

OUTSIDERS

READING PACK 2



Early modern English law and taxation drew a clear distinction between those who belonged to the commonwealth, tied to the land by blood or soil, and individuals from other nations and cities, who were classified as ‘aliens’ and ‘strangers’. These ‘outsiders’ could be migrants who settled in England or temporary visitors such as foreign merchants, scholars, and diplomats. Foreign artisans and merchants had a key role in the development of English manufacturing, new tastes and fashions, and commercial expansion, but they were also regarded by their English counterparts as dangerous competitors, triggering economic anxieties and xenophobic attitudes. Their legal status was often precarious and subject to change depending on the specific needs of the fluctuating English economy and state. Responses to the presence of aliens and strangers varied. These could include attempts at integrating foreigners through processes of ‘denization’ and ‘naturalization’, as well as restrictive legislation that barred foreigners from certain professions and trades. These efforts to regulate the presence and activities of strangers coincided with the implementation of a series of legislative measures against ‘vagrants’ or the ‘undeserving poor’ which attempted to restrict the movements of people and labour across parishes within the country. The anxieties prompted by people on the move – those who resisted easy categorization or identification – were similar to the problems posed by other outsiders or so-called renegades who questioned or rejected the English political, religious and social order: Catholic and non-conformist exiles, ‘rogues’, and mercenaries, for example. This set of readings focus on how foreigners were perceived by English authorities, and highlights their influence on transforming English habits of consumption.

TIDE: Keyword(s): **Alien/Stranger**

Additional Keywords: **Exile, Foreigner, Merchant, Mercenary, Rogue, Vagrant**

Please read the associated essays at <http://www.tideproject.uk/keywords-home/>

Historical documents:

A rhyme set upon the wall of the Dutch churchyard in London, 5 May 1593

Anxieties over the rights of strangers or foreigners in England emerge in this short poem from the 1590s [see also the literary reading below for context]. The poem, and the public act of placing this poem on the walls of a non-English place of worship, is hostile in tone, warning strangers to stop taking advantage of the English market for their own benefit.

You, strangers, that inhabit in this land,
Note this same writing, do it understand,
Conceive it well, for safeguard of your lives,
Your goods, your children, and your dearest wives.
Your Machiavellian merchant spoils the state,
You usury doth leave us all for dead,
Your artifex and craftsman works our fate,
And like the Jews you eat us up as bread.
The merchant doth ingross all kinds of wares
Forestalls the markets, wheresoever he goes
Sends forth his wares, by peddlers to the fairs,
Retail at home, and with his horrible shows,
Undoes thousands.

Bill from the House of Commons against aliens selling by way of retail any foreign commodities, March 1593

This debate in the House of Commons occurred in the same year as the anti-foreigner libel/poem above, and demonstrates the concerted attempt by policy-makers to confront and regulate the influx of European migrants in England. The discussions over trade, the legal status of Europeans in England, and their influence on the economy – as well as concerns that Europeans are not assimilating into England – may appear strikingly familiar from political rhetoric in the media today.

The Council on both sides were this day heard at large in this House in the Bill against Aliens selling by way of retail any Foreign Commodities, and afterwards sequestered. Which done, the Amendments intended by the Committees in the said Bill were read unto the House, and after the reading Ordered upon the question to be inserted into the same Bill accordingly.

Master Fuller spoke next against Alien Retailers, and said: ‘The Exclamations of the City are exceeding pitiful and great against these Strangers; nay had not these latter quiet times in their own Countries, and our troubles made many of them retire home, the Citizens would have been in uproar against them: which if the Government of the City repress not, they will be apt enough to it. It is no Charity to have this pity on them to our own utter undoing; for of them there ought none to be sworn a Denizen, but he should first swear he is not worth five pound. This is to be noted in these Strangers, they will not converse with us, they will not marry with us, they will not buy any thing of our Country-men. Their retailing is the cause that all things be at that price with us. For they make Lawns, Velvets, Rashes, Taffetas, Linen-Cloth, and all this they sell to us also. Now whosoever maketh a thing and selleth a thing, raiseth the price of it. The Retailing Stranger buyeth nothing of our Country Commodities, but all he layeth out he buyeth from beyond the Seas. The Searchers have sometimes taken seven thousand pound of theirs at a time.’

Sir Edward Dymock, speaking for the Strangers, said: 'The Beggary of our home Retailers comes not by the Strangers Retailing, but by our home engrossers; so that if our Retailers might be at the first hand, they might sell as good cheap as the Strangers. But this Bill is thrust into the House by our home engrossers, of Policy, that their begging of our Retailers might be imputed to the Strangers Retailing. The Strangers here purchase dear. And beyond the Seas it is lawful for the Strangers, in the places of the best Traffic, to trade in any thing. In Venice any Stranger may buy, sell, or purchase House or Lands, and dispose thereof by his Will, or otherwise at his pleasure, as freely as any Citizen. And this may we do then in some sort. The Strangers are not they that transport our Coin, but it is our Merchants. For it is to be seen in all the Low-Countries, where her Majesty uttereth much Treasure, there is not so much English Coin to be had, as in the same Towns where the Merchants trade. And of my own Experience I know a Town in the Low-Countries, where a Contract of twenty pound was made by an English Merchant, and he agreed to pay it all in English angels [coins].'

