Doubtful Gains: Risk in Early Modern Maritime Drama, 1592–1625

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ABSTRACT

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“Doubtful Gains” argues that the concept of economic risk emerged in the early modern theater through performances of maritime peril staged at a moment of unprecedented growth for English venturing. Even as the hazards of global commerce became increasingly apparent, there existed no expression in English for risk, nor the inchoate logic by which early modern merchants attempted to manage their voyages’ losses. Yet my study shows that oceanic hazards are repeatedly worked over in “maritime drama,” an under-recognized cross-section of plays concerned with the sea, staged between the founding of the Levant Company in 1592 and the end of the Jacobean era in 1625. While the prevailing scholarly narrative has limited early modern uncertainty to inscrutable forms of “chance,” “accident,” and religious “providence,” my study shows how otherwise fragmentary knowledge was ordered in performance, implicating theater audiences in the management of new forms of uncertainty.

Recovering the emergence of risk on the early modern stage has demanded not only the analysis of a new corpus of maritime drama, but a sophisticated account of economic history constructed from the archives of English joint-stock companies and attentive to the anachronism of modern risk theory. Shakespeare’s plays, at the center of my study, are complemented by the work of Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, John Fletcher, Phillip Massinger, William Haughton, and Robert Daborne, as well as a diverse collection of prose texts. I draw on pamphlets of
mercantile policy, voyage journals, and charters, and a specialized archive of financial and navigational records. Constructing an archive of plays and prose that engage with an increasingly commercial global ocean, I argue that theatrical representations of maritime hazard precipitated a new discourse of risk in early modern England.

Each of my four chapters shows how the theater helped shape one of those forms, which I term “maritime risks.” Scenes of shipwreck, piracy, enslavement, and news connected English venturing to economic vulnerability in increasingly systematic ways, helping to develop the logic of uncertainty which would come to be codified as economic risk. Shipwreck scenes in *The Comedy of Errors*, *Eastward Ho*, and *The Tempest* exemplify the period’s most typical hazard, demonstrating how spectators of shipwreck are central to reproducing the risk of disaster at sea. Encounters with pirates in *2 Henry VI*, *Hamlet*, and Daborne’s *A Christian Turn’d Turke* establish risk within the many forms of negotiation demanded by early modern ventures, and the enslavement of Ithamore in Marlowe’s *Jew of Malta* launches my analysis of the risk to human agency posed by the sex trade in Shakespeare’s *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*. Finally, I address news of financial loss in *Merchant of Venice* and Haughton’s *Englishmen for My Money*, showing how risk manifests through the unreliability of staged merchant correspondence. The notion of maritime risk that emerges from these plays builds on contemporary oceanic studies while also recovering the inter-determination of oceanic space and economic reasoning everywhere evident on the early modern stage.
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This project took shape when I was forced to admit to myself that I had no idea what “risk” was. What does it mean to take a risk, or to bear one, to desire or fear this thing called risk? How, I wondered, was it even possible for early modern Londoners to think about chance and uncertainty when they lacked a science of probability? My friends and mentors know that this question was bothering me long before I understood it was about risk, or knew that it would depend on the sea. During February of 2008, near the peak of the global financial crisis, I was studying economics and writing a paper for Bill Worthen on the strangeness of flipping coins in Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. I could not understand how probability was wedged into a revision of *Hamlet*. Bill put up with this sort of thing a lot; he still does, and I thank him for it. Although I have not known Alan Stewart as long, Alan has been equally tolerant of the strange paths of this project, from chorographies to voyages, and his calm support has been crucial in moments of turmoil. Of Jean Howard’s guidance, what more can be said? Every page of this project owes something to her critical acuity and tireless encouragement. I have been lucky indeed in my mentors.

Likewise, there is no fascination in this study that has not been informed by conversations shared with the wonderful community of early modernists at Columbia. In particular, I would like to thank Seth Williams, Rachel Dunn, Alexander K.P. Lash, Gabriel Bloomfield, and Bernadette Myers for reading and thinking about this work with me for several years. Outside the early modernists, many other graduate students have contributed ideas through discussions spanning disciplines and periods. I would especially like to thank Sarah Arkebauer
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One queer effect of studying of risk is its tendency to seep into nearly every other part of one’s life. My friends and family have done their best to endure it in mine; sometimes they have even been enablers. To Karen Shen, who has suffered altitude sickness, hiking through the night, and my tenuous grip on manual transmission: thank you. Thanks also to William Patterson and Meredith Blank for their enduring companionship, for being voices of reason in unreasonable times, and to Peter Yeung for dragging me out of the library into New York every now and again as if to remind me we live on an island. During the long, difficult process of this dissertation, Marcela Johnson was often my first reader. She bore more of the burden than she deserved; her love and support made this project possible. My parents, too, have withstood many emails, many drafts, and they know well how vital our conversations were to keeping me afloat during the isolating experience of writing.
For Marcela:

amber, archers, cinnamon, horses, and birds.
The foming Seas did bullor vp,
The risking Oares did rashe,
The Soldats peeces for to clenge
Did shoures of shotts delashe.

James I, *His Maiesties poetical exercises at vacant houres* (1591)

So what is this thing called risk? …[T]he term designates neither [a unique] event nor a general kind of event occurring in reality (the unfortunate kind) but a specific mode of treatment of certain events.

François Ewald, “Insurance and Risk” (1991)

Introduction: Risking Oares

Early modern English ventures were faced constantly with risk. Ships ran aground or were battered by storms; merchants were beset by pirates who threatened to kill or ransom them; mariners were enslaved and enslaved others; the irregular news that could be gathered about voyages was often wrong to disastrous effect. Despite these hazards, long-distance maritime trade exploded around the turn of the seventeenth century just as London’s other joint-stock companies, the public theaters, were also experiencing paradigm-altering growth. This twinned expansion had serious implications, not just for the burgeoning institution of the joint-stock company, but also for how English culture came to terms with globalization and the economic concepts that enabled it. For both theaters and merchants, the emergence of the joint-stock company as a new form of corporate organization was a way of addressing risk: a concern with

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1 James I, *His Maiesties poetical exercises at vacant houres* (Edinburgh: Robert Waldegraue, 1591), 12r.
mitigating loss and maximizing gain, with transforming the inherent uncertainty of theatrical and maritime ventures into something manageable, even profitable.

In 1601, England’s relationship to the sea was changing on several fronts, culturally as well as commercially. On February 13th of that year, James Lancaster directed the East India Company’s first voyage to Bantam, and on December 6th, Francis Bacon spoke on behalf of a committee sponsoring an influential marine insurance bill in the Lower Parliament, one he hoped would “draw[] men on to adventures, and to stretch even the / very punctilio of [their] credit.”

The same year, Londoners could have read in quarto about Shakespeare’s Venetian merchant, Antonio, engaged in a struggle to articulate his own maritime anxiety. Antonio is wearisomely sad, and his friends assure him they know why: “your mind is tossing on the ocean [with] your argosies” (1.1.8). Yet this doesn’t seem quite right to Antonio, and he insists on co-mingling sadness with uncertainty: “how I caught it, found, it, came by it, / What stuff ’tis made of, whereof it is born, / I am to learn” (1.1.2–5). In this way, Merchant of Venice establishes a maritime-economic lacuna as its organizing principle. Lancaster and Bacon must also have felt this inexpressible uncertainty regarding the sea, seemingly activated by the potential for disaster, although all three men lacked the word which would emerge after the 1660s to describe that potential: “risk,” the incompletely known possibility of loss.

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5 See Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “risk,” n.1a where risk is used initially “as a count noun” synonymous with hazard. The OED gives, by the 1660s, examples for n.1b of use as a “mass noun,” but the emergence of risk in the abstract in n.2.a as “the possibility of harm or damage causing financial loss” is not recorded until 1677.
This dissertation takes up four devices used onstage to articulate distinct but and converging sorts of maritime peril during the first half of the seventeenth century: shipwrecks, pirates, slave-trade, and disastrous news. Amid the shifting paradigms of mercantile venture and commercial drama (1592–1625), I argue that these devices gave the theater a way to represent the new sort of economic epistemology that was emerging at sea, in maritime venturing. By examining how early modern drama approached risk as a distinctly maritime phenomenon, I show how the theater contributed to an emerging discourse around risk as an economic problem.

Thomas Heywood’s If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody, Part II (1606) takes up the risk of maritime trade by staging sixteenth-century London’s most visible merchant, Sir Thomas Gresham (c. 1518–1579). Gresham was an exceptionally successful cloth merchant and the de-facto leader of the Mercer’s Company, trading English wool and later pounds sterling on the Antwerp cloth and money markets. He was also well-regarded as a public benefactor for founding London’s Royal Exchange and providing funds for the establishment of Gresham College. If You Know Not Me opens with a negotiation between Gresham and a Barbary merchant who has offered him a monopoly—a “sealed patent from your king / For all your

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6 Organizing itself by such spectacles and their problems, this study borrows from recent work such as Ellen MacKay’s Prosecution, Plague, and Fire: Fugitive Histories of the Stage in Early Modern England (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).
7 Here and throughout this dissertation, I refer often to economic epistemologies and logics, and occasionally to economic models. In all such cases I am concerned with the process of decision-making based on the body of information about resources: economic epistemology is a form of knowledge having to do with the management of scarce resources, an economic logic is a system by which an individual might come to terms with those scarce resources, and economic models are representations of how that logic, when executed either singly or en masse, will affect a given distribution of those resources.
Barbary sugar.” The Barbary merchant comments on Gresham’s character as though for the benefit of the audience: “Beleeve me, to his credite be it spoke, / Hee is a man of heedfull providence” (6). This evaluative language leaves no doubt that “heedfull providence” is a quality to be admired in an English merchant, but it is an odd rhetorical construction—what does the phrase mean?

Heywood’s Gresham has a reputation for thinking ahead, for “providence,” but also for attentiveness to existing details, for being “heedfull.” When Edmund Pet, a sailor shipwrecked in 1613, describes that he has been saved by “God’s providence,” he appears to mean divine foreknowledge and fortunate deliverance at once. For the merchant, “providence” is speculation on a fortunate future, as heedfulness is observation, attentiveness as to the past; how can Gresham appear to do both? This seems like a contradiction or even a paradox: providence operates in the lack of information, while heedfulness depends on its observance. Yet the confluence of the two, Gresham’s “heedfull providence,” is nevertheless given as the distinguishing quality of England’s most celebrated merchant; an audience is primed to expect it of him and will not be disappointed. Heywood stages the negotiation over the sugar monopoly as a commercial monologue. Once the Barbary merchant has stepped away, Gresham takes a moment to perform a rhetorical evaluation of the venture’s potential for gain and loss. In the


course of this monologue, as Gresham “thoroughly scan[s] all accidental doubts,” (40) he establishes the economic problem of maritime risk as the play’s organizing concern:

_Gresham_  Bethinke thee, _Gresham_, threescore thousand pounds

A good round summe: let not the hope of gaine

Draw thee to losse. I am to have a Patent

For all the Barbarie Sugars at a rate,

The gaine cleers halfe in halfe, but then the hazard:

My term continues during the kings life,

The King may die before my first returne,

Then where’s my Cash? why, so the King may live

These 40 yeares, then, where is _Greshams_ gaine?

It stands in this as in all ventures else,

Doubtfull. (44–54)

While the “good round summe” in question is impossibly large for a single investor, Gresham is far less interested in the scale of the deal than in its peculiarities: its potential gains, losses, and the economic logic by which the two are to be reconciled. A venturer briefly but explicitly subjects mere value or capital to evaluation, a distinctive mode of analysis. In doing so, Gresham performs the apparent paradox of his reputation as a man at once heedful and provident. He reconciles the precariousness of the venture with its potential for profit in a series of calculating observations which lead the audience through his train of thought. He will have a monopoly on “all the Barbarie Sugars” at a particular cost, or “rate,” such that his profit will be double his investment (“the gaine cleers halfe in half”). “But then the hazard,” the potential pitfall, is implicit in terms of the deal: Gresham has a monopoly only over the course of the King’s life, and “the King may die” before the English merchant can get even one sugar ship out of Barbary. Gresham waxes at once hopeful and despairing: even if “the King may live / these 40 years,”

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12 On the outlandishness of this amount for any one merchant, see Edward Bonahue, Jr., “Social Control, the City, and the Market: Heywood’s _If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody, Part II_, Renaissance Papers (1993): 81–82.
what is to certify his profit? It is the intrinsic character of “all ventures,” he concludes, to be “doubtfull”: in other words, every maritime enterprise has risk.

If *If You Know Not Me* is explicitly driven by the problem of economic risk in maritime venturing, why doesn’t Gresham just say so? In the elaborate rhetorical performance of mulling over the conditions of a sugar monopoly with the Barbary merchant, why seem so deliberately to skirt the issue—why address “gaine,” “losse,” “hazard,” and “returne,” and in short, everything but risk? There are two reasons for this, one simple and one more complex. In the first place, as I briefly suggested above, there was no English word for “risk” in 1606. The second reason Heywood’s Gresham might not have used this word, had it existed at all, is implicit in the first: risk of this sort—the incompletely known possibility of loss—is a very difficult thing to articulate clearly. Gresham’s speech may already suggest why it is so difficult to talk about risk, the abstraction, as opposed to risks as hazards or dangers—that is, events. Heywood’s arch-merchant recognizes the play of uncertainty that prevents him from quite pinning down his expected returns: “The gaine cleers halfe in halfe, but then the hazard” (48). Yet the very process is a means of assessing risk, Gresham’s attempt to “thoroughly scan all accidental doubts” (40) by thinking through, aloud and for the benefit of the audience, the calculus of coming to terms with the possibility of loss amid “the hope of gaine.” Lacking a term for what he hopes to gain by this calculus, Gresham talks around it, circumscribing risk by making a performance out of the practice of evaluation. It is somewhat easier to perform doubt than it is to describe it. If Gresham cannot use the word “risk” to articulate the process of weighing potential profit with potential loss, the theatrical device of the stage monologue allows him to accomplish precisely this: to perform a back-and-forth assessment of the uncertainty that underlies the decision to
enter into a venture. As this study shows, other sorts of stage devices do this too by materializing uncertainties having to do with the sea.

*Risk, Uncertainty, and the Sea*

The word “risk” did not enter the English lexicon in a regular form until midway through the seventeenth century, when it was borrowed from the French *risque*. The word initially functioned as a count noun, describing a particular event—a unique hazard. It is in precisely this sense that it is translated out of Simon Goulart’s French by a self-professed “obscure Englishman” in a treatise called *The Wise Vieillard, or old man* (1621): “The covetous Marchant to runne upon all hazards and risques for a handfull of yellow earth.” A couple of things are worth noting here. First, that “hazards and risques” are not disambiguated, though they are maintained as distinct; both appear to be certain sorts of accidents. Second, and more importantly, the translator gets to this sense of ambitious commerce by employing a maritime metaphor: one “runne[s] upon” risques as a ship runs aground or runs upon a reef. And indeed, as my first epigraph suggests, risk is associated with the sea long before the translation of Goulart’s treatise.

When James, then James VI King of Scotland, wrote his verse commemoration of the Christian victory in the Battle of Lepanto, he also associated commercial ambition, venturing, risk, and the sea. James’ *Lepanto* describes “three thousand Almans” as “money men with awfull

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13 Simon Goulart, *The wise vieillard, or old man. Translated out of French into English by an obscure Englishman, a friend and fauourer of all wise old-men*, T[homas] W[illiamson] trans. (London: John Dawson, 1621), 176. This is the earliest example in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed. s.v. “risk,” n. 1a, given as “the possibility of loss, injury, or other adverse or unwelcome circumstance; a chance or situation involving such a possibility.”

14 On the nature of accidents, see Michael Witmore, *The Culture of Accidents: Unexpected Knowledges in Early Modern England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002). Witmore’s study, although rigorously phenomenological in its treatment and so quite different from the economic history of this one, nevertheless comes quite close to my examination of risk in certain ways, by considering the status of “accidents,” “chance,” and the status of the unexpected.
cheare” accompanied by “three thousand venturers brave,” around whom “The foming Seas did bullor vp, / The risking Oares did rashe.”15 What James means by “risking” may be less clear than what Goulart or his translator meant by “risque,” but it is still perceptible. For James, “risking Oares” suggests oars practically leaping out of the waves and slicing back into it with enough force to “rashe,” or contribute to the turbulence, to further foam already rough seas. Elsewhere, in other appearances of the word in English texts not glossed by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word “risk” is a verb often associated with movement or dancing: one might “risk” a galliard.16 It is a description of an especially vigorous movement, almost a jump and perhaps a sharp one; thus one can also “cut a caper,” as does Sir Andrew Aguecheek in *Twelfth Night* (1.3.108). The French financial philosopher François Ewald, in attempting to describe the origins of the concept, notes wryly that “the term ‘risk’ which one finds being used nowadays apropos of everything…is a neologism…said to derive from the Italian word *risco* which meant ‘that which cuts,’ hence ‘reef’ and consequently ‘risk to cargo on the high seas.’”17 Although Ewald writes around the turn of the 21st century, he exhumes a usage very close to that of James I in the *Lepanto*. The sea, venturing, and risk appear to have been inextricable, emerging together even in their earliest English formulations.

15 James I, *His Maiesties poeticall exercises*, I2r.
17 Ewald, “Insurance and Risk,” 198–9. Etymologically from the “French *risque* danger or inconvenience, predictable or otherwise…it is widely suggested that post-classical Latin *resicum, risicum*, etc. in the sense ‘danger, hazard’ originated as variants of an unattested post-classical Latin noun *resecum*, a proposed derivative of classical Latin *resecäre* *resect* v. with the sense ‘that which cuts’ and hence ‘rock, crag, reef’…with allusion to the hazards of travel or transport by sea.” “risk, n.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2014.
It is important that concrete “risks” are not to be confused with the inchoate sense of abstract “risk,” that early modern Londoners and playwrights like Thomas Heywood are coming to possess. The distinction is troublesome, and working it out is part of what consistently occupies plays concerned with oceanic disaster. Risk, as it is treated in this dissertation, is what Barbara Sebek terms “an emergent epistemology of trade”: a form of economic knowledge developed to address the practical mercantile problems that made its expression suddenly necessary.\textsuperscript{18} The period of my study, 1592–1625, is the inflection point in the growth of England’s maritime trafficking, a period during which the nation’s commercial growth is not yet assured and during which new forms of corporation and finance were being tried out, as I will show below.\textsuperscript{19} Although the word “risk” initially enters English in the early seventeenth century, its uses remain mostly materialist, incidental: it is close to hazard, but less material; it has to do with the sea and with “money men,” but is not definitively financial. Risk as an abstraction—as an epistemology of trade rather than an event—remains inchoate, inarticulable outside of performance. Theatrical devices provided a way to enact the condition under which maritime ventures might be undertaken, a condition they actively pursued: the incompletely known possibility of loss juxtaposed with a correspondingly uncertain possibility of gain.

François Ewald’s formulation, excerpted in my second epigraph, insists on risk as a performative mode of treatment:

\textsuperscript{19} For example, the East India Company, although founded as a joint-stock company, did not in fact operate that way until 1613. Investors funded the first twelve voyages individually or in pairs, rather than investing in the Company more generally. Two large stock offerings—first in 1613 and then again in 1621—made individual voyages to the Indies essentially obsolete, permanently altering English merchants’ financial calculus.
[Risk] designates neither [a unique] event nor a general kind of event occurring in reality (the unfortunate kind) but a specific mode of treatment of certain events capable of happening to a group of individuals…. Nothing is a risk in itself; there is no risk in reality. But on the other hand, anything can be a risk; it all depends on how one analyzes the danger, considers the event. As Kant might have put it, the category of risk is a category of understanding; it cannot be given in sensibility or intuition. … Rather than notions of danger and peril, the notion of risk comes together with those of chance, hazard, probability, eventuality or randomness on the one hand, and those of loss or damage on the other—the two series coming together in the notion of accident.20

Risk of this and other equally modern sorts have been a major focus in the last three decades of sociocultural criticism, especially for those systemizing thinkers who owe a debt to Fernand Braudel and Immanuel Wallerstein, as I do, and for those literary economic thinkers who owe a debt, as I also do, to Marxism and more recently to Marc Shell.21 From these modern theorists of the world system, both economic and discursive, my study takes a sense of risk as inchoate, as a developing part of a far larger network of economic epistemology. It is far from the only “mode of treatment” applied to maritime trade, and is certainly not the only way of engaging with sea-spectacles and maritime topoi onstage. Nevertheless, the fundamental flexibility of risk, its adaptability to various forms of uncertainty and its quality as a performative evaluation of doubt, seem to have captured the imaginations of early modern playwrights and audiences interested in England’s growing connection to maritime venturing.

