] than others,” but never illuminates the depth of his severity (236). Moments such as these are simply glossed over, whereas scenarios during which Roberts utilizes his natural cleverness to achieve his goals are on full display. This serves only to underscore Roberts’s status as an English picaro and not a common outlaw criminal.

The picaro as a protagonist is not the sole quality of the picaresque that Roberts’s narrative fulfills. The narrative also recounts the character’s life as it approaches the “final situation” characteristic of the dénouement of picaresque narratives. Readers experience Roberts’s entire life and psychological progression, even if portions are communicated non-linearly. Johnson inserts readers into the narrative just before Roberts’s metaphorical birth into the world of piracy and follows him to his literal death aboard his ship. This is the final situation to which the narrative leads, and Roberts exhibits psychological progression throughout the narrative, which is delivered in a “hence” structure. The hence structure is typical of what can be referred to as a linear/causal plot. However, as noted previously, Ardila argues that this structure is not exclusive to the linear plot. He maintains that in a true picaresque work, even one told in non-linear, episodic form, the hence structure is evident. *Lazarillo de Tormes*, which is “universally regarded as the first picaresque novel,” employs a hence structure, despite being episodic, “because it relates its protagonist’s psychological development so

perfectly that it would be impossible to change the sequencing of most episodes without breaking up the coherence of the story” (“Origins and Definition” 2, 10). Here, it is implied that the psychological development of the protagonist is at the heart of the hence structure. Despite Johnson’s brief detours and sidebars during Roberts’s narrative, he does employ a hence structure, and Roberts does develop psychologically in a logical fashion.

This is never more evident than in Roberts’s reaction to his lieutenant Kennedy’s betrayal. Roberts takes “40 Men in [a] sloop” in order to pursue a ship, leaving Kennedy in charge (Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates* 223; ed. 2, ch. 9). After an unsuccessful adventure, Roberts returns to be greeted “with the most unwellcome News in the World”: in his absence, Kennedy has made off with part of the crew and both “the Privateer and Prize” of which he was left in charge (224). At this moment in the narrative, Johnson takes a detour in order to detail the adventures and fate of Kennedy and his mutinous crew. When he returns to Roberts, an instance of psychological growth is evinced in the captain.

Despite being in a “grievous Passion at what *Kennedy* and the Crew had done,” Roberts’s next action is not one of vengeance but one of clever calculation: with the express purpose of the “Conservation of their Society, and doing Justice to one another,” he and his remaining crew create and sign articles by which to operate (Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates* 229, 230; ed. 2, ch. 9).¹⁷ Though he does exact some level of vengeance upon Kennedy, if only indirectly, by excluding all Irish from the protection of the constructed articles, the principal goals of the articles are “Conservation” and “Justice” (230). This is a crucial moment in Roberts’s development. Prior to Kennedy’s

betrayal, he was more likely to believe “no Body could do the Business so well as himself,” an attitude that ultimately led to mutiny (223). However, in the wake of Kennedy’s betrayal, Roberts recognizes the folly in that attitude and almost immediately takes practical steps to rectify the situation by constructing a document that cedes a great deal of his authority to his men. The opening clause of the document reads, “*Every Man has a Vote in Affairs of Moment*”—an unambiguous declaration of Roberts’s psychological evolution (230). Though the hence structure is not deemed a necessary condition of the picaresque, the structure does provide authors an apparatus to build more meaningfully to the narrative’s final situation, the final situation being a necessary condition of the genre.

Johnson’s foregrounding of Roberts’s better nature, coupled with his employment of the hence structure, serves to humanize Roberts as a character, molding him into more of an anti-hero than into a villain. It is easy enough to read the likes of l’Olonnais, Morgan, and Teach and strict, stereotypical villains, as they are largely demonized by the authors/narrators of their respective tales. It is, however, similarly easy to root for Roberts—despite the fact that he is not only engaging in, but *leading* men in largely destructive activities—because his progression and evolution as a character render him more realistic and relatable and his cleverness, resilience, and courage are represented as admirable even when the endeavors to which he applies those traits are often a far cry from anything admirable. He is also depicted as beloved and inspiring. Johnson writes that when Stephenson, a member of Roberts’s crew, “found . . . that his Captain was certainly dead, he gushed into Tears, and wished the next Shot might be his Lot” (*General History of the Pyrates* 272; ed. 2, ch. 9). Roberts’s death appears to have

affected other crewmen similarly. “When *Roberts* was gone,” Johnson writes, “as tho’ he had been the Life and Soul of the Gang, their Spirits sunk; many deserted their Quarters, and all stupidly neglected any Means for Defence, or Escape; and their Main-mast soon after being shot by the Board, they had no Way left, but to surrender and call for Quarters” (273). Despite his representation of Roberts as an inspiring figure, Johnson does not shy away from characterizing Roberts and his actions as “wicked,” “vile,” and “deprav’d” (272, 273). There is an unequivocal tension and duality in Johnson’s representation of Roberts, and the author’s ambivalence about his subject is obvious.¹⁸ Similarly, readers, being at once enamored and repulsed, are clearly meant to adopt Johnson’s ambivalence towards Roberts and his actions as their own.

Johnson’s representation of Roberts reflects the English ambivalence towards piracy that pervaded the imperial apparatus throughout the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In their respective recent volumes, historians Mark Hanna and Douglas Burgess, Jr. combat the misconception that pirates were considered by all to be enemies of the state. Hanna “examines and analyzes the often overt support and protection of illicit sea marauders in maritime communities on the peripheries of England’s burgeoning empire,” noting not only that “[m]en clearly guilty of crimes against the subjects, citizens, and residents of foreign nations allied with England were rarely brought to justice in overseas English ports during most of the seventeenth century, though they likely would have been found guilty of piracy had they faced trial in London,” but also that pirates often integrated themselves into colonial societies by buying land and “settling down with women,” often from established families (3, 1). Burgess imparts a similar narrative of pirates living comfortably and openly in colonial

England: “One, a ruthless character named Stephen Claus, resided across the street from the governor’s elegant townhouse. Others swaggered about Philadelphia, displaying gold watches and fine imported clothes. Every’s [referred to as Avery in Johnson’s text] second mate was luckiest of all: his share of the Great Mughal’s treasure had secured the marriage of Governor Markham’s own daughter” (2). Depending on the circumstances, the time, and the place, these men were viewed as privateers doing legitimate, crown-sponsored business or pirates wreaking havoc on the open seas. “The mutability of terms used to describe bandits at sea,” Hanna writes, “reflected the ambiguity of the many roles they played in the colonial world, even into the early eighteenth century” (5). Whether intentional or not, Johnson perfectly captures this pervading ambiguity towards piracy, and his conflicted representation speaks to the often complicated status of these individuals in mainstream society.

Conclusion

Though Johnson was writing out of London, the heart of the English empire, a space wherein piracy likely would have been viewed as a very serious threat to imperial authority and economic progress, he manages to represent a more complicated and nuanced view of piracy in his creation of Roberts as an English picaro. This realization offers valuable insight into the evolution and influence of this genre as it made its way out of Spain and into Western Europe. The genre proved quite resilient in that it was able to transcend its origins and was applicable to novel contexts. In the case of *A General History of the Pyrates*, hallmarks of the genre are merged with myriad English traditions to tackle a pressing issue of the day—piracy. Johnson’s employment of this tradition provides a nuanced lens through which to view the often murky waters of English piracy

by affording him a mold with which to craft well-rounded characters who embodied the dual nature of both piracy and the popular perception of piracy. As we will see in the next chapter, this is not all the picaresque tradition afforded Johnson. Along with other literary traditions, it afforded him a platform for socio-political criticism, and he further utilized the genre and the English picaro as a vehicle to criticize the imperial mechanisms and practices that allowed piracy to flourish on the periphery of the British empire.

Notes

1. The 2008 edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* states, “A literary work that is understood to be reproducing an external reality or any aspect of it is described as mimetic” (Baldick, “Mimesis” 207). Here I use “mimetic” to represent works/genres that purport to represent reality, the world, and actions/people within the world as they are. For additional information on the advent of mimetic prose, see Leslie Kurke’s “Plato, Aesop, and the Beginnings of Mimetic Prose.” For an overview of genre theory, see McKeon’s “Genre Theory.”
2. It would appear that Rediker was convinced by Furbank’s and Owens’s work: in a footnote in an early work, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, Rediker refers the readers to Manuel Schonhorn’s introduction to *A General History of the Pyrates* for information “[o]n Defoe’s credibility” as an author (258). By the publication of *Villains of All Nations*, however, he cites Johnson as the author. Regardless, he expresses his utmost confidence in the information presented.
3. One definition of “poetry,” as provided by the *OED*, is “[i]maginative or creative literature in general; fable, fiction.” When referring to the “poetic” elements of the text, I am referring to the imaginative, creative, and fictional elements.
4. In “Death of the Author,” Roland Barthes comments that
 [t]he image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically cent[er]ed on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions, while criticism still consists for the most part in saying that Baudelaire’s work is the failure of Baudelaire the man. Van Gogh’s his madness, Tchaikovsky’s his vice. The explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as

if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the author “confiding” in us. (143)

“Though the sway of the Author remains powerful,” he goes on to write, “it goes without saying that certain writers have long since attempted to loosen it” (143). Jameson’s theory of the “political unconscious” indeed diminishes the role of the author, viewing the text more of a product of its environmental influences.