Literary documents:

***The Play of Sir Thomas More*, in an extract written by William Shakespeare, c. 1580s-90s**

The 1590s had notoriously bad weather. The harvests failed repeatedly, bringing disease, starvation, and a rapid increase in poverty and vagrancy. This excerpt creatively responds to petitions and complaints that signal deep-rooted frustrations with state and economic structures, where the figure of the migrant or 'stranger' became a scapegoat for anxiety and rage. The first riot against 'foreigners' and 'strangers' occurred in London on 1 May 1517, on a day that would become known as 'Evil May Day'. The excerpt below is from a play called 'The Play of Sir Thomas More', written by several playwrights at the time. But the Master of Revels – in effect, the censor – banned it until it removed most of the references to Evil May Day riots, which Thomas More had helped to quash. Some of the revisions to the text were made by William Shakespeare. This bit comes from a three-page handwritten revision in the middle of the action – it is likely the only piece of dramatic writing that exists in the hand of Shakespeare. Here is his re-imagining of Thomas More facing down the rioting mob on the streets of Tudor London.

Grant them removed, and grant that this your noise
Hath chid down all the majesty of England;
Imagine that you see the wretched strangers,
Their babies at their backs and their poor luggage,
Plodding to the ports and coasts for transportation,
And that you sit as kings in your desires, Authority
quite silenced by your brawl,
And you in ruff of your opinions clothed;
What had you got? I'll tell you: you had taught
How insolence and strong hand should prevail,
How order should be quelled; and by this pattern
Not one of you should live an aged man,
For other ruffians, as their fancies wrought,
With self same hand, self reasons, and self right,
Would shark on you, and men like ravenous fishes
Would feed on one another...
You'll put down strangers,
Kill them, cut their throats, possess their houses?
...alas, alas, say now the King...
Should so much come too short of your great trespass
As but to banish you: whither would you go?
What country, by the nature of your error,
Should give you harbour? Go you to France or Flanders,
To any German province, Spain or Portugal,
Nay, anywhere that not adheres to England,
Why, you must needs be strangers, would you be pleas'd
To find a nation of such barbarous temper That
breaking out in hideous violence
Would not afford you an abode on earth.
Whet their detested knives against your throats,
Spurn you like dogs, and like as if that God
Owed not nor made not you, not that the elements
Were not all appropriate to your comforts,
But charter'd unto them? What would you think
To be us'd thus? This is the strangers' case
And this your mountainish inhumanity.

Further reading: TIDE blogs on the May Day riots

Part I: <http://www.tideproject.uk/2017/05/01/evil-may-day-and-the-strangers-case/>

Part II: <http://www.tideproject.uk/2017/05/03/evil-may-day-and-the-strangers-case-ii/>

Ben Jonson's *Entertainment at Britain's Bourse* (1609)

This extract raises attention to the growing culture of consumption in London as a result of English travel, trade, and exploration. Britain's Bourse was England's first 'shopping mall', a place where customers could view global goods and raise their own status through owning such objects as glassware, textiles, carpets, and rare flora and fauna. Here, a boy lists some of the Chinese goods available for sale, highlighting the rising fashion for Chinese porcelain.

[Boy, calling out the goods available at the Bourse]

What do you lack? What is it you buy? Very fine China stuff, of all kinds and qualitie? China chains, China bracelets, China scarves, China fans, China girdles, China knives, China boxes, China cabinets, caskets, umbrellas, sundials, hour glasses, looking glasses...crystal globes, waxen pictures, ostrich eggs, birds of paradise, Indian Mice, Indian rats, China dogs and China cats? Flowers of silk, mosaic fishes? Wax fruit, and porcelain dishes? Very fine cages for birds, billiard balls, purses, pipes, rattles...See what you lack.

Beyond text:

The 'Walsingham bowl' at Burghley House, here pictured, reflects the rising fashion for rarities like porcelain, just as Turkish/Ottoman carpets became a regular feature of Elizabethan and Jacobean portraiture. This particular bowl, apparently a gift from Queen Elizabeth, raises attention to questions over English trade, piracy, and the acquisition of global goods: Francis Drake conducted multiple raids against Spanish settlements in the Americas, where he may have acquired this porcelain from Spanish ships returning from the East. Archaeological excavations in Spanish and English settlements, from California to Virginia, indicate the presence of Chinese porcelain from the late sixteenth century onwards.



*Further activities: Think about ceramics in UK collections – for example, at the Victoria & Albert Museum – and the growth of consumerism in the early modern era. Invite students to consider the life of an object, such as a tea leaf or porcelain, to explore how commodities start in one place and end in another (such as the trajectory of the above bowl, from pottery workshops in southern China, via Californian coastlines, to London households and eventually museums). To better visualize the ubiquity of such objects, look at paintings from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and 'spot' the global objects – from pearl necklaces in Queen Elizabeth's 'Armada Portrait' (1588) to porcelain and spices like pepper in Dutch still life art. Use these to think more broadly about global production, consumption, and cultural appropriation, from pashminas on the high street to controversies over 'Aztec' patterns at Urban Outfitters. You can also visit the Ethical Consumer website (<https://www.ethicalconsumer.org/>) to discuss plantation labour in the modern age. Histories about single commodities or with themed chapters on global histories are quite accessible – see James Walvin, *Slavery in Small Things*, Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, Peter Frankopan, *The Silk Roads*. Blogs and opinion pieces by BAME persons on cultural appropriation can encourage further classroom discussions on how and why representations and stereotypes around consumption, tradition, and global fashions matter to issues around racism and exploitation.*

For a guide on teaching global exchanges in portraits, see the 'Global Tudors' resource on the National Portrait Gallery website: <https://www.npg.org.uk/learning/schools-and-colleges/news#global-tudors>

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