Risk as it emerges in the performance of maritime drama within the bounds of this study (1592–1625) prefigures its financial codification later in the seventeenth century as the process

of assessing and insuring against uncertainty. It is in this sense that a retrospective on the East India Company, Robert Ferguson’s *The East-India-Trade* (1677) makes use of the term to describe how “many lost of their principal Stocks, besides about two years Interest, and the risk and adventure of the Seas.” This is remarkably close to Frank Knight’s classic formulation of risk as “measurable uncertainty”: a matter of evaluation by which a venture’s doubtful gains might be better known or reconciled. Since the formal assessment of economic risk depends on the mathematics of probability, it is only after the exchange between Pierre Fermat and Blaise Pascal—letters leading to the development of probability and later statistics (1654–1660)—that risk was made subject to calculation and subsequently codified into a quantifiable management of uncertainty. Risk never really escapes its maritime origins. When Daniel Bernoulli publishes the first cohesive theory of risk calculation in 1738, the “*Specimen Theoriae Novae de Mensura Sortis*,” he notes that “the procedure customarily employed by merchants in the insurance of commodities transported by sea seems to merit special attention.” Yet for this study, the practical calculus of risk is ultimately unimportant. Lacking the mathematics to codify it, early modern Londoners had to find other ways to express the process of coming to terms with

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22 Robert Ferguson, *The East-India-trade a most profitable trade to the kingdom. And best secured and improved in a company, and a joint-stock. Represented in a letter written upon the occasion of two letters lately published, insinuating the contrary*, (London: 1677), 16.


uncertainty. This does not mean that they were not acutely aware of the risk inherent in venturing. On the contrary, they wrestled constantly with it in practice and in theory; this study treats as paradigmatic many voyage accounts, mostly from the East India Company’s early efforts, in which venturers attempt to express the new set of epistemological challenges they faced.

Profit and Loss on the Mare Liberum

Three large venturing companies—the Levant, East India, and Virginia Companies—were established each within a decade of the other, in 1592, 1601, and 1606 respectively. All three companies continued to operate through the 1620s, because despite what were often staggering losses, they had good reason to hope for equally staggering gains. This was not always apparent to potential investors, many of whom saw the Companies as damaging for English mercantile interests, in part because they impinged upon the well-established Company of Merchant Adventurers. The Merchant Adventurers, a regulated company of individual merchants of whom Thomas Gresham was the most prominent member, were dominant in London’s export industry through the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. And yet by the middle of the seventeenth century, as the historian Robert Brenner has shown, “the locus of commercial and

political power in the London merchant community had shifted [to] a different group of merchants, who based themselves in the newly emerging commerce of the Elizabethan expansion, especially the closely linked trades with the Levant and the East Indies.”

The distrust leveled at the new joint-stock companies took various forms, but one of the most troubling was that they undermined English credit by over-import, and that in doing so they quite simply failed to produce returns—that they were, as Gerard Malynes put it, “a canker of England’s commonwealth.” This was not unfounded: venturing was a complicated enterprise, and it could be difficult to determine precisely who benefited, how much they did, or whether it was profitable at all.

The East India Company and its supporters published numerous treatises in dispute, arguing that despite appearances, they were eminently profitable and that, moreover, they strengthened the English economy. One of the more interesting such treatises explores a broader European development and the development of risk discourse across the region. In 1614, the East India Company commissioned a translation of the Latin treatise *Mare Liberum*, published by the Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius in 1609, to make their case. When the East India Company commissioned the translation, they tapped Richard Hakluyt for the job. Hakluyt’s

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30 The most widely circulated defenses of the Company came, somewhat later, from one of its directors and founding members. See Thomas Mun, *A discourse of trade from England unto the East-Indies answering to diverse objections* (London: Nicholas Okes, 1621). Incidentally, Karl Marx, writing in the *New York Daily Tribune* in July 1853, notes that due to this constant back-and-forth between defenders and detractors, “that the very existence of the original East India Company was repeatedly endangered” until 1702, when the Company more effectively monopolized and corporatized its investments. Karl Marx, “The East India Company — It’s History and Results,” *New York Herald Tribune,* (New York, NY) Jul. 11, 1853.
Principal Navigations (1598–1600) had already made him a decisive influence over England’s mercantile and colonial aspirations. The choice of such a prominent translator, as well as the move to publicize Grotius’ *Mare Liberum* at all, communicated two complementary things: first, that English maritime ventures to the Indies could fetch astonishing returns, just like the ventures of the Portuguese and Dutch. Grotius, writing about the almost unimaginable profits enjoyed first by Portuguese merchants engaged in state-sponsored venturing, articulated the kind of development English merchants were counting on:

> For we know the first voyages sometimes have yielded fortyfold increase or more, whereby it came to pass that a people [the Portuguese] who were long time poor came suddenly to unexpected riches, in so great excess of riot as scarce befell the happiest nations in the highest degree of fortune’s long progress.  

While the vision of a fortunate nation coming suddenly to riches would obviously have appealed to English merchants, an attentive Londoner around 1614 might have been skeptical. The print market of the early seventeenth century was awash with conflicting news about voyages, such as popular disaster pamphlets like Sylvester Jourdain’s influential *Discovery of the Bermudas, Otherwise Called the Isle of Devils* (1610), and many variations on the providential shipwreck account, like *Lamentable Newes, Shewing the wonderfull deliuerance of Maister Edmond Pet Saylor* (1613). Indeed, the second thing Hakluyt’s translation of Grotius suggests is that

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32 Hugo Grotius, *The Free Sea [Mare Liberum* (1609)], trans. Richard Hakluyt, David Armitage ed. (Indianapolis: The Liberty Fund, 2004), 36. As Armitage points out, it is not entirely clear whether Hakluyt was himself the translator or whether he simply coordinated the work of translation; given his demonstrated preference for management and organization, the latter seems most likely.

venturing’s very potential for failure could recuperate the enterprise. Usury and other financial iniquities were viewed as problematic precisely because they offered certain—and so exploitative—gain: “the usurer is always suer to gaine, whosoever loseth.” Thus, when William Welwod published his critique of Grotius’ treatise, he celebrated the quality of a risky *mare liberum* “to allow the proper right for every man and nation,” for according to that precept “of Tryphoni[n]us, *ex aliena jactura lucrum haurire non oportet*”—that is, “no one should derive profit from the loss of another.” Ventures were part of a courageous and uniquely English project of maritime expansion. As Josiah Child would later claim, “the East-India trade is the most national of all foreign trades…more profitable and necessary to the kingdom of England, than to any other kingdom or nation in Europe.”

Londoners’ anxieties were not misplaced. The risk of disaster on a venture to the Indies, the Spice Islands, or the Arabian peninsula really was extraordinary. Some expeditions, like the Fourth Voyage of the East India Company (1608), lost everything: of three ships, the *Union* was lost to rocks off Brittany, the *Ascension* off Cambay on the north coast of India, and the final ship, the *Good Hope*, foundered in the same region before her crew murdered the master John Lafkin and deserted. News of the disastrous voyage reached London in the form of letters and

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35 Thomas Wilson, *Discourse upon usury*, (London: [Richard Tottel], 1572), 271.
journals carried by the surviving crew members of the *Ascension* between 1610 and 1612.\(^{39}\) Only the miraculous profits of other, more fortunate voyages could balance out such frequent and unpredictable loss; yet it was as difficult to predict which voyages might succeed as it was to suggest which might fail. During the four years in which all three ships of the Fourth Voyage were lost, the Company’s Fifth Voyage (1609) set out under the leadership of David Middleton with just a single ship, the *Expedition*, and in 1611 returned from an uneventful trip to the Bandas islands of Indonesia. Over the course of these two years, the venture yielded for investors an “almost incredible” three-hundred thirty-four percent (334\%) return.\(^{40}\) A shareholder with equal stock in both the Fourth and Fifth Voyages would still have doubled their investment, but the experience of such radical loss and gain must have been disconcerting.

Other ventures contained such contrasts in miniature, such as the East India Company’s Sixth Voyage (1610). This was the grandest venture to date, and its three ships—including the *Trade’s Increase*, the largest merchant ship ever constructed in London—would be led by the eldest Middleton brother, Henry. Barely eight months into a proposed multi-year voyage, Middleton and many of his men were imprisoned at Sana’a on the Arabian peninsula; six of them were killed. What had begun inauspiciously only devolved from there: in retribution, Middleton and his men blockaded the Mokha harbor and essentially turned privateer, plundering Gujarati shipping entering the Red Sea. Later, Middleton died in Bantam just before the *Trade’s Increase* was abandoned in Indonesia and eventually burnt by the Javanese. By any meaningful

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\(^{39}\) See, for example: Robert Covert, *A true and almost incredible report of an Englishman, that (being cast away in the good ship called the Assention in Cambaya the farthest part of the East Indies) travelled by land through many unknowne kingsomes, and great cities* (London: William Hall, 1612); “Ascension: Journal, William Revett, factor,” British Library IOR L/MAR/A/VII.

\(^{40}\) Farrington, “First twelve voyages,” 149.
account this venture must have seemed like an abject failure, and yet despite all this, when the single remaining ship finally reached London in 1613, the return on investment again exceeded two-hundred percent (200%), a massive four-fold increase.\textsuperscript{41}

This study makes use of East India Company venturing documents, both manuscripts and those accounts printed in Samuel Purchas’ \textit{Hakluytus Posthumus}, as literary and economic intertexts for contemporary drama. With a few exceptions, I do not claim that theater explicitly borrowed from these accounts; many of them record events that occurred well after the plays would have left the public stage. Nor do I claim that mariners of the East India Company, however often they must have watched plays at the Globe, the Curtain, or the Rose Theaters, would have necessarily internalized the practices and approaches of onstage merchants to situations of maritime uncertainty. Nevertheless, drama produced between 1592–1625 employed elaborate oceanic spectacles, directly addressed maritime disasters, and developed maritime stage topoi with nuanced representations of the economic problems associated with maritime trade. Companies were certainly awake to the English anxieties, and for an audience increasingly captivated by maritime tales of risk, those companies and their playwrights produced what we can in retrospect term maritime drama.

\textit{Maritime Drama}

\textsuperscript{41} Numerous manuscript records, many now transcribed, attest to the remarkable political and economic character of the Sixth Voyage. See, for example: “Instructions for keeping the accounts of the Sixth Voyage, by Thomas Steevens, 1609–10,” BL Cart. Cotton III.13.xxvi.28 f. 1–4; “Downton’s abstract journal of the Peppercorn’s homeward voyage, 4 Feb.-13 Sept. 1613,” BL IOR E/3/1 no. 103. More broadly, see Samuel Purchas, \textit{Purchas his pilgrimes, or Hakluytus Posthumus}, vol. 1 (London: 1625), 247–74.
Playwrights and their companies increasingly take up the maritime risk faced by early modern venturers at sea, producing a new sort of “maritime drama” between 1592 and 1625. Maritime drama reproduced a set of theatrical devices and tropes that engage directly with England’s rapidly developing commercial relationship to the sea, and with the questions of economic risk emerging from it. The plays are often cross-genre, and although they may take place at sea or on the shore, they are organized as much by social and economic anxieties as by setting; some are resolved in relation to the sea, or depend on it for their organizing concerns. Heywood’s *If You Know Not Me* is a good example of the latter. Although the play is set entirely in London—either in markets, shops, street-corners or amid the subtitle’s proudly-proclaimed “Building of the [Royal] Exchange”—it is, as I have shown, driven by from the outset by the concerns of maritime trade. Like much maritime drama, Heywood’s play occupies several intersecting dramatic categories: it is a city comedy with two acts devoted to an English monarch, Queen Elizabeth I—history and comedy set in London, so a “London chronicle comedy”42—which nevertheless makes its ambitious, worldly English hero-merchant look rather like one of the investors in the Levant or East India Companies.

Heywood’s play intermingles early-seventeenth century maritime concerns with the economic problems of contemporary oceanic commerce by transforming Sir Thomas Gresham from a cloth merchant into a venturer. The historical Gresham traded English wool for weapons and silks with the Netherlands from the 1540s and into the 1560s; he made his fortune through family influence, skillful management of the Mercer Company, and eventually, as a Royal Agent...

in the Low Countries, by his exceptionally-clever manipulation of English debt and sale of pounds sterling on the Antwerp bullion markets. Over the long course of Gresham’s successful career, he does not appear to have traded at all with North Africa, much less the Indies. In Heywood’s play, by contrast, it is precisely Gresham’s fantastical trade with Barbary—in the mold of contemporaries trading in the Indies—that characterizes him as an English success story. As historian Robert Brenner has shown, this is less strange than it may seem: the cloth merchants of the late sixteenth century—Mercers and Merchant Adventurers—were, with Elizabethan privateers, the primary investors in the joint-stock companies which dominated the 1600s. Thus, by dramatizing Gresham’s trade with Barbary, Heywood has rendered him recognizable to a contemporary London audience in 1606.

Heywood’s Gresham, like the merchants of the venturing companies, is distinguished by his ability to evaluate and manage the extraordinary risk inherent in England’s increasingly long-haul maritime trade. The “good round summe” of “threescore thousand pounds,” as critics have repeatedly pointed out, would have been too large for a single merchant at sterling’s lowest ebb; what this sum evokes, rather—and what it approximates in scale—are the collective investments gathered for a large voyage to the Indies. In a revealing coincidence, investor contributions to the East India Company’s Second Voyage just a few years earlier, in 1604, totaled £60,452. As I have argued above, rather than subjecting Gresham to a “schizophrenic” turn from a “sober civic worthy” to a “high risk investor in the Morocco sugar trade,” If You Know Not Me establishes

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44 Brenner, Merchants and Revolution, 3–50.
45 Farrington, “First Twelve Voyages,” 144.
him from the outset as a capable venturer precisely by the extent to which he engages in the
evaluation and management of hazard—the articulation of the risk inherent in his maritime
trade. Thus, seen as a maritime drama, Heywood’s play evokes in the figure of Gresham not
only Elizabethan nostalgia, but also sets up the expectation that risk—in immense quantities and
at an oceanic remove—is the new model for a successful merchant.

While Heywood’s *If You Know Not Me* shows how maritime drama interlaces with other
genres, the quintessential example of singularly maritime drama is Fletcher and Massinger’s *The
Sea Voyage* (1622). The play stages many of the emerging topoi of maritime drama and reflects
the emergence of that subgenre as it is taken up over the course of this study. Simply glancing at
the *dramatis personae* gives a mash-up of nearly every sort of early-modern seafarer:

**Albert**, *a French pirate, in love with Aminta.*
**Tibalt**, *a merry gentleman, friend to Albert.*
**Master of the Ship**, *an honest merry man.*
**Lamure**, *an usuring merchant.*
**Franville**, *a vainglorious gallant.* ...
**Sailors.**
**Aminta**, *mistress to Albert, a noble French virgin.*
**Rosellia**, *governess of the Amazonian Portugals.*

In the first long scene of *The Sea Voyage*, nearly all of these maritime stock-characters are
onstage at once: the French pirate, Albert; the jolly-everyman ship’s Master; a merchant who is
also a usurer, Lamure; and an out-of-his-depth nobleman, Franville; all are accompanied by a
requisite crew of interchangeable sailors.

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47 The *dramatis personae* of the *The Sea Voyage*, 1679. Francis Beaumont, John Fletcher, [and Phillip
When the play opens, the Master of a ship and two sailors are beset by “a tempest, thunder and lightning.” The Master cries out in nautical language, some technical, some fanciful:

Master 
Lay her aloof! The sea grows dangerous.
How its spits against the clouds, how it capers,
And how the fiery element frights it back!
There be devils dancing in the air: I think
I saw a dolphin hang i’th horns of the moon
Shot from a wave. Heyday, heyday,
How she kicks and yerks!
Down with the main mast, lay her at hull,
Furl up all her linens and let her ride it out. (1.1.1–9)

This scene deliberately suggests the shipwreck in Shakespeare’s The Tempest (1611), probably the most famous sea spectacle of the period, and a play audiences could have seen a decade earlier, produced by the same company on the same stage. As in that earlier play, Fletcher and Massinger’s mariners evocatively give agency to an angry ocean even as they try desperately to maintain their own. When the storm threatens to overwhelm them, the Master figures this partly as a problem with audibility—“the storm is loud, we cannot hear one another” (1.1.28). Although it has other valences, Shakespeare’s storm is also concerned with perception—“Do you not hear him? You mar our labour: keep your / cabins: you do assist the storm” (1.1.13–4). When I take up The Tempest in my first chapter, I focus on how the play asks audiences to consider its own devices for perception; how it establishes not just shipwreck-spectacle, but also perspective on shipwreck, as a way of coming to terms with risk. Fletcher and Massinger not only borrow the

49 The Tempest was initially staged at Blackfriars, but there is no real reason it would not also have gone up, afterward, at the Globe. On the staging of The Tempest at Blackfriars, see the classic essay by Andrew Gurr, “The Tempest's Tempest at Blackfriars,” Shakespeare Survey (1989): 91–102.
spectacle of Shakespeare’s be-stormed ship but also the theatrical particularities of the device itself by re-staging a shipwreck with a concern for the uncertainties of perception.

Not content to open *The Sea Voyage* with just a Shakespeare-inspired shipwreck, Fletcher and Massinger add a pirate who, though French, operates within the anti-heroic character of English piracy. Albert the pirate is introduced as a man of characteristically fluid principle: he so loves the lady Aminta that he has abducted her; as he reminds her amid the storm, he “put to sea to seek your brother / Your captain, yet your slave” (1.1.102–3). Aminta, increasingly furious with her pirate-kidnapper as their shipwreck appears to grow more likely, reminds him that he either killed or turned to piracy many of her friends and family:

*Amin*ta

You forced my friends from their peaceful rest
Some your relentless sword gave their last groans
Would I had been there numbered!
And to Fortune’s never-satisfied afflictions
Ye turned my brother and those few friends I’d left
Like desperate creatures to their own fears
And the world’s stubborn pities. O merciless! (1.1.81–8)

The forced impressment of merchants or other mariners into piracy—which is what Aminta is describing—was historically common, especially in the first decade of the seventeenth century. In plays like Robert Daborne’s *A Christian Turn’d Turke*, which I take up in my second chapter, negotiation between pirates and their captives about impressment functions as a set-piece, theatrical devices for rendering concerns about the risk of non-state action in a shifting political sea-scape. Some members of a Blackfriars audience might have remembered quite well the end of the Elizabethan era of gentleman-privateers in 1603.50 With James’ ascension to the throne,

state-sponsored privateering was outlawed, and many un-landed mariners were forced to either join the navy or turn pirate. It may be that Albert remembers privateering, too, when he describes his long experience in terms of time served at sea:

Albert

What comfort, sailors?
I never saw since I have known the sea,
Which has been these twenty years, so rude a tempest.
In what state are we? (1.1.31–4)

A reckoning of twenty years at sea, delivered onstage in 1622, would put the start of Albert’s career in 1603—the very year piracy became a fixture in the English ocean. Even in the midst of a rude tempest, his speech suggests anxiety about the risk of piracy. “In what state are we?” he asks uncomfortably, meaning both to ask about the condition of the ship and about the political environment he will enter should they run aground: will he be pirate here, or privateer? Compare this to Shakespeare’s Viola, shipwrecked in Twelfth Night, who questions her rescuing sailors in similar terms: “What country, friends, is this?” (1.2.1) For Viola, the question shows wonderment—a matter of spectacle more than politics; for Albert as for English pirates, it is a matter of considerable risk. In a maritime drama like The Sea Voyage in which playwrights are deliberately gathering pirate topoi, even simple oceanic issues take on a different cast, figuring here as political tension between a free and restricted sea. Whether Fletcher and Massinger are actually interested evoking the history of English privateering is less significant than the sense that a play like The Sea Voyage, read as a maritime drama, makes the allusion to that history productive. Albert helps establish the play’s emerging concerns with colonization, statehood, and the risk of negotiating with non-state actors like pirates and, later, “the Amazonian Portugals.”

51 Later in Twelfth Night, the risk of piracy is brought into sharper relief through the character of Antonio. As he explains to Sebastian, Antonio—like Albert—was once a privateer and “do[es] not without danger walk these streets. / Once in a sea-fight ‘gainst the Count his galleys / I did some service” (3.3.25–8).
The Amazons who appear later in Fletcher and Massinger’s play displace onto the men the risk of enslavement more often applied to women in maritime drama.

Although *The Sea Voyage* will eventually stage Amazonian women as forceful and threatening, this follows on the play’s initial presentation of women at sea as perishable bodies. As soon as Aminta comes on stage during the shipwreck, she is framed as a danger to others in part because she struggles to articulate the risk of their situation:

*Aminta*  
O miserable Fortune,  
Nothing but horror sounding in mine ears,  
No minute to promise to my frighted soul.

*Tibalt*  
Peace, woman!  
We ha’ storms enough already—no more howling.

*Aminta*  
Gentle master—

*Master*  
Clap this woman under hatches. (1.1.47–52)

Aminta is rejected for invoking “Fortune,” perhaps simply because, as a woman acknowledging that the sailor’s nautical skills might be insufficient to prevent their wreck, she gives the lie to a more orderly picture of their maritime situation. The possibility of loss is not something the sailors are ready to hear about: both the “merry gentleman” Tibalt and the “honest merry” Master roughly suggest Aminta should be stowed belowdecks, as though confining her to the belly of the ship might somehow manage the risk of shipwreck already apparent onstage. In part because of this, Aminta’s captive body figures in *The Sea Voyage* as a metonym for misfortune, as a representation and exemplar of perishability. The Master begins to rail against her, figuring her as a disastrous “burden” that would turn them to even worse fortunes:

*Master*  
We have ne’er better luck  
When we ha’ such stowage as these trinkets with us,  
These sweet sin-breeders. How can heaven smile on us  
When such a burden of iniquity  
Lies tumbling in our ship’s belly? (1.1.65–9)
The ship’s Master refers to all women when he grotesquely renders Aminta as “stowage.” The word suggests both cargo and vessel, that which is stowed and that into which something is stowed; it is a degrading euphemism for Aminta’s status as sexualized vessel, a kind of “sin-breed[ing]” stock, and as a possession, a “trinket,” a commodity without value.52

As with shipwrecks and pirates, Fletcher and Massinger are operating here on the assumption that London audiences of maritime drama would have recognized the risk implicit in the woman-aboard-a-ship topos. Indeed, this peculiarity of early modern merchant misogyny was a wide-spread superstition and even institutionalized. In 1615, when Captain William Keeling took command of an East India Company voyage to the Mughal empire, he formally requested that his pregnant wife, Ann Broomefield, accompany him.53 Although Keeling’s request was denied, Broomefield was not to be deterred, and her husband proceeded to sneak her aboard off the coast of Sandwich. Hearing of this via letters, the Company posed Keeling an ultimatum: jettison Broomefield, whom they saw as a risk to the voyage, or resign his position; reluctantly, Broomefield was set ashore.54 None of this would have come as a surprise to London merchants, nor to audiences of maritime drama, who would once again have seen a similar scene just over a decade earlier, in Shakespeare’s *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* (1608). There “shipboard” in still another storm, the Master tells Pericles that his wife Thaisa, who has just given birth, “must

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52 See *OED*, 3rd ed., s.v. “stowage,” n.4a, n.6 The *OED* gives Fletcher and Massinger’s usage here as the first appearance of the latter sense, “That with which a vessel is or is to be stowed,” which suggests precisely the euphemistic adaptation of the female body from “vessel” to “cargo.”
overboard. The sea works high, the wind is loud, and will not lie till the ship be cleared of the
dead…With us at sea that it been still observed... / For she must overboard straight.” (3.1.47–
54). It does not matter to the Master in Pericles, who does not know, nor to the Master in The
Sea Voyage, who does, that both women are alive; what matters is that they are disposable—that
in maritime drama, risk can be displaced onto the perishable bodies of women and the enslaved.