5. Misson’s story begins in the initial chapter of *A General History*’s second volume and concludes in the chapter “Of Captain Tew.” In this chapter, I refer to the fiction of Captain Misson in order to underscore that fact that this text is working in the realms of fiction as well as non-fiction. For further analysis of this narrative’s function as socio-political criticism, see chapter one, “From ‘Notorious’ to ‘Noted’: The Material Evolution of *A General History of the Pyrates*.”

6. For additional analysis of the satirical aspects of *A General History*, see Richard Frohock’s “Satire and Civil Governance in *A General History of the Pyrates* (1724, 1726).” According to Frohock, the text “enacts a double satire, upholding the pirates’ view that mainstream society is structured to privilege the rich and the powerful at the expense of the weak and disadvantaged while simultaneously mocking pirates themselves as common criminals who cannot—and often intend not—to live up to their principled claims” (468). Chapter three, “‘A Life of So Much Peril’: The Life of Mary Read, English Picara, As Socio-Political Satire,” further explores the text’s satirical qualities.

7. Fittingly, the picaresque genre itself is, not unlike *A General History*, problematic. While some scholars claim a clear lineage, others argue the genre is an eighteenth century critical construction (Ardila, “Origins and Definition” 2). With regards

to a definition of the narrative form, Alexander Parker is of the mind that the “terminology has become ridiculously confused” (qtd. in Ardila, “The Picaresque Novel” 115). Similarly, Brean Hammond notes that the picaresque is “highly complex” (141). Regardless of whether or not this complex genre is merely a critical construct, it has endured as part of the critical consciousness and has become subsumed into the critical lexicon; thus, it is a legitimate means of literary analysis. For more on the picaresque literary tradition, see Harry Sieber’s *The Picaresque* and Stuart Miller’s *The Picaresque Novel*.

8. See Claudio Guillén’s “Towards a Definition of the Picaresque” for his original commentary on the “picaresque myth.”

9. Roberts is not the only figure in the text that functions as a picaro; however, in order to establish the picaresque’s significant influence on the text adequately, this chapter maintains focus on Roberts, its central figure. The next chapter will explore how Johnson fashions Mary Read as a picaro for the sake of socio-political criticism.

10. For an alternative take of the “English picaro,” see Barbara Fuchs’s “An English Pícaro in Spain: Miles Philips and the Framing of National Identity.”

11. “Bartholomew Roberts, the last of the Golden Age pirate captains,” writes Jenifer Marx,

was also the greatest. In his own day he was the ‘Great Pyrate Roberts,’ undisputed king of rovers; fearless, original, and a superlative seaman. . . . ‘Black Bart’ was a handsome, commanding figure with a taste for elegant dress. He died during a battle wearing a rich crimson damask waistcoat and breeches, a scarlet plumed hat, and a massive gold chain attached to a jeweled cross. (119)

Woodard recognizes that Roberts “presided over what was probably one of the most productive pirate companies in history, taking over 400 vessels before they were captured by the Royal Navy in February 1722” (321–22). For more on Roberts, see Lane 191–92 and Linebaugh and Rediker 163–71.

12. See Craig Dionne and Steve Mentz’s introduction to *Rogues and Early Modern English Culture* for a detailed cataloging of England’s criminal literature tradition, the scholarship that focuses on this tradition, and the cultural relevance of the “English rogue.” For a quite comprehensive chronological bibliography of English criminal narratives, see Lincoln Faller’s *Turned to Account* 289–327.

13. Again, Dionne and Mentz explicate this tradition. Hammond briefly comments on it for contextualization. In “Criminal Opportunities in the Eighteenth Century: The ‘Ready-Made’ Contexts of the Popular Literature of Crime,” Lincoln Faller compares criminal literature traditions across eighteenth-century Western cultures. Of English popular criminal literature, he writes,

[T]he popular literature of crime in England seems simpler, more straightforward. The motives focused on are the criminal's, not his victim's, and criminal activity chiefly involves the transfer of portable property, usually under threat of violence—and the violence, when enacted, tends to be concrete, direct, a matter of thrusts, cuts, groans. It is almost never emotional, or psychologically induced.

(124)

For further analysis, see Mackie’s *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates*. Additionally, see Daniel Williams’s *Pillars of Salt* for greater understanding of criminal narratives in England’s American colonies.

14. At times, Roberts is presented as having a vengeful streak. More generally, however, his cleverness and guile, rather than his rage, steer his course.
15. Johnson levels economic criticism throughout the text, and establishes this as a primary concern in the preface, as will be further explored in the next chapter. Schonhorn writes that the first volume indeed “contained authorial allusions to the contemporary English scene,” noting that “it had been published during the upheavals resulting from the South Seas Bubble” (xxxvii). For a brief overview of the South Sea Bubble and the resulting fallout, see “Game of Finance: The South Sea Bubble” in the *Harvard Business Review*.
16. Exquemelin’s *Buccaneers of America* was originally published in Dutch in 1678 and in English in 1684, forty years prior to the initial publication of the first volume of *A General History*. Though the text explores an earlier era of piracy, it is nonetheless an important source text for representations of piratical violence and depredations.
17. Leeson and Skarbek argue that
pirate constitutions . . . created basic behavioural rules, such as those prohibiting theft and violence, regulated various activities that were likely to generate negative externalities for the crew, and specified punishments for rule infractions. Through these articles history’s allegedly most reckless and uncontrolled criminals promoted organisational consensus, prevented socially destructive activities within their organisations, and coordinated the enforcement of their organisation’s rules. (285)

18. Johnson's ambivalence is evident within the preface of the text as well; he refers to piracy as "*Evil*" but mainly lays the blame for this evil at the feet of early modern imperial practices:

I shall not repeat what I have said in the History concerning the Privateers of the West-Indies, where I have taken Notice they live upon Spoil; and as Custom is a second Nature, it is no Wonder that, when an honest Livlyhood is not easily had, they run into one so like their own; so that it may be said, that Privateers in Time of War are a Nursery for Pyrates against a Peace. (General History of the Pyrates; ed. 2, preface)

See the next chapter for further analysis of Johnson's preface.

CHAPTER III

“A Life of So Much Peril”: The Life of Mary Read, English Picara, As Socio-Political Satire

In the previous chapter, I discussed the influence of the picaresque novel on Charles Johnson’s *A General History of the Pyrates*, noting that the work borrowed from the Spanish literary tradition and subsequent picaresque-informed English texts and that some figures in the text function as English picares. In this chapter, I shift my focus to the text’s distinct political commentary and Johnson’s mobilization of the English picaro as a vessel of criticism. The framing devices of the preface and introduction mark the text as a critique of English/European imperial practices and inefficiencies.¹ Johnson argues that the scourge of piracy is a byproduct of the structural and administrative shortcomings of the European state at large, emphasizing the English role in the incubation of piracy. These critiques bleed into and color the body of the text as well. The socio-political criticism evident in the English picaro female pirate narratives—those of Mary Read (and Anne Bonny, to a lesser extent)—is the manifestation, illustration, and extension of criticisms laid bare in the prefatory material.²

“[M]ost of the authors in the genre,” J. A. Ardila writes, “chose to write a picaresque tale because of the genre’s adaptability to social satire” (“Origins and Definition” 16–17). Of early American satire, Richard Frohock writes,

Other satirists discovered in particular genres, such as the travel narrative or scientific voyage of discovery, good vehicles for satirizing the modern drive to improve the condition of mankind and the state of human knowledge through exploration of the wider world. More generally, the Americas and Native

Americans provided a satirical viewpoint—a fictional outsider’s perspective—for critiquing the politics and culture of home. (“Satire and Conquest” 139)

Although “it took some time for critics to understand the genre’s social bias,” like other genres of the era, the picaresque is a “good vehicle” for satire, particularly given its penchant for ironic social commentary (Ardila, “Origins and Definition” 16).

Ironic social commentary is one of Ardila’s essential characteristics of the picaresque and yet another reason *A General History* can be said to operate within the picaresque myth. Social criticism and social bias were “common denominator[s]” in early picaresque novels, and the genre is, in Ardila’s words, “hardly without a political message” (“Origins and Definition” 16, 17). The picaro, not unlike Frohock’s characterization of the Native American, operates on the outskirts of mainstream society, thus affording the picaresque author a similar “outsider’s perspective” to adopt as a vessel of “critiquing the politics and culture of home” (Frohock, “Satire and Conquest” 139). In Johnson’s case, his picaros and picaras are Atlantic pirates. The pirates of *A General History*, both male and female, operate on the fringes of acceptable society as socio-political minorities. They are in Johnson’s estimation, however, byproducts of the very world and ideals they would rage against. This imbues them with a certain insider-outsider quality that serves to critique contemporary European patriarchal and imperialist attitudes. Johnson’s pirate picaros attempt to navigate the imperial landscape, through both legitimate and extralegal means, and their successes and failures to do so call into question economic policies and military practices.

