

Primary Sources:

Villany Rewarded, Bonny and Read, and Roberts



Introduction

By the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, imperial authorities had begun to make efforts to crack down on piracy. The British rose as a major naval force, and the threats to trade and imperial authority motivated new efforts to stamp out raiding. Nevertheless, piracy remained persistent.

Below are three primary sources: the first is a ballad from England recounting the pirate exploits and execution of Henry Every's crew. The second is a newspaper excerpt announcing a pirate's capture, including two female crewmates (Anne Bonny and Mary Read), while the third the exploits of Captain Bartholomew Roberts prior to his capture two years later. Together, the sources encourage us to think about what had and had not changed in terms of both official and popular perceptions of piracy.

Primary Sources

Introduction

Villany
Rewarded

Anne Bonny and
Mary Read

Bartholomew
Roberts

Primary Source 1:

"Villany Rewarded," Broadside Ballad 1696

"Villany Rewarded" was a 1696 song set to the tune of "Russell's Farewell" recounting the November 25 execution of five pirates (William May, John Sparks, Edward Forseith, William Bishop, and James Lewis) at Execution Dock in London. The men had sailed with Captain Henry Every, who had attacked the Mughal ship Gunj-i-Suwee. Every himself disappeared, but the trials were a sensation in England and North American colonies.

Broadside ballads served as art, news, and reflected pop culture of seventeenth-century England in musical form. Balladmongers and traveling salesmen spread them through the streets of cities, and they were posted on the walls of ale-houses, where gatherings of people would sing them to familiar tunes. Their topics ranged from current events, to politics, religion, and stories.

As you are reading, consider the following questions:

- What do the lyrics of the ballad emphasize and why, do you think?
- What does the ballad suggest about popular attitudes towards pirates and piracy?
- How is the notion of "empire" visible in this ballad?
- What messages do the accompanying woodblocks send to the viewer?
- How does the tune contribute to the mixed messages of this ballad?

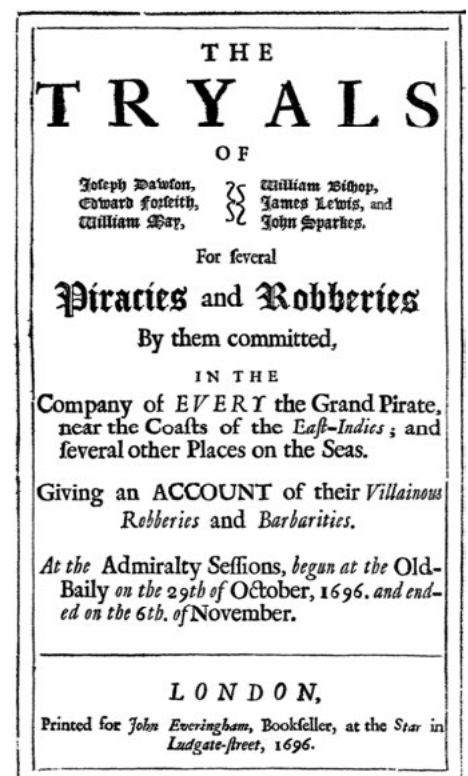
Source: Listening for the Lingering Enthusiasm for Pirates: Broadside Ballads from the UCSB English Broadside Ballad Archive, <https://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/20813/citation>

Audio of "Villany Rewarded": <https://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/20813/recording>

Villany Rewarded; OR, THE PIRATES Last Farewel To the World:

Who was Executed at Execution Dock, on Wednesday the 25th of November, 1696. Being of Every's Crew. Together with their free Confession of their most Horrid Crimes. To the Tune of, Russels Farewel.

Well may the World against us cry,
for these our Deeds most base,
For which, alas! we now must dye,
Death looks us in the face;
Which is no more than what's our due,
since we so wicked were,
As here shall be declar'd to you,
let Pyrates then take care.



Report on the trials of members of Henry Every's crew, 1696

We with our Comrades, not yet ta'en,
together did agree,
And stole a Ship out from the Groyne,
to Roam upon the Sea:
With which we Robb'd, and Plunder'd
too,
no Ship that we did spare,
Thus many a one we did undo,
let Pyrates then take care.

Our Ship being well stored then
for this our Enterprise,
One Hundred and Eighty Men
there was in her likewise:
We Pillag'd all we could come nigh,
no Nation did we spare,
For which a shameful death we dye,
let Pirates then take care.

We Robb'd a Ship upon the Seas,
the Gunsway call'd by name,
Which we met near the East-Indias,
and Rifled the same;
In it was Gold and Silver store,
of which all had a share,
Each man 600 pounds and more
let Pirates then take care.