The Sea Voyage teems with the refigured products of two previous decades of maritime
drama and, as one of the first of nearly ten sea-centered plays authored by the two playwrights, it
also looks ahead, showing the watery turn the repertory of the King’s Men would take in the
1620s. As maritime drama took shape during the period, these topoi were often half-figured,
halting, and difficult to stage. Yet even the narrated shipwreck in The Comedy of Errors, for
instance, anticipates the growth of a subgenre that will repeatedly feature such maritime devices
as markers of thematic and structural concerns with the sea.

Chapter Organization

“Doubtful Gains” argues that early modern theater figuring the sea became central to articulating
risk as an abstraction, an emerging economic concept in the context of maritime commercial
practices. Plays featuring oceanic hazards like shipwreck, piracy, and enslavement evocatively
connected English venturing to economic vulnerability in increasingly systematic ways, helping
audiences think about different forms of uncertainty as risk. This counters the prevailing
scholarly narrative that has limited early modern uncertainty to inscrutable forms of “chance”
and religious “providence,” demonstrating by contrast how performances of what I call
“maritime drama” implicated audiences in the specific conditions of uncertainty with which English venturers were coming to terms.

Each of my four chapters examines a typical encounter with maritime hazard: shipwreck, pirates, enslavement, and perhaps counterintuitively, news of those disasters. I examine how plays reconfigure these events by developing new theatrical techniques for representing uncertainty. In my first chapter, “Shipwreck,” I explore the effect of shipwreck scenes in Shakespeare’s *Comedy of Errors* and in Jonson, Marston and Chapman’s *Eastward Ho*. I then return to Shakespeare to examine how the plays like *The Tempest* make the spectators within them witnesses to shipwreck scenes. Staging perspectives on wrecks inspires a mirrored form of maritime uncertainty which was shared by both onstage observers and the theater audience. Informing my readings are early modern interpretations of an influential passage in Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura* and William Strachey’s account of the *Sea Venture*’s wreck in Bermuda, both of which meditate on the experience of shipwreck for its participants as well as observers. I argue that these materials reimagine the ruin described in prose shipwreck accounts as a form of spectatorial uncertainty, encouraging disparate, indeterminate experiences of the same disastrous events.

While accounts of early modern English pirates typically focus on the explicit threat they posed to the lives of mariners, my second chapter, “Pirates,” argues that dramatic pirates are used, by contrast, to stage the threat implicit in the act of negotiation itself. Taking advantage of modern economic decision theory, I re-examine the Duke of Suffolk’s infamous execution by pirates in Shakespeare’s *Henry VI, Part 2*, showing how Suffolk’s death is less the result of pirate ruthlessness than of his spectacular failure to negotiate mutually beneficial terms. Later, a 1607
Proclamation against pyrates describes the infamous pirate Captain John Ward primarily as a threat to those who would “buy, barter, [and] exchange.” Juxtaposing to this proclamation an under-examined pirate encounter in Robert Daborne’s *A Christian Turn’d Turke*, I show how the play re-imagines the debate around English mercantilism as a trade negotiation between John Ward and two French merchants. Negotiation scenes involving pirates revealed the ubiquity of the practice at sea, as well as the out-size risk poor negotiations could pose, not just to pirates and their captives, but to merchants, statesmen, and mariners of all kinds.

In my third chapter, I take up the London stage’s oblique representation of the slave-trade in the form of perishable bodies. Even as Hugo Grotius was drafting *Mare Liberum*, the influential text which would declare the free sea a public economic good, the ocean was increasingly a space within which human freedom could be sold for profit. This chapter, “Enslavement,” examines the systematic bondage of non-English persons in a slave-market, performative slave labor, and slave trickery. Jacobean drama addresses the disjuncture between a free sea and enslaved persons directly, and with ambivalence. Shakespeare's *Pericles* imparts to oceanic spaces the perverse economic logic by which Marina’s pirate captors determine that although she is not to be raped, she can be sold into sex slavery. Reading Christopher Marlowe’s *Jew of Malta*, I show how a rare slave-market scene marks out the financial and practical terms by which a human person might be assessed as a way of displacing risk. By juxtaposing these two subjugated figures, Marlowe’s Ithamore and Shakespeare’s Marina, the chapter makes the case for the slave as simultaneously a perishable body and a risk-bearing one.

My fourth and final chapter, “Perilous News,” argues that scenes involving the reporting of maritime news frequently involve the audience in the dangerous confusion and
misinformation that surrounded such reports and could lead to financial ruin. In Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice* and William Haughton’s *Englishmen for My Money*, audiences are reminded that the correspondence on which early modern merchants depended was always unreliable and very often wrong, implicating audiences in the financial uncertainty which merchants must really have felt. This uncertainty drove merchants, offstage, to take out expensive marine insurance policies that were, I demonstrate, themselves dependent on news and assessed by metrics of validity much as skepticism regarding Antonio’s wrecked ships is staged in *Merchant*. In the person of the Portuguese merchant Pisaro, Haughton’s *Englishmen* illustrates how routinely merchants on London’s Royal Exchange depended on news in order to make decisions, and how the unreliability of news could throw them into a state of financial precarity. A coda takes up Ben Jonson’s *The Staple of News*, in which the industrialization of “the news” makes of it, for Jonson, a contemptible vehicle of false certainty.

In the aftermath of the recent global financial crisis (2007–2008), amid a dire raft of new sociopolitical and ecological uncertainties, risk is re-emerging, taking unexpected forms. Though it may now be well accounted for in actuarial terms, its very quantification has consequences for what Ulrich Beck has famously termed our “risk society.” Risk remains indispensable for its very malleability: in terms of large-scale financial crises and small-scale socioeconomic precarity, climate change and political upheaval, risk has become an abstraction which governs modern cultural experience writ large. “Doubtful Gains: Economic Risk in Early Modern Maritime Drama, 1592–1625” traces the initial development of this crucial concept, showing how, at another moment of unprecedented economic and cultural change, maritime risk was conceived
on the early modern stage. It produces a necessary analysis of risk in performance, an important economic and cultural history for understanding the inchoate conditions of modern uncertainty.
VVorthy Syr Francis Drake, that hath so nobly aduentured in many calamities three whole yeeres, continuing at fortunes hazard, eftsoones likely to be drenched in the raging floudes, and then in daunger of the unknowen rockes….

Henry Robarts, *A friendly farewell to Syr Frauncis Drake* (1585)

1.1 Shipwreck: Risk in the Management of Theatrical Perspectives

Shipwrecks conveyed a sense of risk to early modern London audiences neither by removing them from spectacle, nor by bringing them closer, but by suspending them in between—by reminding them of the uncertainty of their perspective. The shipwreck scenes this chapter takes up depend on the complementary performances of the wet *and* the dry: those wrecked, and those who watch the wreck from the stage. I argue that the device of the stage-shipwreck always includes a spectator, and that this spectatorial position is how the theater produces the conditions under which risk obtains: inconsistent, suspended knowledge; relationships made unstable; and the pervading threat of maritime loss to a sea which amazes and consumes its spectators.

Reading shipwreck scenes in two plays by William Shakespeare, *The Comedy of Errors* (1594) and *The Tempest* (1611), as well as Chapman, Johnson and Marston’s *Eastward Ho* (1606), this chapter argues that the risk associated with shipwreck is realized through spectatorship and the potential shifts of spectatorship. It attempts to explain a form of risk which is literally un-thinkable for the sailor in present danger, beset by a storm, but which is unavoidable for the observer. The sailor in a tempest is directly subject to the hazard of the storm, without access to the suspended position from which uncertainty can be evaluated. In

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short, it would be impossible to think about the mere possibility of shipwreck when the disaster is already a certainty; such a sailor is already busy in what Lucretius describes as a “laboring anguish” in troubled waters in a formulation to which I will return shortly. This chapter lays out shipwreck devices that complicate the practices of observation. Maritime drama involving wrecks consistently produced a spectator on stage who was at once distant enough to be safe and close enough to recognize maritime hazard. These onstage spectators—Egeon in *The Comedy of Errors*, Slitgut in *Eastward Ho*, and Marina in *The Tempest*—reproduce the relationship by which the theater audience could participate in these forms of, and shifts in, perception.

The risks of venturing must have seemed intangible to early modern theatregoers, in part because many disasters took place in distant oceans, in the Indies, or the Moluccas. The shipwreck in the fourth act of *Eastward Ho* is so far out of reach that, in order to see it, Slitgut the butcher’s apprentice must perch on “the farthest-seeing sea-mark of the world” (4.1.317). What Slitgut watches from that perch—what he sees from nearly two miles off—is a capsized boat and the struggles of Londoners in the tumultuous Thames. Slitgut is as emotionally removed from these struggles as he is physically distant; he witnesses the disaster, but he does not share in the suffering of its participants. There is something comic about this disconnection, and also something disturbing. When a waterlogged usurer stumbles to shore, Slitgut laughingly urges him onward: “get up a’ thy legs, man; now ‘tis shallow enough. So, so, so! Alas! He’s down again” (4.1.31–2). Between Slitgut’s perspective and our own it seems like he may be missing

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something: does he not realize lives are at risk? The perspective of the butcher’s apprentice on the events in the Thames seems blind to serious hazard, the possibility of loss and death; how?

The proem to the second book of Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura* has typically supplied us with an answer:

Suave, mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis,
e terra magnum alterius spectare laborem;
non quia vexari quemquamst iucunda voluptas,
sed quibus ipse malis careas quia cernere suave est.\(^4\)

In Rouse’s translation, this is a matter of perspective: “Pleasant it is, when over a great sea the winds trouble the waters, to gaze from shore upon another’s tribulation: not because any man’s troubles are a delectable joy, but because to perceive what ills you are free from yourself is pleasant.”\(^5\) For the poet Lucretius, the experience of watching is pleasurable and even comedic, not out of what we might call schadenfreude, but in the inevitability of distance. Indeed, the act of perceiving is at the heart of this pleasure because of its distinction from any kind of intervening agency. Lucretius’ pleasure is precisely in being able *only* to perceive without an opportunity to become involved. Because the spectator is capable *only* of watching, her or she is pleased. Hans Blumenberg thinks of this “ability to be a spectator” as a “useless qualit[y],” and many critics have agreed with him that it is this distance which organizes the performance and observation of maritime loss.\(^6\) It does not hurt that one of Blumenberg’s primary examples of this dynamic is (of course) the theatre, where the distance between audience and shipwreck “can never be great enough.” Accordingly, the French economist Abbé Galiani has argued for the

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\(^4\) Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 84.
\(^5\) Ibid., 85.
productivity of dangerous spectacle-at-distance: “The more safely the spectator sits there and the
greater the danger he witnesses, the more intense his interest in the drama.” Other oceanically-
interested critics tend to argue along similar lines—that in early modern drama as in the
Lucretian paradigm, distance allows various sorts of ruptures between participant and observer,
and it is these ruptures that bear exploration. But rupture is not all that happens in the theater;
there is also involvement or even interpellation. Through the mediation of the onstage spectator,
theatrical shipwrecks can complicate the Lucretian rupture, manifesting for audiences at once a
closeness and a separation and involving them in the necessary evaluation of their own
perspective on the risk of shipwreck.

The shipwreck scenes in these three plays, although they may initially be distant, do not always disassociate the observer from the event—they also associate, building new relationships among the shipwrecked, onstage spectators, and audiences. The relationships produced in staged wrecks are in one important way quite different from the relationship between Slitgut and the capsized boat, or that which Lucretius’ spectator bears to “another’s tribulation”: their perspectives are not fixed, nor are they singular. These relationships, which always involve at least three parties—participants, on-stage spectator, and audience—are distinguished by the uncertainty and the instability of the observation by which they are constituted. Their perspectives are always at risk of shifting: moving from far away to very close, troubling linear

7 Abbé Galiani, Voltaire’s Correspondence, ed. Theodor Bestermann, (Geneva: Institut et Musee Voltaire, 1957–8), 16303d.
narratives, going from isolating to threateningly inclusive. Shipwrecks blur once-stable boundaries between land and sea or near and far, and from these new perspectives through which wrecks are represented, the distinction between safety and danger seems far less sure. If a stable perspective on shipwreck gives pleasure, unstable perspectives like these develop a sense of uncertainty.

The risk of shipwreck organizes early modern drama’s engagement with the sea as a natural space. Plays which feature shipwreck build themselves around it, and those plays which narrowly avert disaster turn on the means by which they do so, that maritime risk emerges in the execution of the wreck even as a thing avoided. Early modern maritime drama makes both possible at once, as I will show in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, when Marina asks after the ship fleet of ships:

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O, I have suffered
With those that I saw suffer! A brave vessel,
Who had, no doubt, some noble creature in her,
Dashed all to pieces. O, the cry did knock
Against my very heart. Poor souls, they perished. (1.2.5–9)
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The special province of the stage is to render plausible not only Marina’s shock, to project her sympathy for the shipwreck’s “poor souls” also into the affective perspectives of the audience, but also to contradict that sympathy—to recognize and bewray its artifice, as Prospero does: “Be collected. / No more amazement. Tell your piteous heart / There’s no harm done” (1.2.14–6). Between these two emerging possibilities—sympathy and distance, amazement and none—and in the messy business of staging the shipwreck itself, early modern maritime drama situates the

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inchoate risk of shipwreck in the position of the spectator. This chapter has two primary goals, the first regarding maritime drama and the second a matter of risk, phenomenologically. By looking closely at the shipwreck device in three quite different plays (The Comedy of Errors, Eastward Ho, and The Tempest) spread out over twenty years and three distinct genres (farce, London city comedy, and romance), this chapter provides a broad account of the most spectacular device in maritime drama just as that form emerges. I subsequently seek to assemble the means by which this stage device uses perspective differently in each case to nevertheless produce a coherent sense of uncertainty peculiar to the maritime risk of shipwreck.

Shipwreck was difficult to stage; in fact, playwrights and companies seem to have taken some pains to avoid it. Companies staged many other kinds of elaborate spectacle throughout the 1590s—battles, processions, masques with dancing and music—so the prospect of staging shipwreck would seem at least approachable. But they didn’t approach it: there is no play which seems to call for any kind of material representation until Eastward Ho in 1605, a decade after the first performances of The Comedy of Errors (1594), and there is no record of a fully-rendered shipwreck until The Tempest (1611). All plays featuring shipwreck before 1605—and some after, like Shakespeare’s Pericles (1608)—use monologic accounts, usually delivered by a choric figure or another sort of Presenter-figure. The prolific playwright Thomas Heywood seems to have been especially anxious about this. In the first part of Heywood’s The Fair Maid of the West (c. 1597–1603) a Chorus explicitly bemoans the challenge of bringing the sea to the stage:

Our stage so lamely can express a sea
That we are forc’d by Chorus to discourse
What should have been in action. (4.5.1–3)

Heywood has enough experience with this problem, that this complaint ought to seem at least a bit performative. The London Chorus, by acknowledging the inability of the stage to materialize water, looks significantly at an audience that may well have crossed the Thames to attend the play. It may well be that Heywood feels “naïvely helpless,” or that “the sea seems to him inherently unstageable,” as one critic has argued, but I would also suggest that by communicating the difficulty of the sea, Heywood asks his audience to deliberately implicate themselves in the production, as he did several years earlier in *The Four Prentices of London* (1594):

Imagine now yee see the aire made thicke  
With stormy tempests, that disturbe the sea:  
And the foure windes at warre among themselves:  
And the weake barke wherein the brothers saile,  
Split on strange rockes, and they enforc’t to swim:  
To save their desperate lives. (1.1.265–70)

So, while companies’ repertories suggest that physical representations of shipwreck were not unimaginable, it also seems important to acknowledge that in 1595 such representations may not yet have seemed quite feasible—that they were too demanding to stage, in both financial and practical terms. Perhaps we ought to ask not “was it possible to stage physical shipwreck?” but “was it necessary?” I am suggesting that, in fact, physical shipwreck was not necessary, that the most important element of staging a wreck before 1605 was a non-physical element (risk), and that the non-physical device of monologic narrative employed by playwrights and companies

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merely substantiates this. The quirks of shipwreck-by-account tell us something about the position and function of this hazard in the minds of those who staged it.

Physical representation of shipwreck can accomplish many things, but it (more or less) insists on the immediacy of the event. That is, physical shipwreck onstage is undeniably present: it happens right there and right now in a way that is both spectacular and forceful. In Lucretian terms, this prevents effective contemplation or philosophy. Although my analyses of *Eastward Ho* and *The Tempest* will suggest there is a way to manage this immediacy, the theatrical technology employed in Shakespeare’s earlier play, *The Comedy of Errors*, is not capable of rendering its shipwreck more present, nor, as I will show, does it need to. Although *Errors* is unmistakably interested in the quality of immediacy, the context of the Syracusan merchant’s narrative questions rather than reaffirms that quality.

*Antipholus*

I to the world am like a drop of water  
That in the ocean seeks another drop,  
Who, falling there to find his fellow forth,  
Unseen, inquisitive, confounds himself.

*The Comedy of Errors* (1.2.35–38)

1.2  *Comedy of Errors*’ Indeterminate Sea

It may seem odd to suggest that the long narrative account of shipwreck in Shakespeare’s *The Comedy of Errors* conveys anything about risk. The account itself is imbued with familial trauma and framed by its narrator’s ill-fated willingness to “hazar[d] the loss of whom I loved,” but the shipwreck is, in theatrical terms, rather staid (1.1.131). From a Lucretian standpoint, it is exceptionally distant: so distant in both time and space, in fact, that the audience neither sees nor
even hears a character describe seeing the wreck itself. The play’s only representation of the
disaster is as a recollection in the long opening speech of the Syracusan merchant Egeon, a
diegetic device which enables him to function as a memorial observer of his own shipwreck.

_The Comedy of Errors_ opens with Egeon captive, bound in a marketplace and under
interrogation by the Duke of Ephesus, who struggles to understand what madness could have
possessed a Syracusan merchant to come to his city, where it is well known that “if any
Syracusian born / Come to the bay of Ephesus, he dies” (1.1.18–9). The Duke requests a simple
answer, a short resolution to a troubling situation:

_Duke_    Well, Syracusian, say in brief the cause
           Why thou departed’st from thy native home,
           And for what cause thou cam’st to Ephesus. (1.1.28–30)

The shipwreck narrative into which subsequently Egeon launches is anything but “brief,” and
anything but simple. Egeon treats the construction of the narrative as though he has no choice but
to manage it in a particular way, which he reluctantly does, lamentingly: “a heavier task could
not have been imposed, / Than I to speak my griefs unspeakable (1.1.31–2). In short, as the
merchant Egeon and his family—two twin boys, their mother, and twin servants—sailed out of
their home city of Epidamnum, they suffered a wreck which split their ship in two and threw the
family into different seas—a separation without hope of reunion. In Egeon’s telling, this
narrative takes more than one hundred lines, confusingly mixing up details and seeming to
reverse particulars over the course of the diegesis. The shipwreck is both a familial and economic
loss, as Curtis Perry has noted: “[h]aving children… accompanies and is symbolically related to
the risky investment of capital in mercantile ventures.”13 And not just symbolically, but formally:

13 Curtis Perry, “Commerce, Community, and Nostalgia in _The Comedy of Errors,” Money and the Age of
Egeon’s account, spooled out as a monologue to recover the moment of disaster for the stage, conveys the intrinsic immateriality of risk even in the face of his relentlessly physical shipwreck.