A General History, Richard Frohock suggests, “enacts a double satire, upholding the pirates’ view that mainstream society is structured to privilege the rich and the

powerful at the expense of the weak and disadvantaged while simultaneously mocking pirates themselves as common criminals who cannot—and often intend not—to live up to their principled claims” (“Satire and Civil Governance” 468). His critical eye is drawn, not unsurprisingly, to the text’s critique of both empire and piracy. His work highlights the duality of the text and the ambivalent attitude adopted by the author, and his conceptualization of satire appears to be influenced by his exploration of the genre in a previous piece.

The ability to raise critical questions rather than offer definitive answers is, in Frohock’s estimation, endemic to the genre of satire. In “Satire and Conquest,” he writes the following:

This is not to say that the satirists offered unambiguous opposition to imperialism, however. . . . This ambivalence toward subject matter is characteristic of satire more generally, which many have defined as a genre that raises rather than settles questions, attacks and dismantles received opinion rather than offering clearly defined alternatives, satirizes the viewpoint of the satirist, and concludes open-endedly. (Frohock 139)

Here he notes that ambiguity, ambivalence, open-endedness, self-satire, and question raising are all part and parcel of satire.³ His thesis regarding *A General History* notes the ambivalence present in Johnson’s treatment of pirates and is consistent with the above interpretation of the nature of satire.

While Frohock’s analysis of the text is insightful, it can be expanded upon. Frohock represents the text’s satirical elements as largely a result of the interplay between the “reported pirate speech” and the narrator’s ironic interjections, yet he

underestimates the importance of the text's preface and introduction ("Satire and Civil Governance" 468). While he does dedicate two paragraphs to how certain narratives do and do not support Johnson's opening economic arguments, he neither addresses Johnson's criticism of military practices and governmental negligence nor the extent to which Johnson's opening arguments/concerns frame the work (470). He contends that many narratives characterize "piracy as the manifestation of greed, corruption, or unaccountable, innate evil" but does not acknowledge that Johnson blames the perpetuation of this evil on the failures of the state (470). Additionally, while he recognizes that "the *General History* is a narrative compilation of diverse stylistic construction and generic features," his analysis rarely delves into how specific genre conventions contribute to the text's satirical criticism (478).

Conversely, my analysis hinges on how the prefatory material functions as a framing mechanism through which the rest of the text can be read and how the criticisms leveled by Johnson in the opening sections are illustrated, enhanced, and expanded upon by his mobilization of the picaresque, more specifically of the English picaresque as a character. Johnson's opening remarks do reveal a certain level of admiration for his subjects while also diminishing them, an example being his referring to pirates as no more than a "*Parcel of Robbers*" while simultaneously noting that their "*Bravery and Stratagem in War*" are worthy of record (*General History of the Pyrates*; ed. 2, preface). More overtly, however, they reflect "an imperial crisis" born of pirates' "relentless and successful attacks upon merchants' property and international commerce between 1716 and 1726" (Rediker, "The Seaman as Pirate" 139). Through Johnson's pointed criticisms of current economic, militaristic, and governmental conditions and practices, and his

willingness to offer solutions, they reveal a feeling of English culpability in the rise of piracy, a lack of confidence in the imperial mechanism at large, and a desire to see the imperial ship righted.

“Our Glorious *Britain*, My Dearly Loved Country”: The Preface and Introduction as Constructive Criticism⁴

Early in the preface, Johnson writes,

We have given a few Instances in the Course of this History of the Inducements Men have to engage themselves headlong in a Life of so much Peril to themselves, and so destructive to the Navigation of the trading World; to remedy which Evil there seems to be but two Ways, either to find Employment for the great Numbers of Seamen turn'd adrift at the Conclusion of a War, and thereby prevent their running into such Undertakings, or to guard sufficiently the Coast of Africa, the West-Indies, and other Places whereto Pyrates resort. (General History of the Pyrates; ed. 2, preface)

By opining that the only means of preventing men from “*engag[ing] themselves headlong in a Life of so much Peril*” is to change either economic or military policy, he places blame for the rise of piracy on those very policies and the European empires responsible for their creation and implementation (preface). This excerpt evinces Johnson’s complex attitude toward piracy and the state. Johnson certainly identifies piracy as an “evil” of the world and acknowledges its destructive nature, particularly with regards to commerce and trade, but he lays the blame for its rise at the feet of European society rather than at the boots of the men and women committing the acts. He heavily implies that external factors—among them lack of economic opportunities—are the cause of piracy, not some

in-born defect or innate moral deficit present in the pirates themselves.⁵ As the preface continues, his indictments become more overt: he names the economic conditions, the practice of privateering, and the lack of governmental/naval urgency in the suppression of pirates as crucial contributors to the incubation of the practice.

Johnson first addresses the economic factors related to the creation of piracy. He paints the picture of the hard-working sailor who has not only fallen on hard times due to unemployment but has also been victim of the predatory business practices instituted by unscrupulous merchants. He notes that in England “*there are Multitudes of Seamen at this Day unemploy’d,*” a fact he deems all “*too evident by their straggling, and begging all over the Kingdom*” (*General History of the Pyrates*; ed. 2, preface). He attributes this mass destitution not to “*their Inclination to Idleness*” but to “*their own hard Fate, in being cast off after their Work is done, to starve or steal*” (preface). In his mind, these sailors are fully capable of working and completely inclined to do so. “*I have not known a Man of War commission’d for several Years past,*” Johnson writes, “*but three times her Compliment of Men have offer’d themselves in 24 Hours*” (preface). According to Johnson, however, merchants take advantage of this particular economic condition—i.e., mass unemployment and job scarcity—by lowering wages to such the degree that those sailors who do find themselves gainfully employed are paid and fed so little that they are hardly better off than their unemployed counterparts.⁶ He concludes that “*such Usage breeds Discontents amongst them, and makes them eager for any Change*” (preface).⁷

These unemployed seaman and potential (or perhaps likely) pirates are painted as victims of circumstance and situations beyond their control.⁸ In Johnson’s estimation, it is the failure of England’s economic model and, more specifically, the unchecked capitalist

opportunism of English merchants that have driven willing workers to desperation, discontentment, and crime.⁹ Here he is again, and more overtly, shifting blame away from the individual and placing it upon English society. This representation would have readers believe that these sailors have little to no agency in determining their future and no avenues—at least no legal avenues—of establishing economic security for themselves. His argument is simply the old adage that “desperate times call for desperate measures.” In this this case, the “desperate times” are completely of English creation.

Johnson names the practice of English privateering in his account of factors responsible for the creation of pirates.¹⁰ Steven J. J. Pitt writes,

Wartime generated a new occupational opportunity—privateering. Privateering was, in short, state-licensed piracy. Armed with letters of marque, privateers pursued, captured, and destroyed an adversary’s merchant ships, pocketing the profits and complicating the enemy’s wartime capabilities. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, England used privateers to great effect as its swashbuckling heroes Francis Drake and Henry Morgan terrorized Spain’s colonial possessions. Captain Kidd had also been a well-regarded privateer during King William’s War (1689–97). (224)

Privateering was at once a gambit for military hegemony and economic supremacy. There was a clear economic imperative for European imperial powers to employ privateers, as the harrying of a rival’s transatlantic business interests could open up new markets and opportunities for one’s own gain.¹¹ Similarly, privateers benefitted monetarily from the spoils of their conquest in ways that they likely would not have had in pursuing other seafaring endeavors. It would appear that in wartime this arrangement

worked well for and to the benefit of all parties involved. It is in peace time where lines of legality blur and conflicts of interest arise.

According to Pitt,

Colonial governors were far from discriminating when disbursing privateering commissions, thus blurring the fine line between illegal piracy and legal privateering. Merchants, eager to fill their coffers with gold and silver, did not hesitate to supply and trade with freebooters. In essence, colonial politicians and merchants had essentially helped finance and legalize piracy in the Indian Ocean.

(226)

Additionally, Douglas R. Burgess, Jr. argues, “The challenge of piracy grew out of conflicts and confusion within English law. . . . With English courts divided on issues of definition, as well as a long history of Crown sponsorship that terminated only in the eighteenth century, these [colonial] governors had ample precedent from which to fashion their own policy” (8–9).¹² He concludes that “[p]iracy, then, amounted to a structural flaw within the colonial plan, transposed from the English to the colonial context like vermin that arrive with the first settlers and flourish in their new environment” (9). Not unlike Johnson, though with the added benefit of hindsight, both Pitt and Burgess recognize the culpability of English policy writ large in the genesis and incubation of Atlantic piracy, and both specifically name the practice of privateering, or Crown-sponsored piracy, as a key factor.

