



Becoming Criminal: Transversal Performance and Cultural Dissidence in Early Modern England

Bryan Reynolds

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In this book Bryan Reynolds argues that early modern England experienced a sociocultural phenomenon, unprecedented in English history, which has been largely overlooked by historians and critics. Beginning in the 1520s, a distinct "criminal culture" of beggars, vagabonds, confidence tricksters, prostitutes, and gypsies emerged and flourished. This community defined itself through its criminal conduct and dissident thought and was, in turn, officially defined by and against the dominant conceptions of English cultural normality.

Examining plays, popular pamphlets, laws, poems, and scholarly work from the period, Reynolds demonstrates that this criminal culture, though diverse, was united by its own ideology, language, and aesthetic. Using his transversal theory, he shows how the enduring presence of this criminal culture markedly influenced the mainstream culture's aesthetic sensibilities, socioeconomic organization, and systems of belief. He maps the effects of the public theater's transformative force of transversality, such as through the criminality represented by Shakespeare, Jonson, Middleton, and Dekker, on both Elizabethan and Jacobean society and the scholarship devoted to it.

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