By establishing a mediator between the shipwreck and the audience (both Solinus and Londoners) *The Comedy of Errors* makes it possible for that mediator, Egeon, to upset the presumed linearity and orderliness of the form. When Duke Solinus demands to hear an explanation for the merchant’s presence in Ephesus—“say in brief the cause”—linearity is implicit. The Duke frames this demand as an inquiry into a pre-existing series of causes and effects, ordered events which have precipitated succeeding events. It suggests there is a concrete “cause” that drove Egeon to leave Syracuse, and a subsequent (different) “cause” that drove him into Ephesus. Solinus is asking, more than anything, for a description of the event in the middle that would explain, sequentially, the presently nonsensical elements of the situation, those facts inconsistent with the “solemn synods…decreed / Both by the Syracusans and ourselves, / To admit no traffic to our adverse towns” (1.1.13–15). More than simply asking “Why?” the Duke is setting up an opportunity for Egeon to describe a clear, linear series of events. In formal terms, the action of the frame narrative itself sequential, and Egeon’s explanation of shipwreck at least begins this way. In fact, Egeon explains the genesis of his family’s shipwreck—and indeed, a story of his whole life—in detail so exhausting it would be comical were it not so soon established as a narrative of economic and familial loss:

In Syracusa was I born, and wed
Unto a woman happy but for me,
And by me, had not our hap been bad.
With her I lived in joy; our wealth increased
By prosperous voyages I often made
To Epidamnum, till my factor’s death,
And the great care of goods at random left (1.1.36–42)
Here are order and the unexpected bound together: prosperous voyages until the unfortunate death of a factor turns the trade to “random”-ness. Egeon’s family, he claims, would have been happy but for bad “hap,” bad fortune. The tensions between expectation and uncertainty which fit here between the familial and economic structure the remainder of Egeon’s long account. The shipwreck narrative, with its linear form and apparent sequentiality, in fact serves to highlight the disorder of maritime knowledge, framing as inevitable a disaster which its verse disorders and its performance suspends.

Egeon’s memorial reconstruction of losing his children at sea attempts to articulate a relationship to that event capable of dredging up his experience of risk, even twenty years later. When Egeon explains to Duke Solinus the pressure under which his family set sail from Epidamnum, he tries to articulate this relationship in the sense of foreboding he felt at the beginning of the voyage:

\[
\begin{align*}
Egeon & \quad A \text{ league from Epidamnum had we sailed} \\
& \quad \text{Before the always wind-obeying deep} \\
& \quad \text{Gave any tragic instance of our harm.} \\
& \quad \text{But longer did we not retain much hope,} \\
& \quad \text{For what obscured light the heavens did grant} \\
& \quad \text{Did but convey unto our fearful minds} \\
& \quad \text{A doubtful warrant of immediate death (1.1.62–7)}
\end{align*}
\]

Egeon expresses a mess of contradictory perceptions here, a marriage of the certain to the unknown. The last two constructions—“doubtful warrant” and “immediate death”—can each read, even independent of each other, as expressing either order or confusion. A “doubtful warrant,” suggests something at once foreboding and questionable; “immediate death” a matter without cause and yet strangely unavoidable. The parallel construction of this line suggests the
suspension of knowledge at sea, conveying a deadly play between certainty and doubt. Beyond the line’s paradox is the fact that death was apparently neither immediate nor warranted—Egeon has lived to tell the tale. As he explains, whatever “obscured light the heavens did grant” conveyed only contradictory perspectives on their shipwreck, both in the event and in its narration. This contradictory framing device establishes Egeon’s speech as a formally sequential and forward-looking diegesis paradoxically focused on complicating an auditor’s knowledge of the event: the shipwreck narrative that ought to make clarify the order of things in fact obfuscates everything still further. Shakespeare introduces tension between a linear narrative form and the inconsistent content of that narrative makes as a way to figure a problem with knowledge: the paradoxical inability to predict future events (or recall past ones) despite a range of well-founded expectations. While Egeon’s shipwreck narrative makes death appear inevitable, it is also marks death as impossible to precisely anticipate.

The event Egeon ultimately constructs for his auditors is confused and inconsistent, deliberately uncertain. The physical, mechanical details of the wreck never cohere into an orderly event. Sequence fails, and the mechanics of the event, at a moment in the narrative where mechanics are crucial, are oddly unclear: here is the indeterminacy of “immediate death” in form and narrative practice. Despite receiving considerable attention from Egeon, the sequence of technical actions (those by which and within which he and his wife and children attempt to survive the wreck) are disordered in the course of the telling. Egeon explicitly describes two different moments of disaster, almost as though relating a series of instructions, each one deferring to the next as though to write over the former:

The sailors sought for safety by our boat,
And left the ship, then sinking-ripe, to us.
My wife, more careful for the latter-born,
Had fastened him unto a small spare mast
Such as seafaring men provide for storms.
To him one of the other twins was bound,
Whilst I had been like heedful of the other.
The children thus disposed, my wife and I,
Fixing our eyes on whom our care was fixed,
Fastened ourselves at either end the mast,
And floating straight, obedient to the stream,
Was carried towards Corinth, as we thought. (1.1.76–87)

For, ere the ships could meet by twice five leagues,
We were encountered by a mighty rock,
Which being violently borne upon,
Our helpful ship was splitted in the midst;
So that in this unjust divorce of us,
Fortune had left to both of us alike
What to delight in, what to sorrow for. (1.1.99–105)

It is easy to be ferried along by this sort of technical progression: like the “always-wind-obeying
deep” and the current which carries Egeon’s family “towards Corinth,” the mechanics of lashing
each other to a mast and of an impact with a rock demand progression. And yet, any listener
seeking to actually understand these events and the means by which one leads to another must be
baffled. Despite the apparent thoroughness of Egeon’s explanation, the mechanics are unclear, as
they must be in a shipwreck. How exactly were the children and adults lashed to the mast? Were
they on the ship while tied to the mast, or had it already sunk? If it had sunk and they were
floating with the mast, how does the ship meet the rock? If they are on the original ship, how
does the rock split them—all tied to the same mast—apart? The narrative of shipwreck, although
presented as a careful technical description, is in fact a muddle of details and uncertain sequence,
incomplete cause. The final moment—the splitting of the ship—is so indeterminate that it is
doubled. There can be little doubt that a shipwreck has occurred, but precisely where it falls in Egeon’s narrative, or even what causes it, is as doubtful as the warrant that foreshadowed it.

The inconsistency of The Comedy of Errors’ shipwreck narrative is possible precisely because Egeon’s account is prolonged and retrospective: places, directions, and events themselves are easily muddled throughout the course of a tumultuous wreck. That there are errors in such an account is not remarkable, but representative: a description of a shipwreck would seem more accurate for being muddled. This kind of recognizable confusion is not a trivial thing to reproduce onstage, and Shakespeare takes some care with it. The audience is presented with a profoundly orderly medium, a narrative monologue, precisely so that disorderly knowledge can actually be enacted rather than simply offered as an object of observation. There is nothing to reconcile the conflict between a ship already “sinking ripe” at 1.1.76, and one splitting—again?—at 1.1.102. The monologue’s apparent sequentiality serves only to further confound an attentive listener. In Egeon’s narrative, then, disorder and paradox reflect something more than comedy. These inconsistencies themselves reproduce the risk of shipwreck.

The force of Egeon’s narrative ultimately rests in the wreck’s procedural ambiguity. It has no discernible cause and thus offers no reproducible means by which to expect, guard against, or even come to terms with maritime loss. This should strike us as somewhat surprising: the speaker in Errors is not an impersonal conveyor of events, a Presenter or Prologue figure, but was himself a participant in the shipwreck he describes. Egeon’s involvement ought to justify on his part some assignment of responsibility, or at least cause, to the events of his maritime loss. He is perfectly capable of crafting a narrative in which the fault for the shipwreck is his, or the mariners or God’s, or the seas or Nature’s or the rocks, on and on ad infinitum. Instead, Egeon’s
narrative appears dedicated to eliding all reason or cause for the wreck. Consider the moments in which Egeon’s explanation approaches particularity, as when he describes that “[his] end / Was wrought by nature, not by vile offence,” (1.1.33–4) or when he points at “the always-wind-obeying deep” and “the heavens” which convey the “doubtful warrant” with which I began.

Each of these foreboding signs is studiously de-particularized. In the first instance, for example, it is Egeon who refers ambiguously to an “end,” which figures both his execution and his shipwreck. In both cases, causality is obscured by an imprecise referent. Later, technical details also swerve from ascribing causality, particularly at the moment of contact itself, which is made to sound almost incidental:

We were encountered by a mighty rock,
Which being violently borne upon,
Our helpful ship was splitted in the midst. (1.1.101–3)

It is difficult to tell whether the ship, the rock, or something else unnamed is responsible for splitting. As with so much of Egeon’s diegesis, the end is never in question—the ship “was splitted”—but the course by which that end has been reached is effortfully indeterminate. Michael Witmore calls this a “narrative explanation of an accident,” and argues that the switching perspectives and agencies here, between rock, ship, and passengers, “leaves this crucial, enabling moment of the play in a causal and rhetorical void.” Egeon fails to convey an agent, defaulting instead—by signifying absolutely no cause—to “‘Fortune,’ which is all the more effective because its place in guiding events is left unsupplied.”

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15 Ibid., 68.
The absence of Fortune or other “guiding events” is more remarkable than might be immediately apparent. Contemporary shipwreck narratives are full of causes; those causes are often unapologetically vague, religious, or downright bizarre, but they are almost never lacking: such narratives are committed to ascribing the agency for wrecks to some force, although that force is usually God. Egeon’s failure to distinguish any agent for The Comedy of Errors’ shipwreck suggests not just that it is “accidental,” but also that it must be known, responded to, and—most importantly—anticipated. The ambiguity surrounding the cause of the wreck creates a particularized uncertainty in the face of certain ends—in short, it manifests as a nascent sense of risk.

Egeon’s shipwreck narrative thus manages to convey, precisely through a limitation of perspective, the crucial uncertainty which characterizes the risk of shipwreck. By perspective here, I mean a privileged point of observation: some means, visual or auditory, by which one might gather unique information about shipwreck. More than Eastward Ho or The Tempest, The Comedy of Errors restricts perspectives, staging shipwreck through the simple device of a narrative monologue which is nevertheless the only means of accessing a complicated moment of maritime loss. Since the audience has no knowledge of the event independent from the narrative delivered by Egeon, the tragedy has both always-already happened and is utterly unparsable, incomprehensible. In each of these three plays, risk obtains in the theater’s perspectival mediation of the event of shipwreck. Egeon’s narrative produces the conceptual

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16 For example, Edmond Pet’s account of his 1615 wreck ascribes so much agency over the shipwreck to God that nearly half of it is prayer. Edmond Pet, Lamentable Newes, Shewing the wonderfull deliuerance of Maister Edmond Pet Sayler, and Maister of a ship, dwelling in Seething Lane in London, neere Barking Church. With other strange things lately hapned concerning these great windes and tempestuous weather, both at Sea and Lande (London: T.C., 1616).
instability that characterizes risk precisely because it lacks the physical theatrical perspective which *Eastward Ho* will determinedly provide a decade later.

The first and chiefest way to attayne to the perfect skill and science of Navigation is, whensoever any Shipmaker or Mariner shall set forth from land out of any River or Haven, diligently to marke, what buildings, Castles, Towers, Churches, Hills, [Bals?], Downes, Windmils, or other marks are standing on the land. All which, or many of them, let him portray with his penne, how they beare, and how farre distant: but uppon the true and certeine points of the Compasse, uppon which he first set sayle, and shaped his course, whilst yet every marke on the land may bee clearely and evidently perceaved, to the end the true arising thereof may be better had.


1.3 Watching the Thames in *Eastward Ho*

In 1605, performances of *Eastward Ho* at Blackfriars brought a physical, synchronic shipwreck to the early modern London stage for the first time. In the same year, Francis Bacon published his *Advancement of Learning*, in which he names the poet Lucretius exactly once—to introduce his view of shipwreck, which Bacon treats as a figure for philosophy:

> It is a view of delight (sayth he) to stand or walke vpon the shoare side, and to see a Shippe tossed with tempest vpon the sea; or to bee in a fortified Tower, and to see two Battailleis ioyne vppon a plaine. But it is a pleasure incomparable for the minde of man to bee setled, landed, and fortified in the certaintie of truth; and from thence to descrie and behould the errours, perturbations, labours, and wanderings up and downe ofother men.

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Bacon’s translation calls attention to the unique pleasure of stability and certainty for the inquisitive mind. The pleasure of seeking knowledge is contrasted with the pleasure of watching a tempest-tossed ship, a delight which necessarily expires. For Bacon, in the pursuit of knowledge “satisfaction and appetite are perpetually interchangeable.” He does not seem as interested in the potential interdependence of these metaphorical positions—in the possibility that “certaintie of truth” might depend in some respect on one’s capacity to watch the “Shippe tossed.” Bacon sees these as separate and opposed conditions—one contemplative, the other spectacular.\(^{19}\) \textit{Eastward Ho} does not agree.

In Chapman, Johnson, and Marston’s 1605 play, an extended scene of shipwreck-viewing produces a kind of uncertain knowledge by shifting the privileged vantage of the spectator. For this play, watching shipwreck is not a matter of delight, but of the interdependence of fixity and knowledge, particularly in the event of maritime risk. \textit{Eastward Ho} establishes observational fixity onstage—the Lucretian solid ground, “setled, landed, and fortified”—while also establishing, offstage, perspectival instability for the audience. Like Lucretius’ wreck, the one staged in \textit{Eastward Ho} is organized and experienced through the observation of a mediator: Slitgut, a butcher’s apprentice. Slitgut has been tasked with affixing a pair of horns to the tall ritual pole at Cuckold’s Haven, which gives him an extraordinary prospect of the Thames. It is a stormy day; a “furious tempest” roars and roils the Thames, and the butcher’s apprentice offers a prayerful admonition to “honest passengers” unlucky enough to be “upon her back now.”

\(^{19}\) Bacon’s interpretation of these verses seems driven by the project of his work more than an effort to make an accurate translation; in short, his reading here seems flawed. As Gerard Passannante has diplomatically put it, “Bacon himself struggled with the meaning of the verses, either quoting or paraphrasing them at least three times over the course of his career.” Gerard Passannante, \textit{The Lucretian Renaissance: Philology and the Afterlife of Tradition} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 130.
Looking down, he is at once horrified and delighted to watch the aftermath of a “boat cast away,” in which several Londoners are “labouring for [their] life” in the water (4.1.10–25).20

*Eastward Ho* is more explicitly concerned with venturing, and particularly with venturing’s socioeconomic ramifications, than most plays and even most city comedies. The castaways are venturers, would-be Virginia colonists from *Eastward Ho*’s main plot: Quicksilver, an irresponsible apprentice; Sir Petronel Flash, a “new-made” knight; Winifred, his mistress; Security, Winifred’s husband and a usurer; and Seagull, the captain of their ship. Recent work on Chapman, Johnson, and Marston’s collaboration takes up its representations of the market, credit, and economic history primarily as a means of reading class relations, such as that between the hardworking merchant Golding and his lazy apprentice Quicksilver.21 In these readings, *Eastward Ho*’s wreck in the Thames figures primarily as a moral market crash; a highly speculative venture by which the twenty-pound knight, wayward apprentice, and similar so-and-so’s have attempted to advance their social class only to fail spectacularly. The shipwreck is, in this critical context, both a warning against reaching too high in London’s volatile social ladder, and a comic failure, an object of derision. As Anne-Julia Zweirlein has pointed out, “the comic shipwreck of *Eastward Ho*’s would-be adventurers spells out, and thus in a sense wards off” the

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20 R.W. Van Fossen, ed., *Eastward Ho* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1979). This and all following quotations from the play are cited parenthetically with act, scene, and line numbers from this edition.

social angst which characterized over-exercised London gallants and merchants. But the play also has much to say about the hopes and anxieties which inform these financial behaviors, about the choice to invite this kind of socially disastrous maritime risk.

Slitgut narrates the shipwreck from his perch at the top of the pole for nearly 300 lines as the wrecked characters stagger on to and off the stage, “bareheaded” and soaking wet, in a “wet band” (4.1.38sd). The analysis which follows focuses on this scene and its ingenious approach to staging maritime loss as a spectatorial event. I argue that by staging what comes after a wreck rather than the event itself, Eastward Ho reproduces the observatory associations of the Lucretian shipwreck paradigm, in which the moment of disaster is elided in favor of representing a tossing tempest and struggling mariner. Rather than focusing on spectacle, this play uses multiple perspectives on a shipwreck’s aftermath to produce spatial confusion, shifts in perception that produce uncertainty. The play develops anxieties about the hazard of sea-venturing not just in order to poke fun at over-reachers, but also to work through new ideas about economic activity, about the financial and moral function of risk.

The risk of mercantile venture pervades Eastward Ho’s financial discussions long before boats capsize in the Thames. Early in the play, a debate between Londoners regarding the profitability of a voyage to Virginia turns almost immediately to the problem of ships at hazard. Even for Quicksilver, the London-based apprentice of a goldsmith, sea ventures are the obvious figure for mercantile risk, and he is full of anxiety, torn between his socioeconomic ambitions and the risk of pursuing them venturesomely:

22 Zweirlein, “Shipwrecks in the City,” 84.
23 On the moral and ethical valences of the word “hazard” in the context of Eastward Ho, see Jill Phillips Ingram, Idioms of Self-Interest: Credit, Identity and Property in English Renaissance Literature (New York: Routledge, 2006), 17–41.
Quicksilver I shall be a merchant forsooth! trust my estate in a wooden trough as he does? What are these ships but tennis balls for the winds to play withal? Tossed from one wave to another; now under-line; now over the house; sometimes brick-walled against a rock, so that the guts fly out again; sometimes struck under the wide hazard, and farewell Master Merchant.

Sindefy Well, Frank, well: the seas you say are uncertain; but he that sails in your court seas shall find’em ten times fuller of hazard, wherein to see what is to be seen is torment more than a free spirit can endure. (2.2.67–80)

His mistress Sindefy’s reply continues to make use of nautical language and reference even as the metaphor shifts toward the potential dangers of court; the two spaces overlap in the uncertain play between loss or gain. This discussion prefigures the shipwreck later in the play, not just by enacting a basic financial analysis of venturing, but by making clear the ways in which such ventures are thought of as subject to constant evaluations of likelihood and hazard. Although Quicksilver and Sindefy’s lines play on puns from court tennis, they function because the uncertainty of sea ventures is recognizable enough to fuel another metaphor. Ultimately, it is Security the usurer who lays out the danger of shipwreck most clearly, precisely by distinguishing between a mode of accumulation (purportedly) without risk—usury—and the “peril of wind and weather” faced by mariners: “The merchant, he complains, and says, ‘Traffic is subject to much uncertainty and loss’” (2.2.103–4, 114). In the matter-of-fact denunciation of sea-venturing precisely by the terms of its hazard, Eastward Ho not only foreshadows the wreck-to-be, but provides terms through which to make sense of it. Those terms are economic more than social, disoriented more than hierarchical: loss, uncertainty, and hazard.24

The theatrical devices of perception used for staging shipwreck here are quite different from the mono-perspective of Shakespeare’s Comedy of Errors. Although I have pointed out

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24 On Eastward Ho’s escalation of spectacle in the competitive market of the public theater, especially its position on the sequence of Ho plays see Jean E. Howard, Theater of the City, 99–105.
above that discussion of uncertainty and loss pervade *Eastward Ho*, this play attempts to mediate shipwreck and its risks in new ways, by taking advantage of physical spectacle, space, and the orientation achieved in watching. If *The Comedy of Errors* conveyed disorientation through a linear narrative, *Eastward Ho* uses observatory technology to achieve something like an overabundance of orientation, a multiplicity of perspectives on disaster. I have argued that Shakespeare’s earlier shipwreck depended on narrative restriction and limitation, on the ways in which it could mark disorder, confusion, and uncertainty as conceptual accompaniments to shipwreck. *Eastward Ho* also employs a narrated account of shipwreck, but unlike its predecessor, the account is delivered in the wreck’s immediate aftermath, as the struggling passengers are still laboring for their lives in the rude Thames.

As in Bacon’s contemporaneous translation of Lucretius, the focus in *Eastward Ho* is conveying the nature of maritime disaster as it occurs through the management of perspective. The stage device itself is simple: an uninvolved observer, Slitgut, perches on a pole at Cuckold’s Haven, on the north side of the Thames, and narrates what he sees of the struggling, doused Londoners (4.1.8). Through­out the scene, the boy actor playing Slitgut would probably have been perched on the balcony, or even on a pole erected for the purpose well above the main

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25 This point especially was connected to Fortune, as well as being symbolic for butchers and cuckold’s, as in William Fennor’s *Cornucopie*: “Jnst in the place where Fortune’s Temple stood, / There stands the forked Piller, stout and tall, / VVhose leauelesse boughes are neuer seen to bud, / Though much stone-fruit do from the branches fall.” While the spectator of this shipwreck is indeed a butcher’s apprentice placing a pair of horns on the pole, the choice to place him at Cuckold’s Haven also calls attention to the elements of chance, Fortune, and (of course) nascent risk associated with the spot. William Fennor, *Cornu-copie, Pasquils night-cap: or, Antidot for the head-ache* (Printed for Thomas Thorpe, 1612), 51.
stage, as the other actors entered below him. As Slitgut later acknowledges, his position atop “the farthest-seeing sea-mark of the world” is one, like that of the Blackfriars audience, of great convenience: it allows him to “see two miles about” (4.1.317). Slitgut’s observatory position mirrors that of the audience in both physical separation and dramatic isolation. Like the audience, he occupies a space distinct from the main stage and is capable of describing or narrating the events he witnesses but is essentially incapable of interacting with them.

Throughout the narration delivered from the boy actor’s balcony perch we are reminded of the closeness of the action in a way quite different from The Comedy of Errors’ tragic rehearsal of Egeon’s shipwreck. Although Egeon’s narrative effectively establishes the conceptual preconditions for risk—the co-existence of indeterminacy and inevitability—his monologue, as I have argued, also disavows immediacy. Eastward Ho’s pole-perched, moment-by-moment narration achieves precisely the sort of immediacy Errors sacrificed, and in doing so this play achieves a more active relationship between the wreck, its onstage observer, and the theater audience. Eastward Ho stages a shipwreck event in fragments, first narrated and then manifested onstage through the entrances of waterlogged survivors. Through this doubled perspective, Eastward Ho makes every participant a “knight venturer,” and every observer an intimate spectator to shipwreck. These relationships are more immediate, less stable: they begin to produce the perceptual indeterminacy by which early modern maritime drama evokes risk.