Johnson’s commentary on privateering in the preface is quite brief, yet also quite plain. He writes, “*I shall not repeat what I have said in the History concerning the Privateers of the West-Indies, where I have taken Notice they live upon Spoil; and as*

Custom is a second Nature, it is no Wonder that, when an honest Livlyhood is not easily had, they run into one so like their own; so that it may be said, that Privateers in Time of War are a Nursery for Pyrates against a Peace” (*General History of the Pyrates*; ed. 2, preface). Here Johnson essentially argues that the very practice of privateering—the purpose and methods of which David J. Starkey characterizes as profit-motivated, violent, and unquestionably legitimate and state sanctioned—is directly linked to the incubation of piracy (“The Origins and Regulation” 69). Moreover, Johnson ties this comment back to his previous argument by implying that privateers turn pirate not only because of “*Custom*,” but also because “*an honest Livlyhood is not easily had*” (*General History of the Pyrates*; ed. 2, preface). Again, he is pointing the finger not at the pirates/privateers, but at the inefficacy of English imperial practices and the conditions born of those practices.

Johnson does not level criticism for criticism’s sake alone, however. Rather, he points out flaws within the system in order to correct them, and he proffers his own solutions. He praises the industry of the Dutch, noting “*I have not so much as heard of a Dutch Pyrate*” (*General History of the Pyrates*; ed. 2, preface). Johnson argues that “*It is not that I take them to be honester than their Neighbours. . . . The Reason I take to be, that after a War, when the Dutch Ships are laid up, they have a Fishery, where their Seamen find immediate Business, and as comfortable Bread as they had before*” (preface). Johnson once again divorces the act of piracy from moral depravity and connects it with the lack of other legitimate opportunities. He notes that the Dutch are not innately or inherently “*honest*” than the English but that they have provided their returning seaman with an avenue to success and economic security. “*Had ours* [English

seaman] *the same Recourse in their Necessities*,” Johnson vouches, “*I’m certain we should find the same Effect from it; for a Fishery is a Trade that cannot be overstock’d; the Sea is wide enough for us all, we need not quarrel for Elbow-room: Its Stores are infinite, and will ever reward the Labourer*” (preface). His conclusion on the matter is thus: “[*I*]f there was a publick Spirit among us, it would be well worth our while to establish a National Fishery, which would be the best Means in the World to prevent Piracy, employ a Number of the Poor, and ease the Nation of a great Burthen, by lowering the Price of Provision in general, as well as of several other Commodities” (preface).¹³

The implication is that the English—through negligence and “*want of Industry*”—have in large part created the destructive evil of piracy (preface). However, Johnson does not leave it at mere criticism, but rather doubles down on the idea that the English have it within their power to rectify the situation and prevent sailors from turning to piracy by establishing “a National Fishery.” His argument is clear: provide sailors with legitimate opportunities for work, and there will be no economic imperative for them to seek extralegal means of making profits. He also notes other material benefits of this policy, namely reducing the general level of poverty and lowering the price of goods, both of which would certainly prove both beneficial for and desirable to the English imperial apparatus.

Johnson’s critique is not limited to the economic sphere. He notes that it would be natural for one to enquire, “*Now we have accounted for their Rise and Beginning*,” “*why [the Pyrates] are not taken and destroy’d, before they come to any Head, seeing that there are seldom less than twelve Men of War stationed in our American Plantations,*

even in Time of Peace; a Force sufficient to contend with a powerful Enemy” (*General History of the Pyrates*; preface). His answer to the question at hand is unequivocal: governmental negligence, military/naval incompetence, and lack of international cooperation.

On multiple occasions throughout the introduction, Johnson cautions of the ill-effects of governmental negligence on the proliferation of piracy and heavily implies that the English government is guilty of just such negligence. Prior to delving into the history of piracy in ancient Rome, he states,

But before we enter upon their particular History, it will not be amiss, by way of Introduction, to shew, by some Examples drawn from History, the great Mischief and Danger which threaten Kingdoms and Commonwealths, from the Increase of these sort of Robbers; when either by the Troubles of particular Times, or the Neglect of Governments, they are not crush’d before they gather Strength.

It has been the Case heretofore, that when a single Pyrate has been suffered to range the Seas, as not being worth the Notice of a Government, he has by Degrees grown so powerful, as to put them to the Expence of a great deal of Blood and Treasure, before he was suppress’d. We shall not examine how it came to pass, that our Pyrates in the *West-Indies* have continually increased till of late; this is an Enquiry which belongs to the Legislature, or Representatives of the People in Parliament, and to them we shall leave it. (Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates* 17–18; ed. 2, introduction).

Though Johnson frames his argument as being historical in nature, his invoking “the Legislature, or Representatives of the People in Parliament” in the midst of a comment on governmental negligence with regards to piracy is telling, the implication being that the English Parliament is just as guilty of ignoring the menace of piracy as those governments who preceded it and that the burden of solving this problem lies squarely on its shoulders (17–18). As promised, he follows this statement with a multi-page historical tale of Rome’s struggles with piracy. This, however, serves a greater purpose than merely elucidating the beginnings of piracy: it is intended as “a Proof how dangerous it is to Governments to be negligent, and not take an early Care in suppressing these Sea Banditti, before they gather Strength” (23).

Allusions to governmental negligence, however, are not a strong enough condemnation for Johnson. Instead, he extends blame beyond the houses of Parliament to the very head of the English empire, the former sovereign herself, Queen Anne, with an anecdote that displays the Crown’s apparent disinterest in protecting English interests in the Caribbean. Amid a discussion of the rise of pirates in the West Indies, Johnson notes,

In *March* 1705-6, the House of Lords did in an Address to her late Majesty, set forth, “That the *French* and *Spaniards* had twice, during the Time of the War, over run and plundered the *Bahama* Islands, that there was no Form of Government there: That the Harbour of the Isle of *Providence*, might be easily put in a Posture of Defence, and that it would be of dangerous Consequence, should those Islands fall into the Hands of the Enemy; wherefore the Lords humbly besought her Majesty to use such Methods as she should think proper for taking

the said Island into her Hands, in order to secure the same to the Crown of this Kingdom, and to the Security and Advantage of the Trade thereof.

But, however it happened, no Means were used in compliance to that Address, for securing the *Bahama* Islands, till the *English* Pyrates had made *Providence* their Retreat and general Receptacle. . . .¹⁴ (*General History of the Pyrates* 30–31; ed. 2, introduction)

Though French and Spanish encroachment appears to have been chief among the House of Lords' concerns, Johnson steers the conversation back towards piracy. It's clear that he feels the House of Lords' call for "a Posture of Defence" in the area would certainly have been a boon to the English ability to combat pirates had it been considered and acted upon. As Johnson notes, however, the Crown took no steps to comply with the House of Lords' advice, and as a result of this inaction, ceded dominion of the Bahamas to the pirates.¹⁵ This is one of Johnson's more explicit illustrations of the failure of the English government and how its negligence provided pirates with opportunities to expand and thrive. Laying blame at the feet of the sovereign—the physical embodiment of English empire, power, and tradition—is a strong indictment of the entire system.

Johnson argues further that willful ignorance and inaction extended beyond the halls of English government into the seas, the very auspices of the English navy. Johnson finds it "*strange that a few Pyrates should ravage the Seas for Years, without ever being light upon, by any of our Ships of War; when in the mean Time, they (the Pyrates) shall take Fleets of Ships; it looks as if one was much more diligent in their Affairs, than the other*" (*General History of the Pyrates*; ed. 2, preface). He minces very little here, accusing the English navy of incompetence and inadequacy. As an example, he notes that

Bartholomew Roberts “*and his Crew, alone, took 400 Sail, before he was destroy’d*” (preface). The implication is that, had the English navy taken the threat of piracy seriously long before and been proactive in their approach to dealing with this threat, Roberts and others of his ilk would not have found the success they did.¹⁶ In a sense, the English allowed Roberts and others to make so much “*Noise in the World*” by turning a blind eye to their endeavors and not presenting a credible threat to them. Just as, in Johnson’s estimation, English merchants failed to provide legitimate economic incentives for English seaman, so, too, did the English navy fail to produce a convincing military disincentive.