Thus for some time we liv'd, and
Reign'd
as masters of the Sea,
Every Merchant we detain'd

and us'd most cruelly,
The Treasures took, we sunk the Ship,
with those that in it were,
That would not unto us submit,
let Pirates then take care.

Thus Wickedly we e'ery day
liv'd upon others good,
The which, alas! we must repay
now with our dearest blood,
For we on no one mercy took,
nor any did we spare,
How can we then for mercy look,
let Pirates then take care.

We thus did live most cruelly,
and of no danger thought,
But we at last, as you may see,
are unto Justice brought,
For Outrages of Villany,
of which we Guilty are,
And now this very day must dye,
let Pirates then take care.

Now farewell to this wicked World,
and our Companions too,
From hence we quickly shall be hurl'd
to clear the way for you,
For certainly if e're you come
to Justice as we are,
Deserved death will be your doom,
then Pirates all take care.

Villany Rewarded;
OR, THE
PIRATES Last Farewel
To the V World:

Who was Executed at Execution Dock, on *Wednesday the 25th. of November, 1696.*
Being of Every's Crew. Together with their free Confession of their most Horrid Crimes,
To the Tune of, *Ruffes Farewel.*





Villany Rewarded, not yet ta'en,
together did agree,
And stole a Ship out from the Groyne,
to Roam upon the Sea:
With which we Robb'd, and Plunder'd too,
no Ship that we did spare,
Thus many a one we did undo,
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Deserved death will be your doom,
then Pirates all take care.

LONDON: Printed for Charles Baskin, 1696.

Primary Source 2:

"The Legend of Anne Bonny and Mary Read," 1720

While piracy was largely a male activity, women were present on pirate vessels. Little is known about Anne Bonny and Mary Read, but in the latter half of 1720 they sailed with a small group of outlaws led by John Rackam from the Bahamas. The rare account provided below was sent to New England and published in The Boston Gazette on October 17, 1720, along with a proclamation for their apprehension issued by Governor Rogers. While the raiders were arrested in Jamaica, the women were spared the gallows because they were pregnant. Read likely died in prison in April 1721, and Bonny disappeared.

As you are reading, consider the following questions:

- *What might have driven Anny Bonny and Mary Read to seek a life of piracy? Discuss various different scenarios.*
- *What does the mention of the Bahamas in this source suggest about the connections between the Caribbean and the North American mainland in this period?*
- *Given what you know about the English crackdown on piracy in the early eighteenth century, how do you think this might have shaped the actions and attitudes of Rackam's crew?*

Source: "The Legend of Anne Bonny and Mary Read (1720)," in Kris Lane and Arne Bialuschewski, eds., *Piracy in the Early Modern Era: An Anthology of Sources* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2019), 141–42.

New Providence, 4th September

Several pirates are on the coast of the Bahamas, among which is one Rackam who ran away with a sloop of six guns and took with him twelve men and two women. The governor of this place sent a sloop with 45 men after him. And on the second instant Doctor Rowan with his sloop and 54 hands, twelve guns, went out in order to suppress them, as did Captain Roach who arrived here from Barbados. The pirates swear destruction to all those who belong to this island.

BY HIS EXCELLENCY WOODES ROGERS, ESQ. GOVERNOR OF NEW PROVIDENCE,
& A PROCLAMATION

Whereas John Rackam, George Featherstone, John Davis, Andrew Gibson, John Howell, Noah Patrick and two women, by name Anne Fulford alias Bonny and Mary Read, did on the 22nd of August last combine together to enter on board, take, steal, and run away with out of this road of Providence, a certain sloop called the William, burthen about twelve tons, mounted with four great guns and a swivel one, belonging to Captain John Ham, and with the said sloop did proceed to commit robbery and piracy upon the boat and effects of James Gohier, Esq., master of a sloop riding at Berry Islands in his way from South Carolina to this port.

Wherefore these are to publish and make known to all persons whatsoever that the said John Rackam and his said company are hereby proclaimed pirates and enemies to the Crown of Great Britain and are to be so treated and deem'd by all his Majesty's subjects.

Given at Nassau, this 5th of September 1720
Sign'd Woodes Rogers

Primary Source 3:

Extract from the Boston News Letter, Bartholomew

From 1718 to 1722, Welshman Bartholomew Roberts sailed the North American Atlantic coast, capturing over 400 ships. The news story provided below recounts Roberts' capture of a ship off the coast of Newfoundland. Two years later, his crew was captured at Cape Corso Castle in Africa. They were tried and 52 executed.