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There are two perspectives maintained throughout the shipwreck in *Eastward Ho*: the first, intra-dramatic, as Slitgut watches the struggle of the capsized venturers move from offstage to onstage; the second, extra-dramatic, in which the audience watches Slitgut watching the venturers and sees as well the rest of the onstage action. Some of the elements of these relationships overlap. For example, Slitgut and the audience both watch Security the usurer enter “*without his hat, in a nightcap, wet band, &c,*” and see him creep along the stage, doused and lamenting that “I will grovel here, and eat dirt till I be choked” (4.1.50–1). The audience and the butcher’s apprentice watch this simultaneously, with points of view that are equally informative or privileged; their forms of spectatorship match. This is most obvious when Slitgut describes what he is able to see offstage, in the Thames or along the shore:

> And now let me discover from this lofty prospect what pranks the rude Thames plays in her desperate lunacy. O me, here’s a boat has been cast away hard by. Alas, alas, see one of her passengers labouring for his life to land at this haven here; pray heaven he may recover it. His next land is even just under me. (4.1.22–28)

Slitgut observes the Thames and the capsized boat, but the audience does not. The apprentice’s narration, like Egeon’s diegesis, provides the only window onto these events, which take place on the Thames and thus offstage. Yet in *Eastward Ho*, the action of the shipwreck is delivered as it happens. Slitgut’s narration is less a retelling than a commentary, complete with the internal uncertainties and tensions particular to incomplete events. Rather than the conceptual disorientation achieved by the inconsistencies in Egeon’s account so long after the event, Slitgut’s narration here calls attention to the uncertain outcome of the shipwreck precisely because of its immediacy and accuracy. As each laboring passenger recovers the shore, Slitgut looks around for more objects of maritime suspense:
Ay me, see another remnant of this unfortunate shipwreck—or some other.
A woman! i’faith, a woman. Though it be almost at St. Katharine’s, I
discern it to be a woman, for all her body is above the water, and her
clothes swim about her most handsomely. (4.1.63–68)

St. Katharine’s is about two miles from Cuckold’s Haven, so to see the splay of clothes about
Winifred at such a distance would be remarkable, but detail here is marshaled in the service of
suspense. The account attends to smaller tribulations and lends gravity to moments of potential
disaster: “A pox o’ that wave! It will drown her, i’ faith, ’t will drown her”—followed by survival
and relief, “Cry God mercy...She’s up, she’s up!” (4.1.72–3, 80). Throughout this narration, the
relationship between Slitgut and the off-stage bobbing of Winifred is, limited, fixed: the audience
perceives the shipwreck only as it is described to them from the spectator on the pole.

Not so a moment later, when “the Drawer in the tavern before” enters “with Winifred,”
establishing a new and unmediated relationship between the audience and the action (4.1.83sd).
For such elements of the shipwreck’s aftermath, intra-dramatic and extra-dramatic observation
go undistinguished: the audience and the man on the pole see the same thing at the same time
and implicitly in the same way. This means there is no opportunity for perceptive uncertainty.
Neither Egeon’s disordered sequence nor the suspense of Slitgut’s immediacy can obtain here.
Yet Eastward Ho’s extended shipwreck scene is so remarkable because it repeatedly, with an
almost practical insistence, shifts back and forth between these two modes. After Winifred and
the Drawer exit, seen simultaneously and without mediation by the audience, there is another
moment that privileges Slitgut's fixed-but-unlimited view: “See, see, see! I hold my life, there’s
some other taken up at Wapping now! Look, what a sort of people cluster about the gallows
there!” (4.1.125–6). When Quicksilver enters, “bareheaded,” the audience and Slitgut witness it together: spectatorship is again egalitarian, limited, and—for the audience—profoundly unfixed.

And so on throughout the scene: Slitgut’s limited perception and fixity is followed by egalitarian viewership (audience and Slitgut) characterized by a spatial shift; from the Thames to the variously-placed stage and back again, repeatedly. Security, Winifred, Quicksilver, and Sir Petronel/Captain Seagull each drag themselves out of the water, each in different faraway locations—Cuckold’s Haven, St. Katharine’s, Wapping, and the Isle of Dogs—and each subsequently appearing onstage until the reunion of Security and Winifred at the close of the scene. At that point, finally, Slitgut summarily emphasizes the spectatorial incongruence of the shipwreck and departs:

Now will I descend my honourable prospect, the farthest-seeing sea-mark of the world; no marvel, then, if I could see two miles about me. I hope the red tempest’s anger be now overblown, which sure I think heaven sent as a punishment, for profaning holy Saint Luke’s memory with so ridiculous a custom. (4.1.315–321)

As the butcher’s apprentice leaves, he takes care to call attention to the device of the shipwreck, its multiple (implausible) perspectives, and his synchronic relation of the event. This long scene has been affixed by the spectator on the pole in one frame and spatially inconstant, or unstable, in another, the frame of the audience. Staging the shipwreck this way enables a fresh sort of play between the types, the subjects, and the implications of these perspectives. While the shipwreck in The Comedy of Errors played on a linear narrative’s capacity for recognizable inconsistency, Eastward Ho’s modifies Lucretius’ spectator by staging observatory relationships as perspectives, building risk out of spatial instability and the indeterminacy of the ever-shifting privileged point of observation.
Francis Bacon also thinks about the efficacy of perspectives in *The Advancement of Learning* in order to describe a privileged epistemological approach in the sciences: “But for the placing of this Science, it is not much Materiall: onely we have endeavoured in these our Partitions to observe a kind of perspective, that one part may cast light upon another” (my emphasis).²⁷ Perspective, though imagined as optical, describes for Bacon an epistemological association: a way of expressing a category of specific information or distinct knowledge very close to what I’m describing as the perspective of Slitgut or the audience. In the context of this chapter, the word denotes not precisely what is seen or from what angle, but what can be gathered about the play and its events from a unique position. We might think of Slitgut’s or the audience’s perspective around *Eastward Ho*’s shipwreck, but we might also subdivide these into still more particular sets, as Bacon does, “so that one part may cast light upon another.” The view that gives us Security appropriately stumbling to shore at Cuckold’s Haven is different from the view of Winifred, taken up at St. Katharine’s; in practical terms, witnessing these events would require an observer to be in two different places. Each portion of the scene, in this sense, provides a different perspective, a distinct and limited set of perceptions associated with one mode of observation. Although the positions of both the audience and of Slitgut are fixed, their perspectives are constantly shifting, often in physically impossible ways.²⁸ Observatory limitation—like the sequential limitations of *Errors*—turns out to be a productive way of accessing risk. In fact, for the Dutch polymath Hugo Grotius, perspective seemed like a good way to explain the need for probability.

In the very same year that saw *Eastward Ho* go up at Blackfriars, and Bacon’s *Advancement* was published, Hugo Grotius had begun thinking about the nature of “*presumptiones*, which are not fixed and unchangeable like scientific rules.” He, too, frames limited perception as a problem for assessing likelihood:

Again, very few facts are discernible through the senses, since we cannot be in more than one place at one particular time, and since the senses perceive only those things which are very close at hand. Yet there is no other way of attaining to true knowledge. Impelled thus by necessity, human reason has fashioned for itself certain rules of probability, or *ton eikoton*, for passing judgement in regard to facts.

Grotius suggests that there is a relationship between fixity and certain knowledge. In fact, he goes so far as to propose that no *single* observer, one limited to “once place at one particular time,” can gather enough information to make certain judgment. We must rely to some extent on conjecture and on our sense of likelihood or probability. His reason is that we cannot see synchronously those events which influence one another, or, in brief, that we cannot see far enough. Yet Slitgut, through the authority of performance over such practical limitations, “could see two miles about,” and provides for the audience the same robustly flexible perspectives; what does this do for Grotius probability and Bacon’s Lucretian “certaintie of truth?”

The theatre is not constrained by distance, and the shipwreck scene is organized by over-reaching these perceptual limitations. On stage, the relationship Grotius sees between a limited perspective and access to certainty can be manipulated, even upended. In the theatre, we *can* be in more than one place at one particular time, and the senses can perceive that which is very far

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29 Hugo Grotius, *Commentary on the Laws of Prize and Booty*, trans. G.L. Williams et al. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1950), I:78. The manuscript Grotius wrote in 1605—titiled *De iure praedae commentarius*—was never published in full in his lifetime, although much of it can be found in his *Mare Liberum*, published a few years later (1609). Incidentally, Grotius himself survived a shipwreck in early 1645.

30 Grotius, *Commentary*, I:78–79.
indeed. So, when Slitgut openly marvels at what he has been able to see from Cuckold’s Haven, it serves to acknowledge how important—and how epistemologically generative—is the capacity to see beyond “those things which are very close at hand,” particularly when, as I have argued above, the audience is made so aware of the shifts between the very limited places and times bemoaned by Grotius. Since “we cannot be in more than one place at one particular time, and since the senses perceive only those things which are very close at hand,” the audience of *Eastward Ho* must embrace speculation and attend to the paradox of a fixed perspective with unlimited perception of a shipwreck in the Thames. Rather than providing Bacon’s “view of delight,” Chapman, Johnson, and Marston unmoor their spectators, producing a sense of risk. They do so, appropriately, by staging a self-consciously unstable perspective—at once fixed and shifting, privileged and egalitarian—that inverts Lucretius’ aloof spectator and makes the audience part of a tempestuous and uncertain maritime environment.

While the spectator to shipwreck in 1605 is compromised for Bacon and immobile for Grotius, *Eastward Ho* stages a shipwreck which is seen from multiple, paradoxical perspectives—one fixed, many shifting; rather than a spectatorial dead-end, the shipwreck in drama becomes with *Ho* an opportunity for realizing risk in the instability of perspective and the knowledge that depends on it. In *The Tempest*, I will argue, the risk of shipwreck is realized still more effectively through an elaborate shipwreck device that achieves a division within the perception of the audience. Shakespeare’s last shipwreck is simultaneously more tangible and less knowable, an event through which the storm can amaze and absorb the spectator, rendering the risk of maritime loss more recognizable than before.
Probability arises from an opposition of contrary chances or causes, by which the mind is not allow’d to fix on either side, but is incessantly tost from one to another, and at one moment is determin’d to consider an object as existent, and at another as the contrary.


1.4 “No more amazement”

The shipwreck in *The Tempest* establishes risk more spectacularly than either *The Comedy of Errors* or *Eastward Ho*. In Shakespeare’s later play, the audience is made to question their position with relation to the wreck, and thus their exposure to natural hazard. The technology of shipwreck in Shakespeare’s *Tempest* is paradoxically inclusive and dissociative; it divides the spectator between participating and merely observing, enacting risk in the uncertainty of their position. The question of whether the onlooker is included in the storm or apart from it—individuated self or self at risk—organizes the action of the play from its outset.32

As *The Tempest* opens, the stage of the Blackfriars playhouse is the deck of a ship beset by a furious storm, and mariners dash onto it to “take in the topsail,” and wrench their ship from the grip of howling winds. Shakespeare’s late play makes this rare perspective possible by dividing the spectator. In one scene, our perspective on the shipwreck is unique and privileged, while in *The Tempest*’s subsequent reiterations, spectatorial knowledge is rendered increasingly suspect. Knowledge of the wreck is uncertain, limited by the developing authority of a less-participatory self—an audience that stands aloof, on the shore, rather than on the deck with the mariners. Thus, the negotiation between the *Tempest*’s perspectives on shipwreck and the

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division of the spectator they enact begins in the tension between the Boatswain’s divisive tirade against the hazards of the storm. The Boatswain’s exhortations are crucially technical, if not obscure, peppered with strange-sounding adverbs like “yare,” and jargon-filled demands that the mariners “bring her to try wi’ th’ main course” (1.1. 35–6). The Tempest’s auditory approach to shipwreck begins with these orders and the clashing thunder sheets that accompanied them. The distinctly nautical commands lend credibility to the stage-as-deck, thickening Blackfriars’ salty air along with the “tempestuous noise of thunder,” and like the thunder sheets, they interpellate the audience in the risk posed by the storm even as they isolate the spectators from maritime loss.

Several forms of division take place during the tempest of the play’s first scene, beginning with the panicked attempt to dull the influence of the wind on the tossing ship, and thus divide vessel from medium. If the Boatswain’s lines sound convincingly technical or even alien, it is because their purpose is precisely to alienate: they are dedicated to decoupling the ship from the sea and untangling the nobles from the mariners. The Boatswain tries to dissociate one from the other, first by curbing the storm’s influence on the tossing ship—“Down with the topmast! Yare! Lower, lower! Bring her to try wi’ th’ main course”—and then removing the noise and interference of the Neapolitans: “A plague upon [their] howling! … What do you here? Shall we give o’er and drown?” (1.1.35–40). Maintained, both of these associations could prove

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physically dangerous: if the ship remains under the influence of the wind, it will sink; if the nobles remain topside with the mariners, they “mar [the mariners’] work,” further subjecting the ship to the original hazard of the storm.\textsuperscript{35} Thus, the Boatswain’s reaction to the storm does a great deal of dramatic work. Nautical jargon projects to the audience a technical unfamiliarity which is parallel to the practical purpose of the Boatswain’s commands: to render a larger, intra-dramatic unfamiliarity by breaking the ship and its seaworthy mariners free from the storm and those nobles who muddle about in the privileged space of the ship and “do assist the storm” (1.1.14). In each of these senses, the Boatswain works to dissociate that which is hazardous—sea swells and nobles—from that which promises safety, the ship and its skillful mariners.\textsuperscript{36}

The Boatswain’s rhetoric of dissociation runs counter to the intimate perspective this scene grants the audience. Despite the centrality of oceanic trade to the first decade of the seventeenth century and of naval warfare to the decade before, the stage very rarely placed action onboard ships until after \textit{The Tempest}’s example. Only Thomas Heywood’s \textit{Fair Maid of the West} and Shakespeare and Wilkins’ \textit{Pericles} seem to have preceded \textit{The Tempest} in figuring the stage as the deck of a ship. Neither of the scenes in question involves a shipwreck, although \textit{Pericles} elsewhere describes two. Even plays which figure ships and mariners prominently, such as Heywood and Rowley’s \textit{Fortune by Land and Sea} (c. 1607–9) hesitate to place action on deck. Shakespeare’s staging in \textit{The Tempest} proved so influential that writing about a play performed

just a decade later, Julie Sanders can claim that the “wooden stage becomes a ship deck in a striking theatrical trope, which chimes with the claims of many maritime historians that the ship community can be best comprehended in theatrical and performative terms.”\textsuperscript{37} Other specialized spaces are common onstage, such as the battlefield, court, or prison, but each of these is an incomplete space in a way the ship at sea is not, although accessing such specialized, disjunctive spaces seems to Foucault precisely the work of the stage: “the theater brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another.”\textsuperscript{38} The battlefield depends upon its topographical context, the court upon its principality, and despite the premise of confinement and isolation associated with them, representations of prisons often called up a particular London equivalent.\textsuperscript{39} In contrast, the early modern ship is quintessentially separate, isolated and inaccessible to such a degree that it must be self-sufficient. It is a “heterotopia,” a space removed and microcosmic body of which knowledge—or a Baconian perspective—can be granted only through a sort of membership and inclusion in that space.\textsuperscript{40} To see and hear the storm batter the mariners on the deck of their ship is to participate in the event.

That the ship’s deck is normally inaccessible in dramatic performance is important; it suggests that the perspective granted by the first scene of \textit{The Tempest} is precarious, and that the Boatswain’s attempts to dissociate so many elements of the scene must also apply to spectators. Spectatorial division begins here, where the perspective is most privileged—and, as I say above, 

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{37} \textit{Cultural Geography of Early Modern Drama, 1620–1650} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 54.
\item At any rate, it is a bit anachronistic to think of prisons—at least debtors prisons—as isolating, since many prisoners were forced to beg passers-by to pay for food and bedding. Howard, “Credit, Incarceration, and Performance: Staging London’s Debtor’s Prisons,” \textit{Theatre of a City}, 68–113.
\item Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 27.
\end{itemize}
most demands the membership and participation of the spectators. The dissociation effected by these lines is pegged to the evocation of risk, which I will argue takes place in *the Tempest* through a much-developed version of the perspectival division that organizes *Eastward Ho*’s shipwreck. In Shakespeare’s late play, we are asked not just to register a-sequential confusion, or spatial instability, but to question the proper association of the self: does it lie with the storm, in the midst of hazard, or safely on dry land? The secure, removed delight of Bacon’s viewer and the apprentice at the end of a pole is gone; those who watch *The Tempest* or its tempest are subject to an opposition of association by which they are made to feel divided, “incessantly tost,” and increasingly acquainted with risk.

The natural world encountered in *The Tempest* is stormy and hazardous, but it is also filled with wonders. Risk and prospect merge: when Ariel “flames amazement,” we may think not only as the mariners do, of conflagration and catastrophe, but also of beautiful spectral lights and the comforting midnight dew of the same speech (1.2.199). While the other plays in this chapter deal in strictly hazardous versions of shipwreck, *The Tempest* also stages integration into nature as a fortunate possibility: its storm may oppose man and nature, but it also tucks them together “safely in harbor…in the deep nook” (1.2.228–9). As we learn in this moment to question and double our perception of the storm’s providence—it may be “dreadful” and “bountiful”—we are also learning to question its provenance; what seemed like an especially

41 Justly so: in contemporary accounts, St. Elmo’s Fire is alternately feared and hoped for. Writing in 1605, an anonymous author onboard the *Tiger* describes *corpo sancto* as a spirit which seems to do them good: “In the extremitie of our storme appeared to vs in the night, vpon our maine Top-mast head, a flame about the bignesse of a great Candle; which the Portugals call Corpo Sancto, holding it a most diuine token, that when it appeareth the worst is past. As, thanked be God, we had better weather after it. Some thinke it to be a spirit: other write that it is an exhalation of moyst vapours, that are ingendred by foule and tempestuous weather. Some affirme that the Ship is fortunate where it lighteth, and that shee shall not perish.” From Samuel Purchas, “The second Voyage of John Davis,” *Purchas His Pilgrimes* (London: 1625), 134.
maritime phenomenon is being revealed as a magical one. And still the storm’s effect is unresolved: there are three shipwrecks in *The Tempest*, not one, and although the mariners, Miranda, and Ariel each experience the wreck just once, the audience gets all three. The shipwreck’s multiple perspectives (or iterations) contribute to a division of the spectator by which risk obtains: as quality of the phenomenon itself is in question, so too must our relationship remain uncertain—we must think, although we may not feel, at risk of shipwreck.

I have been arguing that in *Eastward Ho* and *Comedy of Errors*, fixed perspectives on maritime loss implicate audiences in various natural risks: in nautical chaos, disorientation, and the possible loss of life at sea. Although *The Tempest* too makes risk tangible, by offering multiple perspectives on shipwreck the play establishes a larger space of uncertainty for which it provides positive outcomes. In short, where *The Tempest* manages maritime risk, it also reveals oceanic prospects. This argument builds on an increasingly dominant ecocritical line for which Shakespeare—and *The Tempest* in particular—has become the central text, a line which proposes that “early modern literature presents narratives that emphasize proto-ecological values like interdependence, unanticipated consequences, and the limits of human ambition.” In addition to these dire prospects, I am proposing that *The Tempest* offers, in the division of the self, a positive prospect. That is, if all of these plays and narratives bring to bear the risk of death at sea, *The Tempest* also gives early modern Londoners and mariners the prospect of a very particular sort of afterlife. The “limits of human ambition” are conflated with limits to human exceptionalism: the

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play provides the possibility not just of surviving a shipwreck, but of reconsidering Londoners’
relationship to the hazards of the sea. Like Miranda by the shipwreck and like the mariners
subject to Ariel’s illusions, the play gives its audience an opportunity to be interpellated into the
experience of risk—“taken up with amazement,” as a contemporary shipwreck narrative puts it.44

When Miranda laments what she has seen, the breaking apart of a ship and its passengers,
Prospero responds, “Be collected. / No more amazement” (1.1.14). There is something
appropriate about the opposition he establishes between collection and amazement, but what?
The implication is that parts of Miranda are lost in the observation of this wreck, that amazement
in some way fractures the perceiving self. What happens in the course of watching a shipwreck
that could cause Miranda to lose herself in such a way that she might need to be collected, and
why does Shakespeare choose the word “amazement” to express this condition? I hope to show
that “amazement” changes the spectator’s relationship to maritime environment: it is a loss of
oneself to the storm amid the blurring of boundaries between participant, spectator, and
spectacle. So: these are relationships by which boundaries are made less clear, and by which our
relationship to the hazards of the sea is rendered unstable, even for those on dry land who might
prefer to take Bacon’s “view of delight.”

Prose shipwreck narratives tend to use the word amazement to describe the spectatorial
condition of the mariners involved in the wreck itself. Here is a passage from William Strachey’s
“True Reportory of the Wreck,” from which Shakespeare famously borrowed material for The
Tempest:

44 Amazement, as it is used here, is a mutual consumption brought on when the senses are overwhelmed
by that which they take in: an inundation. The OED cites Shakespeare’s Venus and Adonis as the earliest
A dreadful storm and hideous began to blow from out the northeast, which, swelling and roaring as it were by fits, some hours with more violence than others, at length did beat all light from Heaven: which, like an hell of darkness, turned black upon us, so much the more fuller of horror as in such cases horror and fear use to overrun the troubled and overmastered senses of all, which taken up with amazement, the ears lay so sensible to the terrible cries and murmurs of the winds...