Again, as he did with his criticism of the imperial economic apparatus, Johnson couples his criticism of the English navy with a proposed solution. He builds up to his solution by first establishing the successful methodology of pirate vessels. “[*T*he *Pirates at Sea*,” Johnson assesses,

have the same Sagacity with Robbers at Land; as the latter understand what Roads are most frequented, and where it is most likely to meet with Booty, so the former know what Latitude to lie in, in order to intercept Ships; and as the Pirates happen to be in want of Provisions, Stores, or any particular Lading, they cruise accordingly for such Ships, and are morally certain of meeting with them. . . . (General History of the Pirates; ed. 2, preface)

Johnson’s advice to the English Men of War? Adopt the pirates’ strategy as their own by patrolling the very same latitudes merchant vessels are known to cruise. His logic is as follows: it stands to reason that “*if the Men of War cruise in those Latitudes, they might be as sure of finding the Pirates, as the Pirates are to find the Merchant Ships; and if the*

Pirates are not to be met with by the Men of War in such a Latitude, then surely down the same Latitude may the Merchant Ships arrive safely to their Port” (preface). Johnson then makes the following evocative analogy for the sake of his “*Country Readers*”:

[I]f the Men of War take the same Track, the Pirates must unavoidably fall into their Mouths, or be frighted away, for where the Game is, there will the Vermin be; if the latter should be the Case, the trading Ships, as I said before, will pass unmolested and safe, and the Pirates be reduced to take Refuge in some of their lurking Holes about the uninhabited Islands, where their Fate would be like that of the Fox in his Den, if they should venture out, they would be hunted and taken, and if they stay within they must starve. (preface)

Johnson argues that if the navy were simply to capitalize on the information it already has—i.e., knowledge of high-frequency trading routes and the fact that, in Johnson’s estimation, “*Every Man who has used the West-India Trade*” knows that pirates “*follow the Sun*” to warmer waters in the winter—it could at worst ward off the pirates and better protect English economic interests or at best eradicate them completely (preface).¹⁷

Analysis of this preface and introduction alone, though crucial to our understanding the text, is insufficient. With his opening remarks, Johnson establishes the *entire* text as a work of constructive criticism. Subsequent additions to the preface of the initial volume largely address matters of pricing and factual accuracy; they do not, however, alter Johnson’s criticism, leaving the material of the original preface seemingly untouched.¹⁸ The corrective quality of Johnson’s arguments remains. Therefore, regardless of which edition of the text one reads, the preface functions in a consistent

manner—as a critical prism through which the body of the work is filtered. It is in the interplay between Johnson’s opening remarks and the pirate narratives themselves that Johnson’s socio-political themes emerge.

Atlantic Picas and Socio-Political Critique

Read through Johnson’s established critical framework, the pirate narratives themselves adopt a critical quality. For instance, Blackbeard’s depravity becomes not only evidence of the evils of piracy but also an indictment of the negligence that allows such villainy to prosper; Roberts’s besting of nearly all comers, often by outthinking his opponents, becomes less a lionization of his abilities and more an unmasking of naval inadequacies. Though one might reach similar conclusions without the context of the preface and introduction, the text’s socio-political satire is rendered more evident when informed by Johnson’s opening salvo and is often at its strongest when Johnson, unburdened by and unmoored from the historical record, leverages conventions of fictional narrative, such as in the narratives of Mary Read and Anne Bonny. With respect to Read and Bonny, Johnson intermingles fact and fiction, the known and the imagined, and crafts Read as an English picara to enrich and extend his critique of empire. By characterizing Read and Bonny as victims of the circumstances into which they were born—a theme clearly established in the prefatory material—Johnson renders his criticism of how external societal forces can push one towards piracy more effective and specific.

Mary Read and Anne Bonny proved to be two of the most enduring figures to emerge from *A General History*, partially because of their prominent status in the volume’s marketing.¹⁹ Mark Hanna notes that in 1721, three years prior to the initial

printing of *A General History*'s first volume, the *American Weekly Mercury* published a story recounting the "execution of pirates in Jamaica," among whom were Read and Bonny, whose respective pregnancies staid their executions (403). In a chapter dedicated to Read and Bonny, Marcus Rediker notes that as early as 1720, the women were referenced, either by name or indirectly, in proclamations, pamphlets, and various news articles (*Villains of All Nations* 107–08). While information was in no way as accessible and instantaneous as it is now, there would have been some level of cultural awareness for Johnson to trade upon by the time he was releasing his work to the public, a likelihood that could explain the female pirates' prominent position in advertising material.²⁰ "When the *American Weekly Mercury* advertised the *General History*," Hanna writes, "the female pirates took up one-third of the advertisement" (403). Moreover, Read and Bonny, featured more prominently on the first edition's title page than all other pirates save Avery, were emphasized to an even greater degree in subsequent editions. (See Figure 5.) This increased emphasis began with the second edition of the text and was "Clearly . . . a major selling point to a colonial readership" (Hanna 403). Given their increasingly prominent placement in advertising and on the title page of the text itself, it appears that Johnson was either tapping into a preexisting interest in the lives of the iconoclastic female pirates or attempting to generate new interest in their tales. Regardless of his level of awareness of the public's interest in Read and Bonny, there can be little doubt of his intent to draw attention to their stories.

With Read and Bonny, Rediker contends Johnson "recognized a good story when he saw one" (*Villains of All Nations* 105). His conclusion, however, would have been more accurate if it had been that Johnson recognized a good story when he *crafted* one.

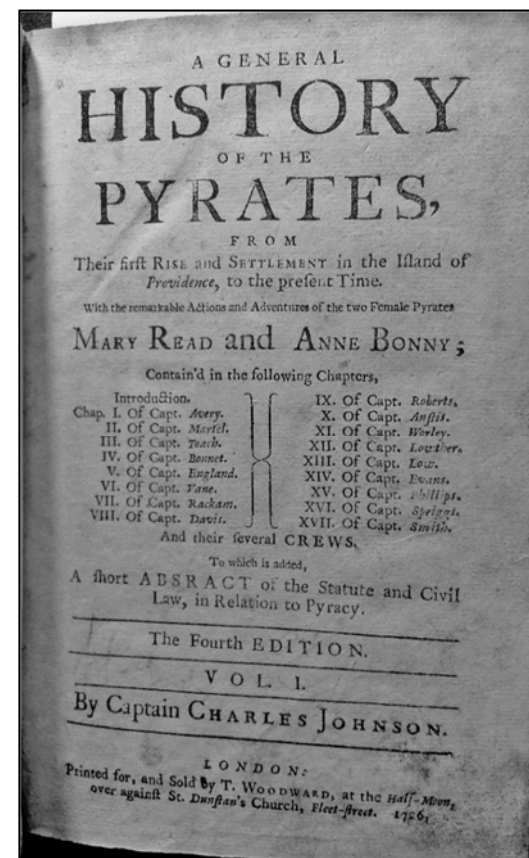
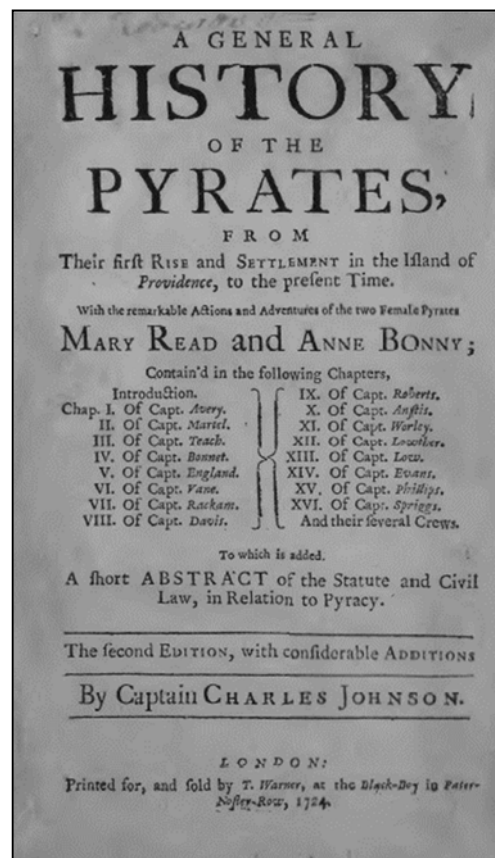
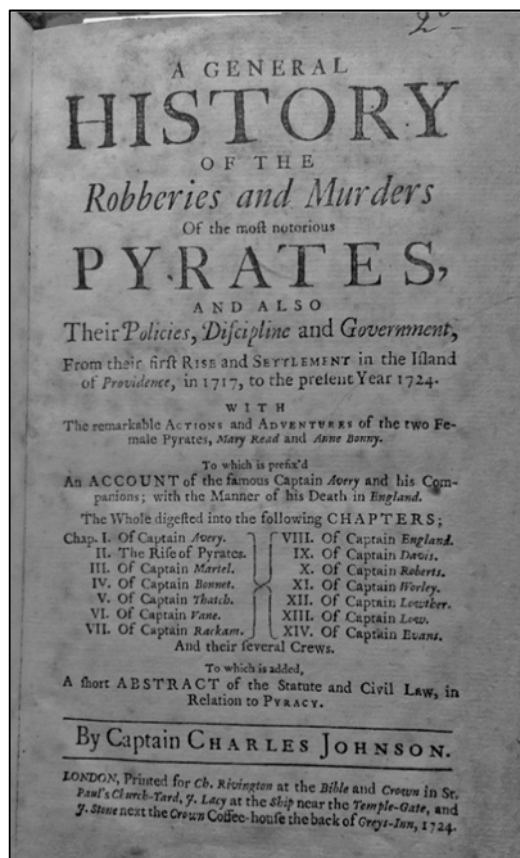


Figure 5: A comparison of the title pages of the first (left), second (middle), and fourth (right) editions of *A General History of the Pyrates*. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University (left and right). Image courtesy of the Biodiversity Heritage Library (middle). <http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>. From Charles Johnson's *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 Present Year 1724* (1st edition) and *A General History of the Pyrates, from Their Rise and Settlement in the Island of Providence, to the Present Time* (2nd and 4th editions). Used under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 / Desaturated from originals.