As you are reading, consider the following questions:

- *What aspect of this description of pirates' behavior do you find most shocking? What aspect of the description do you think readers in Boston in 1720 found most shocking, and why?*
- *Given what you know about the violence that characterized the Atlantic world in the eighteenth century, is the pirates' violence unusual in your view?*
- *Does the reality of piracy during the "Golden Age" challenge modern notions of pirates as social bandits, or Robin Hoods, or support them? Why?*

Source: "Extract from the Boston News Letter, Bartholomew Roberts, 1720," from James E. Wadsworth, *Global Piracy: A Documentary History of Seaborne Banditry* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 167-68.

The Boston News Letter, August 22, 1720; Bartholomew Roberts

Boston, on Monday last, the 15th current, arrived here the ship Samuel, about eleven weeks from London, and ten from land's end, Captain Samuel Carry commander, who in his voyage hither, on the 13th of July past, in the latitude of 44, about 30 or 40 leagues to the eastward of the banks of Newfoundland, was accosted and taken by two pirates, viz. A ship of 26 guns and a sloop of ten both commanded by Captain Bartholomew Roberts, having on board about a hundred men, all English; The dismal account whereof follows:

The first thing the pirates did, was to strip both passengers and seamen of all their money and clothes which they had on. Board, with a loaded pistol held to everyone's breast ready to sho[o]t him down, who did not immediately give an account of both and resign them up. The next thing they did was, with madness and rage to tear up the hatches, enter the hold like a parcel of furies, where with axes, cutlasses, etc., they cut, tore and broke open trunks, boxes, cases and bales, and when any of the goods came upon desk which they did not like to carry with them aboard their ship, instead of tossing them into the hold again they threw them over-board into the sea. The usual method they had to open chests was by shooting a brace of bullets with a pistol into the key-hole to force them open. The pirates carried away from Captain Carry's ship aboard their own 40 barrels of powder, two great guns, his cables, etc. and to the value of about nine or ten thousand pounds sterling worth of the choicest goods he had on board.



Woodcut of Bartholomew Roberts, 1725

There was nothing heard among the pirates all the while, but cursing, swearing, damning and blaspheming to the greatest degree imaginable, and often saying they would not go to Hope point in the River of Thames to be hung up in gibbets a sun drying as Kidd and Bradish's company did, for if it would change that they should be attacked by any superior power or force, which they could not master, they would immediately put fire with one of their pistols to their powder, and go all merrily to Hell together! They often ridiculed and made a mock of King George's Acts of Grace¹ with an oath that they had not go money enough, but when they had, if he then did grant them one, after they sent him word, they would thank him for it. They forced and took away with them Captain Carry's mate, and his seamen,...holding a pistol with a brace of bullets to each of their breasts to go with them, or be presently shot down, telling them that at present they wanted none of their service; but when they came to any action, they should have liberty to fight and defend the ship as they did, or else immediately be shot, that they should not tell tales. They had on board the pirate near 20 tons of brandy. However, the pirates made themselves very merry aboard of Captain Carry's ship with some hampers of fine wines that were either presents, or sent to some gentlemen in Boston. It seems they would not wait to untie them and pull out the cork with screws, but each man took his bottle and with his cutless cut off the neck and put it to their mouths and drank it out. Whilst the pirates were disputing whether to sink or burn Captain Carry's ship they spied a sail that same evening, and so let him go free.



Jolly Roger pirate flag of Bartholomew Roberts

1. George I of Great Britain issued the Act of Grace (also called The Proclamation for Suppressing of Pirates) in 1717. The Act promised a pardon for pirates who surrendered to authorities as well as bounties for those who helped to apprehend those did not surrender.

Image Citations

Page 1:

Anne Bonny and Mary Read convicted of Piracy Nov. 28th, 1720, c. 1724, Public Domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:General_History_of_the_Pirates_-_Ann_Bonny_and_Mary_Read_\(coloured\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:General_History_of_the_Pirates_-_Ann_Bonny_and_Mary_Read_(coloured).jpg)

Page 2:

The title page of The Tryals of Joseph Dawson, Edward Forseith, William May, William Bishop, James Lewis, and John Sparkes, London: Everingham, 1969, Public Domain, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Trials_of_Joseph_Dawson_et_al.png

Page 3:

Villany Rewarded Broadside Ballad, Listening for the Lingering Enthusiasm for Pirates: Broadside Ballads from the UCSB English Broadside Ballad Archive, <https://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/20813/image#>

Page 5:

Bartholomew Roberts, in A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pyrates, 1725, Public Domain, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:BartholomewRoberts.jpg>

Page 6:

Jolly Roger flag of pirate Bartholomew Roberts, described in the Boston Gazette, August 22, 1720, CC-BY-SA 3.0, RootOfAllLight, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jolly_Roger_flag_of_pirate_Bartholomew_Roberts_\(early\).svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jolly_Roger_flag_of_pirate_Bartholomew_Roberts_(early).svg)