Strachey’s account is of a ship overtaken by a tropical storm. He tries to convey the way it feels for those aboard the Sea Venture to be absorbed into the chaos of the storm, and to express this feeling of being absorbed, he uses the word “amazement.” Amazement is what happens when the senses are “overmastered,” when the perceiver is “taken up” and made subject to their environment in a way somehow more tangible than before. To be “taken up” might be to suffer abduction or to be integrated, to become a part of something else in the course of “amazement.” We might say that, at least for Strachey, amazement is a sort of perceptual inclusion in the spectacle.

The storm in Strachey’s narrative encroaches upon the position of its observers, and as it does so, their relationship to it changes. The storm does more than physically encompass Strachey and his ship. It also begins to dominate their senses. At this moment in the narrative, at least, the primary force of the storm is precisely to steal “all light from Heaven,” and replace it with darkness: this is to steal from the sailors the capacity to see anything but darkness. All sounds, too, are replaced by the “terrible cries and murmurs of the winds” to which the ears of

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46 A storm, for the purposes of my argument, exerts influence on all senses, although it particularly dominates sight. For a recent and detailed analysis of a particularly auditory “three-way relationship” mapped out between Strachey’s account and The Tempest’s version of the storm which beset the Sea Venture, see: Keir Elam, “A Tempestuous Noise: on the Acoustics and Vocalics of Storms,” in *Revisiting the Tempest: The Capacity to Signify*, eds. Silvia Bigliazzi and Lisanna Calvi (New York: Palgrave, 2014), 137–149.
the sailors now lie too sensible. As all their means of perception are “overmastered,” their other forms of agency are called into question. That is, Strachey and his fellows actually experience the “hell of darkness” as altering the way in which they are able to manifest themselves as independent from that darkness and the maritime more generally. Strachey uses versions of the word “amaze” several other times, and each of them seems also to do with a seeping of the natural into the human. At one point, when they have “received likewise a mighty leak, and the ship in every joint almost having spewed out her oakum,” the whole ship suffers “fright and amazement” at a quite literal inundation. Later, amazement is again that which describes the failure of human agency: “When she struck upon the rock...we were all amazed, and our hearts failed.” In the moment of contact between the natural hazard and the boat, amazement seems again to signal a kind of homology: “hearts failed,” as though the sailors turn to the very stone they’ve struck. They are “overmastered,” no longer masters of themselves. Although there are other ways to be immersed, as The Tempest will illustrate, Strachey’s narrative suggests that management of perception is one such way.

When Hans Blumenburg applies Epicurean atomism to the experience of men at sea he is right to insist that shipwreck itself “is a natural event, and it is accidental that it involves people along with the ship.” What Strachey’s narrative makes especially clear is that overwhelmed perception is part of the realization of that natural-ness of shipwreck. Consumed as they are by the storm, the sailors of the Sea Venture are no longer able to choose a perspective on, or a vantage point from which, to perceive their maritime experience. In this way, an event which was

48 Ibid., 61.
49 Blumenburg, Shipwreck, 51.
once at least partly under the influence of men and subject to their perception has become wholly subject to the conditions of the sea. When Blumenburg suggests that “it is accidental that [shipwreck] involves people along with the ship,” he skirts the nature of this subjection. Mariners like Strachey’s and Shakespeare’s are “accidental” in the sense that they are profoundly “along,” or “taken up” with an overwhelmingly natural event. There is something important here for the struggling figures in the first scene of The Tempest. Not only are they hapless, they are helpless —merely along for the ride. If agency is part of what defines the human, these mariners are undergoing a sea-change of their own. They have lost part of that agency, that humanity, and become natural along with the storm and the very shipwreck.

There are many ways to merge with the sea in The Tempest, other and more obvious means by which the human and the maritime converge. Critics tend to agree on this, and the play between natural and human has become a commonplace: as Gabriel Egan puts it, “The Tempest is clearly concerned with the possibilities of transmutation.” Egan and others that the Tempest’s transmutations often occur between the distinctly human and the distinctly natural. When Ariel sings, it is of this kind of transformation:

Full fathom five they father lies.
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are the pears that were his eyes;
Nothing of him that doth fade


52 For a sustained treatment of The Tempest as an adaptation of Ovid’s Metamorphoses along these lines, see Bate, Shakespeare and Ovid, 241–263.
But doth suffer a sea-change (1.2.395–400)

The song is quite explicit: “sea-change” here is the convergence of human tissue with maritime materials, and if it has not already occurred, it is inevitable. Ariel’s song explains a prospective—and a positive—transformation; despite the use of the word “suffer,” the immersion of the king into his environment offers a prospect of preservation, not destruction. Other transformations are more material, such as the costumed oscillation of Caliban between man and sea creature that causes Trinculo to ask, “What have we here, a man or a fish?” (2.2.24). Caliban’s transformation seems to have occurred, at least in part, due to the same storm that consumes the ship in the first scene. When Trinculo observes in conclusion that Caliban “is no fish, but an islander that hath lately suffered by a thunderbolt” (2.2.33–4), he still identifies the storm as the cause of Caliban’s liminal position between human and creature. It is only a little ironic that this “strange fish” has in fact mistaken Trinculo, very much a man, as Prospero’s attendant to the thunder Caliban has just heard, and which has indeed made him “fall flat.” This, like Ariel’s song, is a transformation which occurs “in the form of theatrical power”: Caliban is a fish in costume and a creeping creature of the earth directly in response to a thundersheet; his prostration itself is a performance, albeit one by which he hopes to go unnoticed. Gabriel Egan, reading for space between natural and supernatural, calls Caliban’s identification of Trinculo with the source of thunder a “misrecognition of the everyday.” If it is true, as Egan convincingly explains, that the actor playing Caliban wore a “sea-creature” costume which the King’s Men had acquired from a recent sea-pageant, there is a kind of appropriate disjunction in this moment: entered by his “fish-like costume” into the process of transformation, an already-liminal Caliban has a hard time
distinguishing the natural (thunder) from the human (Trinculo).\textsuperscript{53} These kinds of prospective transmutations into the maritime natural—poetic: eyes to pearls, and sartorial: man to fish—are more obvious than those which take place in the play’s first scene, although they are familiar to us from Strachey.

The prospects offered to the mariners in \textit{Tempest} are similar to that which the Strachey’s company experienced. Like the crew of the \textit{Sea Voyage}, Shakespeare’s ship and its passengers are less beset by the storm than part of it. Both sets of mariners are surrounded by “\textit{tempestuous noise[s] of thunder and lightning}” which threaten to overwhelm their senses and immerse them in an exclusively maritime awareness. Michael Witmore, in his case for the play’s “dramaturgical monism,” sees these effects elsewhere in the sounds of the island:

> What from one perspective, then, appears to be a ‘quality’ of the environment—a diffused power of affection as mobile and invisible as music—is from another understood to be a localized form of action…. Action and environment, that is, become convertible in this scene depending on where one stands and, crucially, \textit{what one hears}. For those who can hear everything—that is, the audience—there is a potentially vast array of subtle interconnections between different elements in the environment.\textsuperscript{54}

Witmore, too, thinks of perspective as an abstract way of organizing dramatic perception, another way of registering the intrusion of the environment onto the observer or the auditor. If the moment Witmore describes in 2.1 holds a “diffused power of affection,” \textit{The Tempest}’s first scene thrusts an encompassing power upon us; the deck of the ship is a chaotic sensorium, dominated with yelling that is hardly distinct from the howling of the storm. When the Boatswain insists that the mariners “Tend to th’ Master’s whistle,” he cries in the same breath to the storm to “Blow till thou burst they wind” (1.1.6–7). These exhortations are both cries to an

\textsuperscript{53} Egan, “Supernature,” 152–158.
\textsuperscript{54} Witmore, \textit{Shakespearean Metaphysics}, 97.
environment more than to separate entities; there is a muddling, at least in the consciousness of
the blustering Boatswain, among the storm and the men who weather it. A few lines later, he
remonstrates Gonzalo and company in a dialogue that marshals some of the same logic:

**Boatswain**  Do you not hear him? You mar our labour. Keep your cabins; you do
assist the storm.

**Gonzalo**  Nay, good, be patient.

**Boatswain**  When the sea is. Hence! What cares these roarers for the name of king? To
cabin! Silence; trouble us not. (1.1.12–15)

The Boatswain’s lines throughout 1.1 are often read as charged with class critique. They ignore
monarchical social standards; the hazards of the rough sea dismantle the comparatively fragile
sociopolitical hierarchies of these Italians, as is also the case in Strachey’s account. In Stephen
Greenblatt’s important reading, both tempests “provoked an immediate collapse of the distinction
between those who labor and those who rule.”

Yet, as I have argued above, the distinctions
between ruling and laboring classes are not the only ones elided. When Antonio boasts that the
disruptive Neapolitans, “are less afraid to be drowned than thou art,” he is remonstrated by
Gonzalo, who reminds the nobles that “our case is as theirs [the mariners]” (2.1.40, 49). Here,
again, is the question of association and division with which I began: Antonio seems to think he
can affect his relationship to the sea—hold himself aloof from it—while Gonzalo knows better,
that they are yoked, like the mariners, to the tossing sea. Like the mariners who have just exited
sopping wet, they are all becoming elements in the maritime environment, and aloofness—
insistent, individual personhood—is no longer an option.

“conjunction of Strachey’s unpublished letter and Shakespeare’s play…an institutional circulation of
culturally significant narratives” rather than a “direct transfer of properties” (149).
Conflict in *The Tempest’s* first scene is simultaneously natural and sociopolitical. Mariners and courtiers alike are encroached upon by the storm so that they begin to function together as elements of a larger, hazardous environment, rather than as distinct actors. Gonzalo and company, the Boatswain complains, “do assist the storm,” and while this accusation is figurative first, it is an exercise in assimilation. The mariners struggle to dissociate themselves from the Neapolitans and the sea, but in the chaos of *The Tempest’s* wreck, they are difficult to separate. There is no doubt that sounds and senses mingle: the cries of the storm are confused with the courtiers’ “cries within,” and it is the very disregard of “these roarers [waves] for the name of king” that reorganizes social relations in the way that Greenblatt has proposed. The Boatswain and the mariners become part of the storm in the sense that they participate in the chaos of its tempestuous noises; their disregard for social order is the storm’s disregard both for order and for human life as separate from nature. As in the “True Reportory,” the faculties of *The Tempest’s* mariners are overmastered to such an extent that they seem to become part of the natural force which threatens them.

That *The Tempest* and “True Reportory” insist on the “amazement” of mariners might suggest that Shakespeare has simply borrowed imagery and language from Strachey’s account, and while Strachey’s account almost certainly exerts textual influence on *The Tempest*, I want to argue that the use of the same word more importantly suggests that there is a consistent way, particularly around 1610, of encountering the possibility of maritime loss—of conceptualizing risk in the experience of shipwreck. The persistent use of perception as a device for the experience of bearing a storm in both maritime drama and shipwreck accounts suggests something larger about the relationship between the spectatorial position and the elimination of
boundaries between human and natural. That is, the perceptual problem with which both Shakespeare’s and Strachey’s mariners are faced is not restricted to their exchange, or even precisely to shipwreck. Amazement, as an inability to distinguish the self from an overwhelming sensory force, applies even when the spectator is on dry land. These representations of shipwreck provoke and perform a common confusion—safe or at risk, dry or wet—centered more in the removal of the boundary between land and sea than the event of shipwreck itself. In late 1607, a pamphlet called More Strange Newes offers a suggestive account of the way in which confusion between land and sea comes to involve even a spectator well on land, producing the kind of amazement and correspondingly the sense of maritime risk, experienced by those in Strachey and The Tempest.

An immense wave, likely a tsunami or storm surge, swept in from the Bristol Channel and in January 1607 flooded a large portion of southwest England. It was a catastrophe: “thirtie Townes and Villages in the West Country, are utterly ouer-flowed, and their Cattel destroyed, (or the greatest part of them)…the Sea rushed in…devouring with his waves…swallowing up whole heards of Cattell.” The sense of absorption that manifests in this account is remarkably similar to that produced by shipwreck; this account also uses the word amazement. Although floods and wrecks are certainly different events, I am suggesting that they share, a complicated play with spectatorial position that enables a unique form of immersion in natural hazard, and

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56 For a storm-surge argument, see: K.J. Horsburgh and M. Horritt, “The Bristol channel floods of 1607 — reconstruction and analysis” Weather, vol. 61 no. 10 (October 2006), 272–277. For a tsunami argument, see: E.A. Bryant and S.K. Haslett, “Was the AD 1607 coastal flooding event in the Bristol Channel (UK) due to a tsunami?,” Archaeology in the Severn Estuary, vol. 13 (2002), 163–167. Appropriately, both articles quote historical accounts, including More strange nevves, as evidence for their respective theories.

correspondingly a form of maritime risk. At the intersection of land and sea, the lucky survivors of the 1607 flood had witnessed something that contemporary mariners would’ve recognized as comparable to shipwreck:58

A Gentleman dwelling within 4 miles of the sea (betwixt Barnstable & Bristol) walking one morning to view his grounds, cast up his eyes toward ye Sea-coast, and on the sudden was struck into a strange amazement, for hee beheld an extraordinary swallowing up of all the earth, that had wont to lie [?] and levell to his sight: he could scarce tell whether hee stood upon the ground which he was sure the day before was his own: Hilles and Vallies, Woods, Meddowes seemed al to be either removed, or to be buried in the Sea: for the Waters a far off stood to his judgement many yards above the earth: he took them at first for Mountains and heapes of clouds...(my emphasis)59

From this gentleman’s perspective, the event was less terrifying than amazing. That is, it overwhelmed him in a way that made him unsure of his own position in relation to land and sea. This is because there has been a fundamental shift in the relationship between land and sea—a shift in which the gentleman had become involved. He is described as staggered by the sudden conflation of land with sea, enabled through some mechanism he can’t quite pin down: are the the “Hilles and Vallies…removed,” or “buried in the Sea?” The predictable landscape, his ‘grounds,’ has been transformed without warning into something which is unknowable because it is indistinguishable. Boundaries have disappeared, topographical characteristics flattened out,

58 It is curious that throughout More strange newes—and indeed throughout all pamphlets describing the 1607 flood—there is just one relation of a wrecked ship: a few sentences that describe a 60–ton bark driven aground near Appledore. The apparent elision of ships and shipping from these accounts is less a matter of marred completeness than of ambitious narrative efficiency. The role of the shipwreck narrative was already being filled, unexpectedly and spectacularly, by nearly every other account in this collection. These literally grounded perspectives suddenly included hazards normally unique to the sea. In this way, they were already manifesting, in excess, the risk which shipwreck narratives normally conveyed through the same sort of blurred boundary between land and sea. To include shipwrecks would have been to undermine what was so spectacular about the flood—that a wrenched perspective could produce the sense of watching a shipwreck inland. Other pamphlets describing the flood include the earlier edition of Strange newes: 1607. A true report of certaine wonderfull overflowings of waters (London: W[illiam] I[aggard], [1607]), 1607 Lamentable newes out of Monmouthshire (London: [Edward Allde], [1607]).
and the space around him rendered so generally incomprehensible that he can “scarce tell
whether hee stood upon the ground which he was sure the day before was his own.” It is the
disappearance of the “Sea-coast,” once a crucially recognizable boundary between maritime and
terrestrial, that initiates and drives the epistemological crisis by which “Mountains and heapes of
clouds” are recognized as “Waters.” This colorful account makes the spectatorial disjunction
almost as visible as if it were performed. A man accustomed to gazing off the coast at a chaotic,
hazardous sea now confronts the same sea as a participant: he has become himself an element in
that environment. The “Sea-Coast,” once a recognizable boundary between terrestrial and
maritime, shares some of this new blurriness with the staging of the tempest which renders the
Blackfriars itself an ambiguously maritime space, and one with multiple perspectives on a single
event: shipwreck. I suggest that these multiple perspectives, like those in Strachey’s and the
Gentlemen’s account, blur the already-questionable boundary between (maritime) hazard and
(terrestrial) safety. They establish, in other words, the incompletely known probability of loss
precisely because they suggest that an event staged from just one perspective may not be
complete.

The Tempest stages three perspectives on the shipwreck. Although the latter iterations are
simpler than the initial spectacle, Shakespeare takes advantage of repetition to give each iteration
a unique relationship to the storm, and subsequently to the performance of maritime risk.60 The

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60 Elizabeth Fowler thinks of the repeated approaches to shipwreck—“once staged and once described”
—as creating “a pictura, an inaugurating image that serves to introduce, order, and memorialize the
matter of the play.” Elizabeth Fowler, “The Ship Adrift,” in The Tempest and Its Travels, eds. Peter
Translation: Marlowe and Shakespeare and the Carnival Tradition, (Evanston: Northwestern University
Press, 1987).
first of these is the doubled perspective of audience and mariners who simultaneously witness an unmediated storm. Second is the meta-theatrical perspective of Miranda, who from within the dramatic space has witnessed a storm about which she is unsure: it could be either magical or natural. The third perspective is Ariel’s, whose relation from “within” the storm itself serves to separate “nature” from “art.”

The progression between these perspectives on *The Tempest*’s emergent (and reiterated) shipwreck establishes risk and as well as an implicit prospect of salvation.

*The Tempest* realizes physical, natural risk through similar manipulation of terrestrial and maritime perspectives. The realization this risk depends on the play’s ability to reproduce for its audience the conditions of sudden amazement experienced by the Gentleman in the 1607 account of the flood or in Strachey’s [*True Reportory*]—the sudden conflation of the chaos of the sea with the expected certainty of land in a way that overwhelms all other senses. The boundary produced by the stage—between performance and observation—is not so different, here, from the boundary of the coast—between maritime hazard and the impotent spectator. These perspectives can be shifted, Shakespeare’s play suggests: spectators can, like sailors, be immersed. This possibility is what produces a sense of risk: not that spectators can be placed in real danger, but that their perception can be inverted. Risk inheres in the potential doubt about which perspective one holds in the event of maritime loss.

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61 Brian Gibbons, too, asks of these perspectives a question he frames as spatial, but which seems to me to have implications for the phenomenology of the event itself: “The dramaturgy progressively develops the question, in what sense did this experience take place? It is not all an illusion, but the very vividness of its realistic locations seems to intensify, not reduce, the sensory confusion.” Gibbons, “Place,” 42.
The play’s own spectator, Miranda, is most subject to the conditions of confusion and uncertainty by which the maritime produces risk. She has every reason to be convinced that she has witnessed a shipwreck, and has “sufferéd / With those that I saw suffer!”:

A brave vessel,
Who had, no doubt, some noble creature in her,
Dashed all to pieces! O, the cry did knock
Against my very heart! Poor souls, they perished.
Had I been any god of power, I would
Have sunk the sea within the earth, or ere
It should the good ship so have swallowed and
The fraughting souls within her. (I.ii.5–13)

Miranda’s language in this moment shares much with the pamphlet’s description of the stunned Gentleman. She, too, witnesses a sort of ravenous consumption in the shipwreck, even though she also describes it—quite differently—as “dashed to pieces.” Of course, it is hardly uncommon to describe the sea as “devouring” or “swallowing”: to be drowned is often to be “swallowed” by the sea. Miranda’s use of this figure might not be so interesting were it not that she has reversed it a line earlier. To “[sink] the sea within the earth” would be to realign consumption while preserving the more important element in these metaphors: the universally troubling conflation of oceanic and terrestrial that introduces an uncertainty, normally associated only with the sea, onto otherwise stable dry land. Miranda is so overwhelmed by the imposition of this aqueous uncertainty that, like the Gentleman, she loses—or gives up as pointless—the ability to distinguish earth and sea. The earth may absorb the sea, or the sea may absorb the ship which stands in for dry land; the conflation of sea and land is the confusion produced by hazard.

If amazement is something that happens when the sea and the shore become indistinguishable, it also describes the experience by which the viewer/auditor is subsumed into
that which is witnessed. Miranda’s perspective on the shipwreck, if we take her at her word, edges into empathy: she has “sufferéd with those that she saw suffer,” experienced emotionally what they have experienced physically. Her emotional involvement with the fate of the ship presages, of course, her relationship with Ferdinand, that “noble creature,” but it is also a recognition of the particular kind of unavoidable absorption enabled by The Tempest’s play with perspective. Moreover, this sympathy between Miranda and her environment—the shipwreck she believes she watches—hints at other ways in which The Tempest’s maritime natural will subsume its participants in the production of prospects.

The absorption of the spectator into the event as it emerges is narratively totalizing. It makes way for the unexpected, offering a prospect of immersion which could only take place on stage. As I have hopefully conveyed, not all maritime loss is shipwreck, and even shipwrecks do not always end with death. Strachey’s account—although remarkable partially for this reason—demonstrates that some natural hazards can be weathered, and hardships overcome:

Sir George Somers, when no man dreamed of such happiness, had discovered and cried land…and by the mercy of God unto us, making out our boats, we had ere night brought all our men, women and children, about the number of 150, safe into the island (16).

