

The Hour of the Little Ones, Part IV: The Other . . .



So they lov'd as love in twain,
Had the essence but in one,
Two distincts, Division none,
Number there in love was slain.¹

The True Story of Mary Read and Anne Bonny

For lesbians, homosexuals, transsexuals and transvestites, with admiration and respect.

While reviewing the parchments, I discovered a story that Durito is asking me to include in his new book, *Stories of Vigilance by Candlelight*. It is about a letter from an unknown sender (the signature is illegible). The addressee is also an enigma; although it is clearly named, it is not clear whether it is a he or a she. Better that you see it for yourselves. Upon my soul, if the lack of definition between the masculine and feminine is not quite explained in the epistle itself. The date is smudged, and we don't have the technology here to verify when it was written. But it also seems to me that it could have been as easily written centuries ago as weeks ago. You'll know what I mean. OK, then.

¹ William Shakespeare, "The Phoenix and the Turtle," from the "Additional Poems to Chester's 'Love's Martyr,' or 'Rosalin's Complaint,'" in Howard Stauton, ed., *The Globe Illustrated Shakespeare, The Complete Works* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1979): 2321.

Letter 4d

You:

Pirate stories tell of two women, Mary Read and Anne Bonny, who disguised themselves as men and, as such, plowed through the seas in the company of other buccaneers, taking towns and vessels, hoisting the standard of the skull and crossbones. It was the year 1720 and different stories have one or the other living and fighting the rough seas of those times. On a pirate ship, commanded by Captain John Rackam, they met each other. The stories tell that love blossomed, one thinking the other was a man, but upon learning the truth, everything returned to normal, and they went their separate ways.

It wasn't like that. This letter I write to you is the true story of Mary Read and Anne Bonny. The letter trusts in this other story, the one that will not appear in books, because they still persist in spinning the normality and good sense that everything has, and the normality of the 'other' goes no further than disapproving silence, condemnation or neglect. This is part of the story that walks along the underground bridges that the 'others' build, in order to be, and to be known.

The history of Mary Read and Anne Bonny is a history of love, and as such, it has its visible parts, but the greatest is always hidden, in the depths. In the visible part, there is a ship (a sloop, to be more precise), and a pirate, Captain John Rackam. Both ship and pirate were protectors and accomplices of that love that was so very 'other' and 'different' that the history from above had to cover it up for later generations.

Mary Read and Anne Bonny loved each other knowing they also shared the same essence. Some stories relate that the two were women, who, dressed as men, met each other knowing they were women and, as such, loved each other under the affectionate gaze of Lesbos. Others say that the two were men who hid behind pirates' clothes, and that they concealed their homosexual love and their passionate encounters behind the complicated story of women pirates disguised as men.

In either case, their bodies met in the mirror that discovers that which, for being so obvious, is forgotten; those corners of flesh that have knots that, when undone, inspire sighs and storms; places sometimes only those alike can know. With lips, skin and hands, they built the bridges that joined those alike, making them different. Yes, in whichever case, Mary Read and Anne Bonny were transvestites who, in the masquerade, discovered each other and met. In both cases, being the same, they revealed themselves to be different, and the two lost all divisions and became one. To the unconventionality of their being pirates, Mary Read and Anne Bonny added that of their "abnormal" and marvelous love.

Homosexuals or lesbians, transvestites always, Mary and Anne overcame with courage and boldness those whom 'normality' would put in chains. While men surrendered without putting up any resistance, Mary and Anne fought to the end, before being taken prisoners.

In this way, they honored the words of Mary Read. To the question of whether she feared dying:

She replied that, as to dying on the gallows, she didn't think it so cruel because, if it were not for that, all the cowards would become pirates and they would infest the seas to such an extent that the men of courage would die of hunger; that if pirates were left to choose their own punishment, they would have none other than death because their fear of it keeps some cowardly thieves honorable; that many of those who today swindle widows and orphans and oppress their poor neighbors who have no money in order to obtain justice would take to the seas to rob, so that the ocean would be full of thieves in the same way that the land is . . .²

Homosexuals or lesbians? I don't know, the truth was taken to the grave with John Rackam when he was hung in Port Royal, November 17, 1720; and to the shipwreck that cracked the sloop that served them as bed and accomplice. Whatever, their love was very "other" and great for being different. Because it happens that love follows its own paths and is, always, a transgressor of the law . . .

I do my duty by telling you this story.

Adios.

(An illegible signature follows.)

There ends the story . . . or does it continue?

Durito says that those who are different in their sexual preferences are doubly "other" since they are 'other' within those who are in themselves other.

I, a bit seasick from so much "other," ask him, "Can't you explain that a bit more?"

"Yes," says Durito. "When we are struggling to change things, we often forget that this includes changing ourselves."

Above, the dawn was about to change and make itself "other" and different. Rain followed, as well as struggle . . .

Vale once more. *Salud*, and don't tell anyone, but I haven't been able to figure out how in the hell I'm going to fit into the sardine can (sigh).

El Sup, bailing water out of the frigate because, as you can imagine, it started to rain again and Durito says that bailing water is one of my "privileges."

5 *General History of the Thefts and Assassinations of the Most Famous Pirates*, Daniel Defoe, ed. (Madrid: Valdemar, 1999). Translation by Francisco Torres Oliver. For more on Mary Read and Anne Bonny, see Marcus Rediker, "Liberty Beneath the Jolly Roger: The Lives of Anne Bonny and Mary Read," in Margaret S. Creighton and Lisa Norling, eds. *Iron Men, Wooden Women: Gender and Seafaring in the Atlantic World, 1700-1920* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1996).