Sally O'Driscoll describes both Bonny and Read's narratives as being told "[i]n the conventional style of criminal biographies" (361). As noted in the previous chapter, the English criminal literature tradition informed the development of English picaresque fiction. I contend that in the case of Mary Read, Johnson crafted a picaresque tale heavily influenced by contemporary English picaresque fiction and in doing so created an English picara who, like the seamen to which he refers in the preface, is a victim of a lack of legitimate economic opportunities and is forced to seek "her Fortune another Way" (*General History of the Pyrates* 160; ed. 2, ch. 7). Read's picaresque narrative is evidence of Johnson's thesis that the flaws inherent in the military and economic structures of imperial societies limit economic and social mobility, and in absence of legitimate economic opportunities, piracy can appear as a viable option.

Read's narrative appears to have been informed largely by English picaresque works by novelist Daniel Defoe. The echoes of *Moll Flanders* that permeate Read's narrative are undeniable. According to Hanna,

Johnson most likely knew next to nothing about either Bonny or Read, since they were eventually executed (as far as we know) in Jamaica, and their trial record provides little insight into their backgrounds. Nonetheless, the stories produced in the *General History* are eerily similar to Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1721) or *Roxanna* (1724), with sexual intrigue, out-of-wedlock pregnancies, cross dressing, and general licentious behavior. These were all common tropes of woman warriors popularized in ballads. (404)

Considering the similarities, it is not difficult to understand how many came to the conclusion that Defoe himself was the true author of this volume. It is even possible, if

not immediately verifiable, that Defoe's text may have functioned as a blueprint for Read's narrative. Regardless, Johnson was no doubt aware of and likely influenced by *Moll Flanders*, an exemplar of English picaresque work.

Mary Read fulfills, in some way, all five of Ardila's characteristics of the traditional picara. Read's story is organized chronologically and encompasses the entirety of her life, from birth to death. Many of the other narratives presented in *A General History* focus almost exclusively on the given pirate's marauding career. By contrast, Johnson explores Read's early life nearly as much as he does her life as a buccaneer, dedicating nearly half of the pages to her pre-pirate life. In the case of Read, her ultimate death in prison is the final situation to which the narrative builds in a "hence" fashion.

Read, much like Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, "is born to a family of the underclass, . . . a condition that determines [her] future" (Ardila, "Origins and Definition" 14). She was the product of her widowed mother and an unknown father, making her an illegitimate child who would have, at that time, been disadvantaged from birth. The mother, barely able to scrape by, then returned to live with her dead husband's mother. After the death of the grandmother, "they were more and more reduced in their Circumstances" and Read was put to work at the age of thirteen (Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates* 158; ed. 2, ch. 7). These humble beginnings set her on a path towards piracy and infamy, even if that path was not made manifest immediately. Read spent many years earning an honest soldier's wage but barely getting by before turning to a life of crime. Because of circumstances beyond her control, she did so mostly in the guise of a man. After finding love and marrying, her "honest" life is torn asunder when her husband dies and "she again assumes her Man's Apparel" as a means of carving out a life for herself (160). This

is a pivotal moment in her psychological development, as she evolves from a woman at peace with her station in life into one seeking “Fortune” on the sea. This would ultimately result in her capture and introduction into a life of piracy. The death of her husband serves as both a character development and plot development catalyst, just as it did fairly early on in *Moll Flanders*.

Just like other picaros, Moll Flanders not excluded, Read operates outside of legal and social mores, often by way of her cleverness. As a criminal, she exemplifies “a social outsider who tries [her] hand at several professions living by . . . her wits” and “normally engages in unlawful activities” (Ardila, “Origins and Definition” 14–15). Though “she often declared, that the Life of a Pyrate was what she always abhor’d, and went into it only upon Compulsion,” Read nonetheless persists in her illegal adventures, eventually breathing her last breath behind prison bars (Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates* 161; ed. 2, ch. 7). In all phases of her life—as an illegitimate child, as a crossdresser, and ultimately, as a pirate—she is in some respects a social outsider. All three of these descriptors exist outside accepted social norms. Even as a woman aboard a ship, she is an outsider. Additionally, over the course of her story she works as a foot-boy, a soldier, a business owner, and a pirate. In each of her incarnations save one, she is forced to disguise herself as a man, a deception that would require much cleverness to effectively maintain for years on end. In these ways she also fulfills Ardila’s fifth condition: “a cunning trickster who deceives others” (15).

Read’s picara tendencies being established, I turn now to Johnson’s mobilization of Read as a vehicle of criticism. After the death of her grandmother, out of necessity,

Read “flits from one master to another” (qtd. in Sieber 2). Johnson describes her early military career:

Here she did not live long, for growing bold and strong, and having also a roving Mind, she entered herself on board a Man of War, where she served some Time, then quitted it, went over into *Flanders*, and carried Arms in a Regiment of Foot, as a *Cadet*; and tho’ upon all Actions, she behaved herself with a great deal of Bravery, yet she could not get a Commission, they being generally bought and sold; therefore she quitted the Service, and took on in a Regiment of Horse; she behaved so well in several Engagements, that she got the Esteem of all her Officers. . . . (*General History of the Pyrates* 158; ed. 2, ch. 7)

This account of her military endeavors not only makes it clear that she was a quality soldier and held in high regards by her peers and officers but also exposes a critical flaw in the military preferment system. Johnson renders the military not as a meritocratic entity but one of corruption and incompetence. Though Read “behaved herself with a great deal of Bravery,” she was not allowed to climb the martial ladder because of the predatory nature of buying and selling commissions (158).

This anecdote is a shot across the bow of European military practices and serves to enhance the prior argument of military incompetence, which Johnson established in the opening sections of *A General History*. Johnson calls for stronger military leadership and a greater military presence from European imperial powers and leverages Read’s narrative to expose why that might not be possible. The subtext here is that advancement through hard work and merit is oftentimes impossible, particularly for those without means, a common theme in picaresque tales.²¹ Coming from poverty, Read was unable to

afford a commission; therefore, she did not receive one, despite garnering the respect and approval of her superiors. How can inspired military leadership be expected when consideration of ability and merit is tossed aside in favor of monetary gain? Moreover, why would a hardworking and skilled soldier seeking advancement in the world persist within a system designed to keep him/her from doing so? After returning to military service for a brief time following her husband's death, she again realizes the futility of the endeavor—"there was no likelihood of Preferment in Time of Peace"—and "ships herself on Board of a Vessel bound for the *West-Indies*" (Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates* 160; ed. 2, ch. 7). Though she did not immediately turn to piracy, her decision to leave the regiment of foot set her on a path that would ultimately end with her standing before a judge and dying in prison.

Her transition from legitimate soldier to outlaw pirate is symptomatic of flaws extant within the imperial system. Had the system not failed her on such a fundamental level, it is entirely possible, perhaps likely, that she would have been content with ascending the military hierarchical ladder, rung by rung. The irony is that bureaucratic ineptitude and corruption actively contributed to the creation of an entity who would go on to disrupt and oppose the imperial agenda actively, when had the system functioned in a fair, merit-based manner, it would have retained the services of a skilled soldier. Even if one concedes, based on her gender, that high-ranking military leadership might not have been a realistic possibility for Read, Johnson creates little doubt that she would have been a credit to any unit in which she served. With increased manpower, perhaps the European powers would have sufficient forces "*to guard sufficiently the Coast of Africa, the West-*

Indies, and other Places whereto Pyrates resort” (Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates*; ed. 2, preface).

Beyond functioning as a military critique, Read’s narrative is, perhaps at its core, an economic critique. As noted earlier, Johnson’s primary suggestion for remedying the “*Evil*” of piracy is economic in nature, namely to “*find Employment for the great Numbers of Seamen turn’d adrift at the Conclusion of a War, and thereby prevent their running into such Undertakings*” (*General History of the Pyrates*; ed. 2, preface). At the core of this statement lies the presupposition that those who are unemployed are willing to engage in legal work—which Johnson alludes to—and that providing these opportunities would indeed curb the desire to turn to piracy. Considering this, Read’s traversal of the economic landscape and her eventual taking up of the pistol and cutlass can be read as the depiction of one’s regression from struggling worker to outlaw pirate. This illustration further serves Johnson’s point that post-War of the Spanish Succession European economies did little in the way of fostering appropriate, legal means of making a living, and in the resulting desperation, many opted for “*a Life of so much Peril*” (preface).