What The Tempest proposes is something quite different, though. The reiterated accounts of the wreck provide an effect not just of survival, but of something more like reversal. Strachey’s account—like Slitgut’s, like Egeon’s—is linear, and the conclusion of the disaster, once revealed, is certain: the Sea Voyage is wedged between two rocks, and its occupants make it miraculously to shore in smaller boats. Not so the ship from Naples, about which even Prospero has his

62 See Andrew Gurr’s comparison between narrative setup in The Tempest and Fletcher/Middleton’s The Sea Voyage: “These [elements in the plot or other sorts of exposition] are all so fleeting and enigmatic that the effect is entirely given over to the tempest. After the wreck anything could happen.” Gurr, “The Tempest’s Tempest at Blackfriar’s,” Shakespeare Survey (1989), 91–102; 101.
doubts. Although he assures Miranda that “there is no soul— / No, not so much perdition as an 
hair / Betid to any creature in the vessel,” *The Tempest* makes it clear that Prospero is just as 
uncertain about the conditions of the shipwreck as is every other spectator (1.2.30–1); risk 
inheres in this maritime spectacle even for its onstage architect.

*The Tempest* preserves no absolute perspective on shipwreck: no one is outside the 
articulation of risk, both distinct from the disaster and sure of it. After assuring his daughter that 
there has been no loss, no “perdition,” Prospero turns significantly to Ariel and asks, “hast thou, 
spirit, performed to point the tempest that I bade thee?” (1.2.193–4):

_Ariel_  
To every article.  
I boarded the King’s ship. Now on the beak,  
Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin,  
I flamed amazement. … (1.2.195–98)

_Prospero_  
My brave spirit!  
Who was so firm, so constant, that this coil  
Would not infect his reason? …  
But are they, Ariel, safe? (1.2.206–8)

Prospero has never had a privileged perspective on *The Tempest*’s shipwreck—no more than 
Miranda, or the play’s audience. Prospero, like every other spectator of the wreck, needs to 
investigate his own perspective. If the former Duke of Milan insists on rejecting amazement, it is 
in recognition of the risk implicit in sympathy. Like Lucretius’ distant observer, “gaz[ing] from 
shore upon another’s tribulation,” Prospero’s willful division from the event prevents him from 
really viewing it. As his questions to Ariel suggest, even though he has orchestrated the 
shipwreck, Prospero is further from it than his daughter, and less available to its ramifications; he 
needs to ask, repeatedly, about what happened, who resisted, even where it took place: “But was 
not this nigh shore?” (1.2.216) Although he does not understand it—he seems barely to have
witnessed it—he nevertheless expresses doubt, uncertainty. He knows there was a risk: “But are they, Ariel, safe?” It is as though, by making devices out of these perspectives on shipwreck, Shakespeare’s theater has demanded even its most intently distant observer to at least attempt to come to terms with maritime risk, and to reiterate again that the audience must do the same.
Whereas it hath appeared vnto vs by the Records of our high Court of the
Admiraltie, That William Hull Captaine of a Ship…with divers others…in
November 1602. With their Ships in warlike maner appointed within the
Mediterranean Seas, did rob and spoile a Ship called la Serene of Olona
in France…And not content therewith, did also in most savage maner
commit wilfull murther (a crime most foule)…. .

Proclamation for search and apprehension of certain Pirats (1604)

2.1 Pirates: Negotiation and the Risk of Coming to Terms

This chapter examines staged pirate encounters in Shakespeare’s Hamlet, 2 Henry VI, Daborne’s Christian Turn’d Turk, and Massinger’s Unnatural Combat. It attempts to answer questions about those encounters that have so far gone unaddressed by the primarily politically interested historicist work on dramatic pirates in the early seventeenth century. The primary question has to do with the staged relationship between pirates and risk. What did the theatre do to represent the risks of piracy—to merchants, to statesmen, and to the pirates themselves? What can these representations, distinct from even a generous interpretation of historical accounts, say about the theatrical technologies for articulating maritime risk?

The most recognizable encounter with pirates in early modern drama occurs in Hamlet, and unlike most pirate encounters, it ends very well for the Prince of Denmark. But the risk of the encounter is not to be discounted, and especially in the context of contemporary representations of maritime ventures, it is remarkable that Hamlet survives at sea. His return voyage to England is a patchwork of maritime hazards: political betrayal, intended murder, sea battle, and most desperate of all, capture by pirates. All of these events occur offstage, although

\footnote{A Proclamation for the search and apprehension of certain Pirats, (London: Robert Barker, 1604).}
they constitute perhaps the most important crux of the play. Hamlet reports them in a letter to his friend Horatio:

Ere we were two days old at sea, a pirate of very warlike appointment gave us chase. Finding ourselves too slow of sail, we put on a compelled valor and in the grapple I boarded them. On the instant, they got clear of our ship, so I alone became their prisoner. They have dealt with me like thieves of mercy, but they knew what they did. I am to do a turn for them. Let the King have the letters I have sent and repair thou to me with as much speed as thou wouldst fly death.²

By almost any measure, this is a very strange letter. A pirate attack-turned-rescue is tremendously convenient for Hamlet, as well as for the plot of the play. Partly for this reason, critics as diverse as Margreta de Grazia and Alan Sinfield have remarked upon the strangeness of the episode from a structural perspective, framing it, respectively, as an “absurdity” which is “improbable and… unnecessary to the plot.”³ My reading is more particular. I am less interested in the suitability of pirates for the plot and more focused on the quite-sufficient strangeness of the device’s form and —most of all—on the management of risk in the events it describes. In neither plays nor prose accounts do Jacobean pirates typically spare captives. It is also out of keeping with the dramatic topos of the pirate. And yet, rather than kill, enslave, or ransom him, when the pirates “of very warlike appointment” capture Hamlet, these pirates conveniently transport him back to Denmark. What prompts them to do so, and what does the use of an epistolary device tell us about the prince and his play? This question will lead to a larger one, which is the primary concern of this


chapter: what do pirate negotiations suggest about the articulation of maritime risk on the early modern stage?

Pirates posed a real threat to mariners in the early seventeenth century. Not only were the English well aware of them, many of the pirates in the Adriatic and Mediterranean seas were English. Even as the play printed in 1604/5 as The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet was being staged at the Globe Theatre, on the south bank of the Thames, authorities across the river were constantly confronted with the complex, developing industry of English seaborne crime. As part of James’ truce with Spain, all crown-sponsored plunder, or privateering, was officially banned in 1603, but some crews continued their depredations unabated. James responded to this—and to numerous complaints from Spain, France, and indeed Denmark—by issuing proclamation after proclamation, rendering certain pirates infamous and establishing piracy as one of the dominant concerns of the British state. The first of these proclamations, which serves above as my epigraph, describes a particularly ruthless attack in language strikingly similar to Shakespeare’s: Hamlet’s “pirate of very warlike appointment” recalls, in the proclamation, a ship “in warlike maner appointed.” The rhetorical resonance suggests that statesmen and dramatists alike were

4 Mary Floyd-Wilson, within a lengthier survey of the critical terrain than there is space to do here, notes “the presence of pirates in Hamlet may have been quite credible to an early modern audience.” “Hamlet, the Pirate’s Son,” Early Modern Literary Studies Special Issue 19 (2009).
5 William Shakespeare, The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark (London: 1.R. for N.L., 1605). The first quarto (Q1), printed the year before, does not include Hamlet’s letter to Horatio or any recognizable version of the scene, and thus there are no pirates at all. It is not entirely clear why the letter would be added to the text of both Q2 and F, even on the shaky assumption that the absence of the pirate letter better reflects Hamlet in performance (as is often said of Q1). It is tempting to speculate that the addition of the maritime report is intended, for the reasons I argue below, to better manifest Hamlet’s capable diplomacy, rather than to explain his return via a peculiar device (epistolary account of pirate abduction) that is apparently unnecessary otherwise.
6 The usefully abstract phrase “seaborne crime” is borrowed from the work of Claire Jowitt, particularly Culture of Piracy, 1580–1630 (London: Ashgate, 2011), 9.
7 For a direct account of the constant English piracies of Danish ships in the 1590s, see the work of historian Edward Cheyney: “England and Denmark in the Later Days of Queen Elizabeth,” The Journal of Modern History, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1929), 9–39.
used to talking about pirates, or at least had some common language for addressing this particular maritime hazard. Although I will return to the complex development of English piracy below, it is most important for now to simply say that Hamlet’s attack by pirates would have been seen as a common sort of event.

What does Hamlet mean when he writes that the pirates “have dealt with me like thieves of mercy, but they knew what they did. I am to do a turn for them” (4.3.25–5)? His description of the encounter is remarkably vague. The sentences conceal circumstances we might expect them to reveal, replacing technical detail with biblical allusions and abstractions. Few critics have attempted to identify precisely what happens here, focusing instead on the much clearer result: Hamlet survives. But there is a lacuna, something circumscribed to which he refers obliquely by bracketing it with past and future action: the pirates “have dealt,” Hamlet is “to do a turn.” What is in between, in the strict preterite? Margreta de Grazia calls it “bribery” in passing, but does not speculate on the conspicuously withheld particulars, and indeed the “turn” is more likely to be a pardon or a promise of safe harbor.⁸ What we can say with certainty is limited: Hamlet lives because a mutually-beneficial agreement has subtly but unmistakably been reached between the prince and the pirates. The terms of that agreement, and the process by which it is reached, remain unclear. Yet this difficult moment, a circumscribed event in a diplomatic report, is the means by which Hamlet manages the omnipresent risk of his sea voyage even—especially—in

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⁸ “Hamlet writes rather than fights himself out of danger…rely[ing] on bribery rather than swordplay to escape the pirates.” De Grazia, “Hamlet” Without Hamlet, 72. Although the other prominent example of piracy in Shakespeare (2 Henry VI) appears to turn on ransom, nothing in Hamlet would suggest the same. Alternatively, non-English states, especially in the Mediterranean, were notorious for harboring and supporting English pirates. John Ward, of whom much will be said below, is the most famous example: he escaped English imprisonment by operating out of Tunis for nearly two decades.
the face of pirates. Whatever its terms, and whatever its means, the best we can say is that Hamlet survives because he and the pirates negotiate.

Negotiation is an uncertain discursive space, in which terms and outcome are both elements at risk; it is the element Hamlet’s report accesses when it describes the pirates as “thieves of mercy, but.” If I have avoided the term “negotiation” so far in favor of words such as “agreement” or “deal” it is because negotiation has so many implications. By claiming that Hamlet’s report describes his active, deliberate negotiation with the pirates, I am implicitly challenging the accepted reading of the episode as a manifestation of Providence. Although the encounter certainly proves fortunate, it is not without considerable risk, and I would argue that it is misleading to think of it as “fortuitous,” “salvific,” and especially as “Providential.”

Just as Hamlet’s letter to Horatio is formally bureaucratic rather than Romantic, the negotiation it circumscribes is not indebted to chance, interruption, or outside design. Instead, these two lines imply a form of political or social acumen, a practical knowledge of diplomacy as carried out on the outlaw ocean. The key element in Hamlet’s account is the implicit understanding of the terms of the agreement between the pirates and the prince. The pirates in their mercy “knew what they did,” and the prince seems also to know precisely what is expected of him, in the form of a “turn for them”: ransom, probably substantial and certainly speedy—“as thou wouldst fly death.” Both parties seem to have appraised the situation almost as a condition of its development, and the play mimics this unspoken comprehension formally: the maritime interaction, central as it is to the plot, never materializes and is never mentioned again. We are left, instead, with the rare and

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9 The argument often centers on Hamlet’s supposed indebtedness to prose romance, whose pirates are typically liminal figures and “interruptors.” For example, see Michael Witmore, “Hamlet Interrupted,” Culture of Accidents: Unexpected Knowledges in Early Modern England (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 82–110.
salubrious results of smooth and successful interaction: Hamlet returns to Denmark newly marked out as carrying a kind of state authority, and the pirates are accorded what seems to be a sort of favor. Rather than making an example of “special providence,” Shakespeare works in this encounter as an opportunity for Hamlet to demonstrate ahead of time the “immense diplomatic delicacy” that Alan Stewart suggests we should see in a letter described later, in 5.2.¹⁰

Negotiation is not an element of many direct reports of piracy in this period. It tends to appear instead—in one form or another—in dramatic representations of seventeenth century piracy. Thus, the importance of negotiation’s centrality to the account in Hamlet is hard to overstate. It suggests that negotiating well can be enough to stay alive, even when the pirates are “warlike.” It also defines the interaction: the report of Hamlet and the pirates is a report of negotiation and its process. Hamlet’s success has numerous implications, some for the representation of pirates in early modern drama, and some for the maritime risk that scenes of negotiation, increasingly recognizable as a stage device in maritime drama, come to articulate. Addressing both, this chapter, makes a new case for the dramatic and economic productivity of the negotiating pirate on the early modern stage.

This chapter approaches the aspect of maritime risk embodied in the figure of the pirate through these representations. Considerable prior criticism has dealt with early modern pirates, and it has primarily addressed their characteristics as literary figures and the obvious kinds of hazard they posed: outright sea battle; theft of cargo; capture and impressment, demand for

¹⁰ Alan Stewart, Shakespeare’s Letters (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 266.
ransom, or execution; even the threat of forced religious conversion.\(^1\) I am suggesting that performances of pirates are the early modern theatre’s way of accessing a less obvious form of hazard, that which obtains in Hamlet’s lacunae. Negotiation participates in the suspension and management of direct threat. There is risk posed in the act of coming to terms, in reaching agreements across boundaries of commerce, class, religion, nationality, and experience within the overwhelmingly free “market” of the sea, in which regulation falters and all interactions are uncertain. In this chapter, I will address two primary scenes in which negotiation is physically staged—first in 2 Henry VI (1592), and then in Robert Daborne’s Christian Turn’d Turk (1610)—before concluding with a short reading of Phillip Massinger’s Unnatural Combat (1624). These plays figure pirate encounters as simultaneously economic and political problems in which negotiation figures differently but inextricably, as a risky and unavoidable part of maritime venturing.

Whereas it hath appeared unto us by sundry credible informations and certificates fro foreine pars, That Richard Gifford…with divers others… have under colour of friendship and peaceable Traffique, committed most fowle outrages, murders, spoyles and Depredations with the Streits, and Mediterranean Seas, as well within the ports as without, to the great offence of all our friends, to the extreame losse and hurt of our Merchants….

2.2 Commerce and Violence

When pirates negotiate onstage, the outcome is rarely as bloodless as we hear it has been in Hamlet. As I hope to show, negotiation is always full of risk: the process itself contains the threat of violence, both in its execution as well as its conclusion. The stakes in qualifying negotiation are in our understanding of maritime commercial practice taken broadly. Thinking differently about negotiation makes us think differently about the practices and projects of early modern seaborne trade—about the East India Company, mercantile praxis, and about the potential for risk in all instances of negotiation, not just with pirates.

In the simplest sense, negotiation is the performance of coming to terms. Specifically, I hope to demonstrate that these plays stage a form of negotiation for which actions communicate terms to the same degree that words do. Thus, in my sense, negotiation could be any staged practice that contributes to the determination of terms or outcomes. This means that haggling is negotiation over price, just as a duel whose winner settles a formal conflict might be negotiation

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12 Proclamation for the search and apprehension of certaine Pirates (1606).

13 It is difficult to separate the dramatic concept of ‘negotiation’ from its use in new historicist discourse, for which it means something like ‘a representational exchange toward cultural synthesis’ and is largely an expression of the dialectic without its materialism. It absorbs some of its dialectic valence in my chapter only—although inevitably—when it becomes clear that literal negotiations are also representations of a state redetermining its economic and political condition in the face of maritime risk. The term was already doing heavy lifting for literary anthropologists when Greenblatt chose it to encapsulate the process which produced his “poetics of culture”; “a whole spectrum of representational exchange… . There are many modes, their character is determined historically, and they are continually renegotiated.” Stephen Greenblatt, Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 1–21, esp. 5–7.

14 The OED restricts the use of the term to verbal interaction: “2. A discussion or process of treaty with another (or others) aimed at reaching an agreement about a particular issue, problem, etc., esp. in affairs of state; an instance of negotiating. Freq. in pl.” "negotiation, n,” OED Online, (Oxford University Press: 2015).
over reputation; both are subject to an implicit logic, and the conclusion of both is a significant coming to terms. I am proposing that it is more useful to include the threat of violence—implicit in contests, duels, and overt demonstrations of force—in a formulation of maritime negotiation because it explains maritime events—staged or reported—more consistently, and with fewer caveats.

A definition of negotiation which allows for the threat and practice of violence better represents the way in which the body of practices employed by East India Company merchants, as well as pirates, included undifferentiated rhetorical and physical modes. If discussion and combat are both used to reach an agreement, they are most productively analyzed together, rather than artificially separated. Moreover, venturing accounts themselves do not appear to distinguish between these practices. When Henry Middleton approaches Java, he begins with a demonstration of force that transitions seamlessly into the familiar delivery of letters:

The next day in the morning, we entred the Road of Bantam, and shot off a very great peale of Ordnance out of the Dragon, being our Admirall, and out of the Hector: such an one as had neuer beene rung there, before that day. The next day in the morning, the Generall sent his Vice-Admirall, Captaine Iohn Middleton aland, with a Message to the King: declaring, that hee was sent by the Queene of England (4:161, my emphasis)

The “peale of Ordnance,” is certainly a warning shot, not intended to maim but to intimidate. It promises that overwhelming violence is a possibility, and as the next lines imply, it also plays a role in identifying a ship, associating it first with force and then with the “Queene of England.”

Rather than thinking of this show of force as preceding the negotiation by which Middleton will

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15 Consider, in contrast, the Venetian account of a similar event with a very different outcome: “The Secretary to the English Ambassador…complained that off Brazzo di Maina the ship he was on was attacked by our admiral and exposed to the danger of being sunk. Contarini informs us that the incident arose from the Englishman not making the proper salutes” (1604: 289). The salute in this account is a firing of ordnance, analogous to the “very great peale” above. As this account shows, firing off a cannon is simultaneously a means of communication and an implicit martial challenge.
to “come a-land, and buy and sell,” I would argue that firing ordnance is part of the that behavior; it clarifies terms. Even before “the King (being but a child of ten or eleuen yeares of age)” speaks with Middleton, he has been informed that the result of poor payment or restriction of access could be the application of considerable violence. The threat of violence is a strikingly effective tactic, and it is surely the most important one in this exchange. A few lines later, Middleton omits the “many speeches of diuers things,” in which he and the young Javanese king subsequently engaged, pointing out that his account is not meant to be particular, but illustrative. And yet the “peale of Ordnance” deserves inclusion: it is at once the most spectacular and the most effective of the negotiation tactics Middleton employs. This is in keeping with Robert Brenner’s exhaustive historical work on the development of the East India Company, for whom it is “the combination of (armed) shipping superiority, company organization, and government backing that made for English commercial superiority.”

Commercial practices like negotiation, which included a mix of violence and diplomacy, were key to England’s growing domination of trade in the Indies.

This sense of negotiation ought to describe some elements of prose mercantile accounts as well as dramatic performances of piracy, and I will suggest that it does. The risk acknowledged or produced in complex theatrical set-pieces also functions importantly in prose accounts of English trade with the Indies. Although the difference in media means that negotiation is harder to parse in prose accounts—less a set piece than an undifferentiated series of events—I would suggest that the risk implicit in dramatic production also adheres in prose, and thus describes the development of a concept that is otherwise difficult to identify in other

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venturing literature of the period. Although the sense of risk is subtler, what is obvious in prose accounts is the abandon with which venturers and merchants—like the pirates of the stage—combined violence and diplomacy.

In the first decade of the 1600s, the differences between pirates and merchants are the institutional bodies authorizing them rather than in either group’s particular constitution or in their praxis. In 1604, after two decades of wildly profitable English privateering, the recently crowned king of Britain outlawed piracy as part of a peace agreement with Spain, and into the economic void created by this policy sailed the East India Company. When the Company was established by royal charter in the twilight of 1600, the great majority of its venture capital originated in Elizabethan privateering, from which many of its 220 founding members made their fortunes in the war against Spain. In short, the contemporary accounts of East India Company merchants which I draw from Samuel Purchas’ *Hakluytus Posthumous* describe behavior almost identical to that we would expect from privateers in the 1590s or pirates in the 1600s. As Robert Brenner describes, some of the most influential merchants of this period “were able to amass great fortunes through simultaneously exploiting opportunities for privateering in the Atlantic and for peaceful trade with the eastern Mediterranean and areas farther east. [They] applied their earnings, in turn, to opening up direct sea trade with the East Indies.” The tendency to combine diplomacy with force did not end with the elimination of privateering under James in 1603. If anything, it was strengthened by a commitment to the material increase in armament for East India Company ships: “during the first forty years of the seventeenth century,

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it built some seventy-six ships, especially prepared for military-commercial combat.”

In short, merchants as much as pirates were prepared to employ force, and the tactics by which they came to agreements with trading partners show that—like pirates—merchants very often mixed the two. This shared praxis means that staged scenes of pirate negotiation have implications for the way all seventeenth century mariners dealt with the risk of deal-making.

While most large-scale voyages to the East Indies did not advertise themselves as piratical, this seems not to have prevented them from acting along the same financial and political lines. As Richmond Barbour argues, the East India Company needed to behave like pirates in order to turn a profit in an environment of untested—but surely extraordinary—capacity for loss: “Driven by the need to profit from joint-stock enterprises of prodigious cost, danger and scope…the challenge in the experiment was to harness the reckless, improvisatory energies of privateering—corporate raiding—to the strategic needs of corporate sustainability.”