One episode in the life of Mary Read resonates particularly, as she finds herself bereft of her prosperity in the wake of her husband’s death and the end of a war. After being married to a fellow soldier, Read and her new husband “seemed to have a Desire of quitting the Service, and settling in the World; . . . they easily obtained their Discharge, and they immediately set up an Eating House or Ordinary, . . . near the Castle of *Breda*, where they soon run into a good Trade, a great many Officers eating with them constantly” (Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates* 160; ed. 2, ch. 7). Here Johnson

depicts Read as prosperous and seemingly contented; she has left the military service with her husband and established a successful business. This happiness and stability is short-lived, however, as her husband soon dies and the Treaty of Ryswick is signed, ending the War of the League of Augsburg and the constant flow of business to her inn.²² Read, “having little or no Trade” in the wake of the signing of the treaty, is then forced to return to the military because of her diminished funds (160). She does not immediately turn towards piracy, as noted earlier, but she is furthered on her path to that end when she realizes that her economic prospects in the military are quite poor.

This brief episode serves as an analogy for the plight of the destitute sailor/prospective pirate Johnson discusses in his opening commentary. All of the elements are present and accounted for: the willing worker, the end of an international conflict, the withering of economic prospects, and the limitation of opportunity. Read is more than willing to pursue legal, legitimate economic opportunities, whether in the private sector or through military service. Only when those opportunities evaporate or provide no room for growth does she ultimately resorts to piracy. Moreover, Read’s diminishing economic prospects are a byproduct of post-war recession. Just as European sailors found themselves in dire straits in the aftermath of the War of the Spanish Succession, Read is reduced to destitution following the end of the War of the League of Augsburg. Placing Read’s economic hardship in the context of post-war Europe, particularly in post-League of Augsburg war Europe, strikes me as a calculated move to highlight the parallels between Read’s plight and that of European sailors, the wars being closely related. “The Treaty of Ryswick ended [the War of the League of Augsburg] by restoring the captured territories, including colonies, to their original owners,” Robert

Foley notes, but “[t]he peace was merely a prelude in which both sides gathered strength for renewed conflict in the War of the Spanish Succession” (Foley). Not unlike World War One and World War Two, the latter conflict was simply an extension of the previous, involving many of the same players. The use of the War of the League of Augsburg as a backdrop for Read’s economic woes inextricably links her narrative to Johnson’s economic criticism and likely would have had resonance with Johnson’s readership, both wars having occurred in recent memory at the time of *A General History*’s initial publication in 1724.

Conclusion

As the text of *A General History* evolved over the course of numerous editions and reprintings, so, too, did the tenor of Johnson’s social-political satire. His critiques manifested themselves in various contexts, through a variety of pirate narratives, and were not necessarily limited to the concerns spelled out in the preface and introduction of the text, as has been explored elsewhere in this work. Analysis of a great many of Johnson’s pirate narratives was not incorporated into this thesis for the strict purpose of maintaining a clear critical locus on the text’s material history, its picaresque influences, and what those changes and influences reveal about eighteenth-century conceptions of imperial power and piracy. However, further examination of this work is necessary for a more comprehensive understanding of its literary legacy and impact. Suffice it to say that there is room yet in the scholarly conversation, room to attack this text from both historical and literary perspectives. What do we have to gain? A greater understanding of this particular work and of the past, to be sure, but perhaps more importantly a greater

understanding of how representations of the past and present transcend the epoch of their creation and inform the culture of their present and their posterity.

Notes

1. This chapter hinges on Johnson's critique of empire and how the policies and practices of the European state at large aided and abetted the creation and incubation of piracy. There is certainly criticism of the pirates themselves within the text, but the preface and introduction of the text, the two sections wherein Johnson's voice and attitude is not filtered through history/narrative, place an emphasis on the faults and flaws of economic and militaristic imperial practices. There is less a focus on the evils of piracy, though Johnson does use that word, and more a focus on how society has created and encouraged this evil.
2. This chapter pays special attention to the narrative of Mary Read—and a bit to the narrative of Anne Bonny—because of the heavy influence of fictional genres, including the picaresque, on both narratives. Mark Hanna calls the tales of Read and Bonny “highly embellished” and recognizes that Johnson “likely knew next to nothing about either” pirate (403, 404). Colin Woodard accuses Johnson of “erroneously claim[ing] that Bonny and Read met at sea” when the meeting “almost certainly took place . . . in Nassau” (317). David Cordingly addresses similar concerns over the historical truths of Read's and Bonny's tales:

The problem with their story is the lack of documentation for their early lives.

The printed record of their trial and brief references in the colonial documents and contemporary newspapers provide information about the last year or two of their lives, but for the rest we have to rely on Captain Johnson, who is usually accurate but rarely indicates the source of his information. And the story that he tells is almost too amazing to be true. (*Under the Black Flag* 61)

This marked lack of documentation provided Johnson the necessary space within which to create and to embellish and to satirize. “Johnson’s account is fanciful rhetoric,” rather than true history, according to C. R. Pennell, “although interesting for that reason, because it illustrates eighteenth-century attitudes to power and piracy” (362).

3. Frohock’s conceptualization and definition of satire are influenced by Dustin Griffin’s *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction*. In the introduction, Griffin cites the established theoretical consensus:

[S]atire is a highly rhetorical and moral art. A work of satire is designed to attack vice or folly. To this end it uses wit or ridicule. Like polemical rhetoric, it seeks to persuade an audience that something or someone is reprehensible or ridiculous; unlike pure rhetoric, it engages in exaggeration and some sort of fiction. But satire does not forsake the “real world” entirely. . . . Finally, satire usually proceeds by means of clear reference to some moral standards or purposes. (1)

In Griffin’s estimation, that consensus is outmoded and in need of updating. His argument, echoes of which are present in Frohock’s characterization of satire, is that “satire is problematic, open-ended, essayistic, ambiguous in its relationship to history, uncertain in its political effect, resistant to formal closure, more inclined to ask questions than to provide answers, and ambivalent about the pleasures it offers” (5). For more on the open-ended, question-raising nature of satire, see chapter two of Griffin’s *Satire*.

4. This is a reference to the “small Digression” Johnson takes during the narrative of Captain Bellamy, a chapter appearing in volume two of the text; Johnson writes, “I hope the Reader will pardon this small Digression which the Interest I take in every Thing,

which may tend to the enriching or extending the Dominions of our glorious *Britain*, my dearly loved Country, forced me into . . .” (*General History of the Pyrates* 2: 223; ed. 4).

5. Other contemporary commenters were contemplating the impact of external factors on one’s desire to turn pirate. After his encounters with William Fly, Cotton Mather published *The Vial Poured out upon the Sea*, a work that included a recreation/dramatization of his conferences with Fly and Fly’s compatriots and also included a sermon. Near the end of the sermon, after addressing sailors and pirates, Mather turns his attention to shipmasters:

But while I am addressing the poor *Sailours*, and beseeching them, that they would not let the *Devil*, who is the worst of *Masters*, enslave them, nor have their *Names* in the *Book* of, *The Wicked one*, I would presume upon an Address to the *Masters* of our Vessels, that they would not be too like the *Devil*, in their *Barbarous Usage* of the *Men* that are under them, and lay them under *Temptations* to do *Desperate Things*. (44)

Steven Pitt argues that Mather’s encounter with Fly made him consider the possibility that disciplinary mistreatment of sailors could lead them to piracy. For another take on Mather’s encounter with Fly, see Williams’s “Puritans and Pirates: A Confrontation between Cotton Mather and William Fly in 1726.”

6. Colin Woodard notes, “With the end of the War of the Spanish Succession in 1713, tens of thousands of sailors suddenly found themselves out of a job. . . . With thousands of sailors begging for work in every port, merchant captains slashed wages by 50 percent; those lucky enough to find work had to survive on twenty-two to twenty-eight shillings (£1.1 to £1.4) a month” (86). Rediker provides similar statistics regarding

wages: “The surplus of labor at the end of the war had extensive, sometimes jarring social and economic effects. It produced an immediate contraction of wages; merchant seamen who made 45–55 [shillings] per month in 1707 made only half that amount in 1713” (*Between the Devil and the Deep* 282).

7. Johnson’s economic concerns appear to be justified. “Pirates and Markets” by David J. Starkey explores how economic factors influenced and affected piratical activity. Starkey asserts that “the chief causal dynamic, as the waves of maritime lawlessness in the Atlantic demonstrate, was economic and was found in the forces of demand and supply which conditioned trading and shipping activity” (113). He concludes,

The various waves of piracy which swept the Atlantic in the early modern era were essentially a function of economic factors, chief among these being disequilibria between supply and demand in the labor market. While the long waves reflected chronic deficiencies in the underdeveloped economies of the Caribbean and North Africa, the short waves were causally related to the oversupply in the market for seafarers at the end of war in 1603, 1714, and 1815. (“Pirates and Markets” 119–20)

For more on the economic landscape post-War of the Spanish Succession, see Woodard 86–87; Anderson 95; and Rediker’s *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* 35, 117, 281–82.

8. Perhaps this was not a singular assessment of the situation; a contemporary citizen of Port Royal, Jamaica is quoted as later recalling that “[r]esentment and the want of employ’ . . . ‘were certainly the motives to a course of life which I am of [the] opinion

that most or many of them would not have taken up had they been redressed or could by any lawful mean have supported themselves” (qtd. in Woodard 87). Additionally, see Rediker’s “The Seaman as Pirate” 140–41 or *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* 258–59 for commentary on working conditions of both merchant and naval ships, another circumstance beyond the sailor’s control. See also *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* 217–22 for a picture of harsh maritime discipline.

9. See notes 6 and 7 on the state of wages and the impact of the laws of supply and demand on maritime labor in the wake of The War of the Spanish Succession. It is clear that Johnson views the slashing of wages as predatory and opportunistic. However, one could argue that merchants were operating under the same economic conditions and that wage cutting was simply a byproduct of those conditions.

10. Of English privateering and its relationship to piracy, Arne Bialuschewski writes, As early as 1536 Henry VIII created the first piracy law that applied to the high seas. The statute declared England’s imperial right to regard all piracy, no matter where it was committed, within the purview of the Crown’s justice. But in reality it was particularly England that sponsored maritime depredations in its quest for the leading position in overseas trade. During wartime it was perfectly legal to supplement the nation’s sea power by granting ship-owners privateering commissions that allowed them to operate as state-sanctioned raiders, attacking and plundering enemy shipping. However, such activities often continued in peacetime, at which point these vessels and their crews crossed the boundary into piracy. (“Pirates, Markets and Imperial” 52–53)

11. The practice of privateering has long been a crucial component of English/European maritime endeavors. In his first chapter, which explores the relationships among markets, monarchies, privateers, and pirates, Hanna writes,

[L]etters of marque, first issued by Henry VIII in 1544, allowed captains to attack enemy shipping in times of war, at the shipowner's expense, and to keep a percentage of the prize for themselves. Ships possessing letters of marque were typically not men-of-war but merchant vessels granted permission to take an enemy vessel if the opportunity arose. Henry VIII determined that "friends' goods in enemies' ships and enemies' goods in friends' ships, and also in either case the ships themselves, were good prize." (qtd. in Hanna 36).

This practice eventually earned the name of privateering, continued well into the eighteenth century and beyond, and was not exclusive to the English. "[B]y the eighteenth century" Starkey reports, "the privateering forces of belligerent powers included a number of merchant vessels, armed primarily to deter aggressors, but licensed to take prizes should the opportunity afford itself in the course of a commercial voyage" ("The Origins and Regulation" 71). For information on privateer and privateering in various contexts, see Starkey's "The Origins and Regulation of Eighteenth-Century British Privateering," Hanna's *Pirate Nests*, and Woodard 55, 63–65, 71. For information on English law as it relates to privateering and piracy, see Rubin 66–122.

12. On the murky distinction between piracy and privateering, P. Nick Kardulias and Emily Butcher write, "One of the problems in distinguishing pirates from privateers is that various seamen, untethered from the ambitions of nationalist elites, held no particular allegiance to states since those entities limited their freedom of action, and thus could

move in and out of links to formal governments” (546). Similarly, Hanna notes that the “mutability of terms used to describe bandits at sea reflected the ambiguity of the many roles they played in the colonial world, even into the early eighteenth century” (5).

13. There is historical precedent for Johnson’s argument. See Hanna 52 for a description of how, in 1591, Sir Francis Drake convinced the English Privy Council to invest in fisheries for the purpose of providing decommissioned sailors from Plymouth with work opportunities. Hanna also opines that “James I did more to eradicate West Country piracy by promoting the fisheries as the new ‘nursery for seamen’ than by hanging pirates in Plymouth port” (54).

14. The war to which Johnson refers is the War of the Spanish Succession (also referred to as Queen Anne’s War), which occurred from 1702–1713 (Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep* 32). Of the war, Woodard writes, “War had been brewing for some time due to the political and genetic complications of royal inbreeding” (49).

“When [Charles II of Spain] died in November of 1700,” he continues,

the Spanish Habsburg line died with him. His out-of-town relatives immediately started squabbling over who would inherit the estate. . . . Unfortunately for the people of Europe, these same out-of-town relatives were the French King Louis XIV and the Holy Roman Emperor, Leopold I. Pretty soon armies were clashing and . . . most of Europe’s rulers were drawn in. In the spring of 1702, England went to war, siding with the Dutch, Austrians, and Prussians against France and Spain. (5)

15. Lack of protection for Caribbean islands was apparently a pervasive problem for the English. During the war, Woodard notes,

England's Royal Navy could spare few resources to defend its scattered Caribbean colonies. For most of the war, the Leeward Islands colony (St. Christopher, Nevis, Antigua, and Montserrat) was protected by a single fifth-rate frigate and for long periods had no naval protection at all. . . . The Bahamian settlements had no protection at all and were repeatedly burned by French and Spanish invaders. Even Jamaica, the navy's regional headquarters, generally had only a half dozen warships on station, and rarely were these larger than a fourth-rate. (60–61)

16. “Nation-states in the process of formation,” Anne Pérotin-Dumon writes, “were capable of none of this, especially because these states were engaged in expensive wars among themselves. With the means of the time, they were incapable of sending strong fleets frequently enough to control seas far away from their European bases” (29). J. Ross Dancy notes that “The English Navy of the Restoration was also a seasonal navy, only being mobilised during the major campaign season, almost exclusively during the summer months. Winter weather in the North Sea was not conducive to fleet battles, so typically the fleet was manned in the spring, campaigned in the summer, and was then paid off in the autumn” (12). Additionally, Rediker reports, “The navy plunged from 49,860 men at the end of the [War of the Spanish Succession] to 13,475 just two years later” (*Between the Devil and the Deep* 281). Perhaps the tradition of a “seasonal navy,” coupled with a massive descaling of naval manpower, left the English in no position to capitalize on Johnson's plan and contributed to the pirates' dominion of the West Indies.
17. See notes 15 and 16 regarding the state of the English navy during this period.

18. In his additions to the preface, as explored in chapter one, Johnson justifies the increased price for the new edition and takes pains to defend the historical/factual authenticity of the information within. No addition to the preface alters or calls into question Johnson's previously established critical perspective (*General History of the Pyrates*; ed. 2, preface).

19. On the influence of Read's and Bonny's narratives, John C. Appleby writes, Steve Gooch's play, *The Women Pirates*, for example, portrays two rebel women escaping from female stereotypes in "a small 'alternative' society of anti-colonial" rebel pirates. From this perspective Read and Bonny were not just breaking with conventional life ashore, they were also trying to construct a new way of life at sea. These later interpretations in literature or drama testify to the almost unparalleled lives of both women. (285)

Pennell recognizes that Read and Bonny's "mythology . . . is immensely appealing" and notes "it can be reconstructed to suit feminist, anarchists and even prurient audiences" (361).

20. Angus Konstam notes, "It was little wonder that the newspapers of the day were full of the story, and what was not actually known about the two women was happily made up for the readers. The public was gripped by the scandalous notion that two women could turn to piracy" (167–68). Considering this, Read's and Bonny's prominent placement in marketing material was an astute business decision.

21. Regarding social mobility in the picaresque, Brean Hammond writes, It is not at all clear that real social mobility was a possibility for everyone in the Spanish society that generated the picaresque. Converts from other religions

(*conversos*) who achieved social mobility were looked upon with contempt, particularly by the lower classes. Indeed, the closed, rigidly hierarchical nature of Spanish society appears to be a satiric target for the author of *Lazarillo*. (141)

22. The War of the League of Augsburg, which ended with the Treaty of Ryswick, was a late-Seventeenth Century war involving England, France, Spain, and many other European powers. See Foley's "League of Augsburg War (1688–97)" for an overview of the conflict.

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EDUCATION

Master of Arts student in English at Sam Houston State University, July 2013–present.
Thesis title: “Of pyrates and picaros: the literary lineage of Charles Johnson’s *A General History of the Pyrates*.”

Bachelor of Arts (December 2010) in English, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Classroom Teacher, Department of English, Montgomery High School, August 2011–June 2015. Responsibilities include: serving on campus advisory committee, serving on district advisory committee, serving on district curriculum alignment committees, development of grade-level curriculum, preparation and presentation of curriculum, grading, and tutoring.

Dual Credit Instructor, Department of English, Lone Star College via Montgomery High School, January 2015–June 2015. Responsibilities include: preparation and presentation of curriculum, grading, and tutoring.

Classroom Teacher, 5th Grade, Montgomery Intermediate School, August 2015–June 2017. Responsibilities include: serving on district advisory committee, serving on district curriculum alignment committees, development of grade-level curriculum, preparation and presentation of curriculum, grading, and tutoring.

Classroom Teacher, 5th Grade, Lone Star Elementary, August 2017–present.
Responsibilities include: serving as campus Technology Integration Mentor, serving as campus Lighthouse Coordinator, development of grade-level curriculum, preparation and presentation of curriculum, grading, and tutoring.

ACADEMIC AWARDS

Special Graduate Scholarship Award, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Sam Houston State University, January 2016, August 2016, and January 2017