In this sort of environment, prose venturing narratives such as those contained in Samuel Purchas' *Hakluytus Posthumus* take on a considerably more piratical cast. Consider the practice described in this account, from the Javanese voyage of Henry Middleton:

> The fifth of February, we got sight of the Ilands of Banda, and made all the sayle wee could, to get neere before night: and drawing neere, I sent my Skiffe to heare some newes, of some of the Country people, who sent me word that the Hollanders would not suffer any Sayle to come into the Roade, but they would take all hee brought, (if it were such things as they stood in need of) and make payment at their owne pleasures: But if any Iuncke came and brought Commodities very vendible for the Countrey people, they were not permitted to haue any speech with any of the Countrey: but the Hollander would bring them to the backside of the Castle within Musket shot of their Ordnance, that one

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19 Ibid., 49.

20 Richmond Barbour, “Corporate Praxis and the Legacy of Privateering: The Jacobean East India Company,” *Clio* vol. 41 (Fall 2011), 1–31, esp. 12. As Barbour points out, the most exhaustive historical treatment of Elizabethan privateering—and, especially salient here, the process and outlay of its capital accumulation—remains Andrews’ *Elizabethan Privateering*. 

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must not set his foot ashore, but they would send a Bullet at him. …What hope is there to make a Voyage there, seeing they dealt so with all.21

At least as described here, the operations of the “Hollanders” are organized around their ability to bring trading partners “within Musket shot of their Ordnance,” and otherwise to dictate by threat of violence the prices and sale of goods (“make payment at their owne pleasures”). Although the narrative voice is a bit garbled, filtered as it is through the hearsay of the “Countrey people” directly into Middleton’s account, it seems fair to conclude that martial practice and commercial practice are, perhaps appropriately, indistinguishable. The language of the account is so procedural that the quality and character of the events themselves are practically ironed out. And yet, wildly different sorts of events occur within this short passage: the English ship sees land; a procedure of trade is discussed; mortal threats are implied. To Middleton, these are elements of one complicated interaction, not worth flagging and distinguishing. Middleton does finally interrupt the flow of events, editorializing only to bemoan the hopelessness of any “Voyage” when the Hollanders “dealt so with all;” that is to say, when they too were willing to mix a threat of violence into mercantile negotiations.

Some East India Company voyages traveled willfully without letters of marque, taking on enormous political risk which morphed quickly enough into personal, mortal danger, as it did later for Henry Middleton in the Ottoman empire. The accounts of the company make it clear that “a passe from the Grand Signior [of Turkey was provided] to this Company for safe trade to Aden etc.,” but Richmond Barbour describes, “Middleton’s fleet departed in April 1610 without the indispensable letter of protection from Achmed I, received and read at a meeting of the

21 Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus posthumus or Purchas his pilgrimes* (London: William Stansby for Henrie Fetherstone, 1625). All subsequent quotations of Purchas are cited in the text by volume and page number, and refer to those in the EEBO scans of the 1625 printing.
company’s General Court *eighteen months before.*”

This kind of general diplomatic-mercantile foolishness does not result for Henry Middleton in the enormous profits it did for his brother, David Middleton. The account in Purchas describes that when they arrived in “Ariaba Felix…

*Francis Slanny, John Lanslot,* and sixe more were slaine, and that foureteene of our Company there present were grievously wounded, and that our House was round begirt with armed Souldiers” (3:252). Middleton reports those men who were not killed or otherwise imprisoned are then paraded through Mocha as a kind of curiosity. Ultimately the figures of Turkish authority loosen their grip, and some of Middleton’s captors begin angling for a deal:

> The seuenth day, I was sent for to the Cayhas garden, where he feasted me and M. Femel, telling me, that shortly I and my people should haue libertie, and be sent to Moha, where I should haue redresse of all my wrongs, promising me to be my friend, and … what kindnesse he did me was onely for Gods sake; but I well knew it was in hope of some great reward from me. (3:256)

The experience of the beleaguered Middleton, as captive of a series of largely independent Turkish powers ultimately responsible to the Great Turk Rajab Aga, was not at all uncommon for merchantmen making voyages to the Indies. The circumstances of Middleton’s general abuse within the Turkish empire serve to remind us of the extravagant hazards precipitated directly by neglecting to bring along the Grand Signior’s pass. For at least twenty-two of Middleton’s men, either “slaine [or] grievously wounded,” poor diplomatic practice was as every bit as deadly as a direct wartime confrontation could have been. In each of these two mercantile engagements—first with the Dutch, then with the Turks—terms are in question, as are allegiances, as are outcomes. There is little question that these merchantmen, whatever their titles or associations, are persistently employing the practices their contemporaries associated with privateering or

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outright piracy. By examining dramatic spectacles of pirate negotiation, I hope to demonstrate that the concept of maritime risk inhered in this shared practice, as much or more than in direct violence or in more obviously hazardous contexts.

The performance of pirate negotiations may not predict or model the behavior of early modern merchants, but it is difficult to ignore their echoes. Let us return for just a moment to the crucial lines of *Hamlet*’s pirate report, written barely a decade earlier than Middleton’s account of his Turkish difficulties: “They have dealt with me like thieves of mercy, but they knew what they did. I am to do a turn for them.” Middleton’s explanation of his treatment at the hands of the Cayhas is exceptionally close, right down to the allusion to godly mercy on behalf of the captors: “Turkes and Arabs said, what kindness he did me was onely for Gods sake; but I well knew it was in hope of some great reward.” Although Middleton could certainly have seen *Hamlet* while it was in the repertory of the King’s Men, and perhaps remembered the spirit of a fortunate captive’s report, there is probably no way to confirm such a possibility. It is more important, in fact, that this is not a case of direct influence but of a developing concept which both Hamlet’s and Middleton’s reports implicitly recognize: Godly Providence, or the mercy of godly men, is an insufficient way of understanding the danger of dealing with men at sea. It seems better for both Hamlet and Middleton to think of the omnipresent risk of negotiation.

For Gerard Malynes, whose *Lex Mercatoria* helped stir up the infamous mercantilist debates of the 1620s, to which I will return below, the broadness of the term “negotiation” was particularly important. He uses it to refer to every sort of business transaction and trade-related management of deals; it is the largest category, under which all forms and all practitioners of commerce fall. Malynes extended title implicitly proposes that the idea is “*Necessarie for all*…
merchants, marriners, and all others negotiating in all places of the world.” Pirates fall under that last category, “all others,” but as Malynes points out, the distinction in position does not produce a distinction in practice. Anyone who “trafficke[s]” must negotiate, and indeed it is at the root of maritime practice:

The observation and customs whereof, was the beginning of the Law-Merchant, and that especially when mankind was propagated into an infinite number, and the domestiques or neere hand commodities were not sufficient for their sustenance in some countries, and in other countries were ouer abundant: Then of necessitie followed the use of trusting, exchanging, and trading; first, on the Land in the maine Continent, and then extensively upon the Seas, both for fishing and negotiation.23

The juxtaposition of “fishing and negotiation” as the two commercial actions that might take place upon the seas is at first a bit comedic but it is also telling; if these two are mutually exclusive, negotiation must include an awful lot of maritime behavior. If it’s not maritime production, it’s negotiation. Malynes use of the term is not quite ours, partially because it has nothing to do with performance for him, but Malynes use does demonstrate the potential range of negotiation as a term in a maritime context.

Early modern English drama staged negotiation as a practice that could be replicated and adapted. As in prose voyage accounts, there is a considerable range of actions associated with the practice. Within the three plays I will be treating in this chapter, actions associated under the umbrella of negotiation include: haggling, indictment, bluffing (2HVI); gaming, betrayal, impressment (Turk); debate, censure, combat. Several of these elements appear in two or more of the plays, and one constant—the threat of violent death—appear in all of them. I address the

23 Gerard Malynes, Consuetudo, vel lex mercatoria, or The ancient law-merchant Divided into three parts: according to the essentiall parts of trafficke. Necessarie for all statesmen, iudges, magistrates, temporall and ciuile lawyers, mint-men, merchants, marriners, and all others negotiating in all places of the world (London: A[dam] Islip, 1622), 3.
plays in the order they were staged, which is also in the order of increasingly spectacular set pieces. First, in 2 Henry VI, the Duke of Suffolk’s misunderstanding of diplomatic and economic praxis results in his death; next, the pirates of Christian Turn’d Turk play at hazard and duel their way toward impressment and new allies; finally, I will argue that Massinger’s Unnatural Combat frames a mortal contest between a pirate son and his father, the Neapolitan Admiral, as the refiguring of political conflict into the personal hazard of pirate negotiations.

Nowe her Maiestie is enformed, that there hath beene other notable deceipts vsed by diuers other Captaines…for that many of them haue…made spoyle on the Seas…for which custome should haue beene paid to her Maiestie (which hath not beene) and…the parties that haue so embeselled such goods, are in danger to answere thereto as felons and pirates.

A Proclamation to charge [embesellers] as Felons and Pirates (1592)24

2.3 Poor Diplomacy in 2 Henry VI

In this section, I make the case for a new reading of the Duke of Suffolk’s notorious execution by pirates in the fourth act of Shakespeare’s 2 Henry VI. The reading turns on an extended miscommunication: the failure of negotiations between the pirate tough, Walter Whitmore, and the haughty Duke of Suffolk, a figure whose incompetent diplomacy is specifically emphasized by the playwright. The fatal interaction between Suffolk and the pirates has typically been read by critics as intimately and exclusively tied to the play’s other enactments of class tensions: Jack Cade’s rebellion, the corruption of the peers, and “disordered relations” broadly construed as political. I argue for a new reading, rooted in the sense that practical economic knowledge—

24 By the Queene. A Proclamation to charge all persons that haue gotten any maner goods in|to their possession, which haue beene taken on the Seas this last yeere, and haue not bene customed, to restore the same vpon paine to bee punished as Felons and Pirates (London: Barker, 1591 [1.e. 1592]).
specifically, a rational model for participating in maritime negotiation—is the focus of the interaction. That Suffolk ultimately “dies by pirates” in Shakespeare’s play is made a matter of the Duke’s incomplete comprehension of pirate negotiations and their stakes; it is a spectacle of ignorance which nevertheless articulates maritime praxis.

2 Henry VI is a good place to begin thinking at length about the risk of pirate encounters, and the early modern theatre’s use of negotiation to figure the development of risk. After all, the element which organizes the play’s conflict is the treaty reached as a result of Suffolk’s magnificently disastrous political agreement: the “articles of contracted peace / Between our sovereign and the French King Charles” (1.1.40–3). In short, 2 Henry VI is a play in large part about the risk of poor diplomacy (and poorer governance) when the factor—here, Suffolk—is a poor negotiator. Indeed, when the audience is introduced to Suffolk they are shortly made aware of several things: first, that he has brokered the marriage of King Henry to Margaret of Anjou, and second, that the negotiations which have effected this union are an utter ruin for England. The Duke of Gloucester stumbles over the terms of the agreement in order to make this point unmistakable:

Gloucester | Imprimis: It is agreed between the French King Charles and William de la Pole, Marquess of Suffolk, ambassador for Henry, King of England, that the said Henry shall espouse the Lady Margaret…. Item [it is likewise agreed]: That the duchy of Anjou and the county of Maine shall be released and delivered to the King her father.

King Henry | Uncle, how now?

Gloucester | Pardon me, gracious lord.
Some sudden qualm hath struck me at the heart.
And dimmed mine eyes that I can read no further. (1.1.41–55)

We are made to recognize that this single-minded diplomatic blindness is typical of Suffolk, who in the play’s opening speech preens over what, to him and for him, seems like a successful deal:
“I have performed my task and was espoused, / And humbly now, upon my bended knee, / In sight of England and her lordly peers, / Deliver up my title in the Queen” (1.1.9–13). Suffolk is not the only one pleased with this reckless bargain. King Henry, too, announces that the terms “please us well”—well enough, in fact, that once-Marquess of Suffolk is handed a dukedom (4.1.61). This performance of preening, promotion, and kingly satisfaction functions as Shakespeare’s bellwether for political ethics at the outset of the drama. The opinions expressed regarding the agreement swiftly sort the figures onstage into categories. Humphrey, who feels “the common grief of all the land,” is the populist ‘good Duke’ (1.1.74). Warwick, who weeps over his own wasted bloodshed in this matter—“Anjou and Maine? Myself did win them both… Mort Dieu!”—is made out to be a self-absorbed firebrand (1.1.116, 9). York’s perspective, which positions him as a singularly far-sighted schemer, also solidifies the general condemnation of Suffolk’s rotten deal in which the audience is expected to participate:

York Suffolk concluded on the articles,  
The peers agreed, and Henry was well pleased  
To change two dukedoms for a duke’s fair daughter.  
I cannot blame them all: what is’t to them?  
Tis thine they give away and not their own.  
Pirates may make cheap pennyworths of their pillage (1.1.214–9)

York’s figure of the pirate will prove a prescient metaphor for Suffolk, willing here to trade away his goods at too low a price, unable later even to grasp the nature of the negotiations into which he has been thrust. Unmistakable from the opening of 2 Henry VI, then, is that the newly-minted Duke is incapable of making good deals. York’s metaphor is curiously apt for suggesting the context in which this failing will ultimately prove deadly.
Unlike *Hamlet*’s invisible rovers, Suffolk’s encounter with the pirates announces itself from the outset as a spectacle, and the Duke wastes no time misunderstanding his position within, or the nature of, that event. There is an explosion of noises and warfare—“Alarum. Fight at sea. Ordnance goes off” (4.1.1sd)—before the disguised Duke of Suffolk, alongside two other gentlemanly prisoners, is dragged onstage by a crew of warlike mariners that includes the Lieutenant, a Master, and the forbidding Walter Whitmore. Suffolk is rather ineffectively disguised and quickly revealed; Walter Whitmore remarks: “The Duke of Suffolk muffled up in rags?” (4.1.46) The Duke insists on maintaining a sort of bizarre aloofness—first disguise and then dismissal—throughout the course of the scene. He employs “a rather different understanding of established social protocols,” as Thomas Cartelli has put it with a wink.²⁵ His entrance disguised is an enactment of Suffolk’s drastic misunderstanding of the nature of the event, like an inattentive audience member watching for devices but ignorant of events. The mariners are skeptical and apparently unimpressed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whitmore</th>
<th>The Duke of Suffolk muffled up in rags?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suffolk</td>
<td>Aye, but these rags are no part of the Duke.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jove sometimes went disguised, and why not I?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lieutenant</td>
<td>But Jove was never slain as thou shalt be. (4.1.45–8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As I have argued above, this is what the audience has been primed to expect of Suffolk. When the Duke responds to the Lieutenant with an insult—“Thou obscure and lousy swain!”—it is the beginning of the end, a stumble at the negotiating table that will end with Suffolk’s execution (4.1.50). How has it gotten to this point, and so quickly? What Shakespeare represents in *Henry VI* is not, for any contemporary audience, a simple execution; it is a nuanced back-and-forth

between two parties at risk in a contested maritime space where terrestrial authority and protections mean very little. One of the Duke’s most laughable errors, in fact, will be assuming that the influence of his peerage could extend offshore. What’s even worse is that throughout the negotiation he fails to realize that his captors, rather than trying to kill him, are—in the hopes of higher ransom—trying desperately, fruitlessly, to keep him alive.

The conditions of pirate captivity are clearly delineated by the Lieutenant, and only the disguised Suffolk seems unable—or unwilling—to come to terms with them. Part of the function of the mariner’s opening speech is to announce as plainly as possible what the captives are expected to do: “Here shall they make their ransom on the sand, / Or with their blood stain this discoloured shore” (4.1.10–11). Having so clarified the form of the negotiations to follow, the pirates and their captives immediately begin their exceptionally high-stakes bargaining. Terms are established in steps: proposal, response, bluff, response. It is a complicated engagement:

*1st Gentleman* What is my ransom, master, let me know.
*Master* A thousand crowns, or else lay down your head.
*Mate* And so much shall you [Second Gentleman] give, or off goes yours.
*Lieutenant* What, think you [both] much to pay two thousand pounds, And bear the name and port of gentlemen?
*Whitmore* Cut both the villains throats! — For die you shall. The lives of those which we have lost in fight Be counterpoised with such a petty sum?
*1st Gentleman* I’ll give it, sir, and therefore spare my life.
*Second G.* And so will I, and write home for it straight.

Although I’ll expand on this below, it is important to make clear that pirate negotiations like this one are not just risky for captives, but for captors as well. Even sea-dogs like the Lieutenant and Whitmore, who seem to consider themselves gentlemanly privateers, were consistently in enormous danger of reprisal: if not from the English monarchy, then from other European
powers such as France (under the protection of which Suffolk was about to be placed). What Shakespeare brings to bear in 2 Henry VI is not, for any contemporary audience, a simple execution; it is a nuanced back-and-forth between Suffolk and his captors in which terrestrial power and authority hold no water. It is a laughable miscalculation on the duke’s part to assume that the influence of his peerage could extend offshore. It is even worse that throughout the negotiation he fails to realize that his captors do their best to avoid killing him in hopes of earning still higher ransom.

By the midpoint of negotiations, Walter Whitmore has twice already threatened to kill all three gentlemen captives. After an appalling rain of insults from Suffolk, which include a claim that the Lieutenant has waited on the expulsion of the Duke’s feces—“in our voiding lobby hast thou stood / And duly waited for my coming forth” (4.1.64)—the mariners are nearly at a loss. Whitmore tries again to convey to Suffolk the gravity of the situation in a significant question to the Lieutenant, and but even the pirate’s last bluff is ineffective:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Whitmore} & : \text{Speak, Captain, shall I stab the forlorn swain?} \\
\text{Lieutenant} & : \text{First let my words stab him, as he hath me.} \\
\text{Suffolk} & : \text{Base slave, thy words are blunt and so art thou.} \\
\text{Lieutenant} & : \text{Convey him hence, and on our longboat’s side Strike off his head.} \\
\text{Suffolk} & : \text{Thou dar’st not for thy own. (4.1.65–9)}
\end{align*}
\]

Every expectation, at this point, ought to be that Whitmore might, as ordered, behead the Duke. Suffolk has continued to mistake the terms of this interaction, bluffing without leverage and thus inviting his own execution, rather than acting like his fellow gentlemen to manage the risk

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26 Sir Walter Raleigh is, of course, the most famous of England’s executed privateers, although there were many others. Raleigh was beheaded in large part for the 1617 assault on the Spanish-controlled Santo Tomé de Guayana undertaken under his (neglected) leadership. For details on this event and the Raleigh’s trial, see: Stephen Greenblatt, \textit{Sir Walter Ralegh: The Renaissance Man and His Roles} (New Haven: Yale, 1973).
inherent in the negotiation by responding to threats with assurances of payment. Still, instead of a beheading, what follows is an excoriating political indictment from the Lieutenant.

This indictment, borrowed almost wholesale from Edward Hall’s chronicle history, has unfairly overshadowed the possibility of other cultural forces at work in this scene. In his excellent analysis of this scene, Thomas Cartelli argues that the pirates are, rather than strictly political, more abstractly “end-directed…seeking neither reward nor recognition nor promise of advancement from the actions they undertake.” For Cartelli, the apparent aloofness of the pirates throws into sharp relief the ruthless self-interest of the play’s other political actors, and so is evidence of their “patriotically motivated disinterestedness.” That the pirates seem to have no interest in the ransom the Duke of Suffolk could provide, then, conveys a kind of financial or economic selflessness motivated by populist priorities. Cartelli quite reasonably proposes that such figures could only exist on the infinite margins of the ocean, beyond the corrupting reach of the court and within a pseudo-utopian space where brutes like Walter Whitmore are able to claim membership in the gentry-of-the-sea through the “wiping away [of] blot[s]” with a sword. With much of this, I agree. That these ‘pirates’ are patriotic seems likely—in either 1450 or 1592, they sound, at any rate, far more like privateers—and that they act as executors of the will of the commons is borne out by the events which follow throughout the act. But we cannot mistake the Lieutenant and Whitmore’s well-developed economic savvy for complete “disinterestedness.”

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27 Hall’s chronicle does not substantially disagree with Lonmor’s account (following), although as many critics have pointed out, Shakespeare clearly imports other elements of Suffolk’s popular indictment into this scene nearly word for word from Hall: “the commonaltie began to make exclamation against the Duke of Suffolke, affirming him, to be the onely cause of the deliuerie of Angeow & Mayne, the chief procurer of the death of the good duke of Gloucester,” and so on. Hall also does mention a “small fight.” Edward Hall, The vnion of the two noble and illustre famelies of Lancastre [and] Yorke, (London: 1548). For an analysis of the political popularism implicit in this re-delivery of Hall, see: Cartelli, “Suffolk and the Pirates,” 329–32.

what follows, I will argue that, contrary to appearances, the mariners live up to Suffolk’s accusation precisely in their willingness to enact the economics of rational pirate negotiations. In short, it is rational self-interest which leads them to kill Suffolk and release another prisoner. That the First Gentleman is released to report the “barbarous and bloody spectacle” is strong evidence that Suffolk’s death is a communication failure on the part of the mariners, and that the spectacle of negotiation—rather less bloody, but very bit as hazardous—is a matter of poor risk management by Suffolk.

Pirates are distinct from other seaborne agents, privateers among them, in that they are non-state actors unbound by the maritime policies of the state. This position enables and demands of them a body of rational choices—such as the murder of the Duke of Suffolk and the release of one prisoner—which, while broadly consistent with the political readings advanced by Cartelli, Patterson, and others, also has implications for the awareness of hazard articulated by these events. As I have suggested above, acting as a pirate or even a privateer was never safe, and an early modern English audience would have understood that pirate negotiations like this one were not just risky for captives, but their for captors as well. Even experienced mariners like the Lieutenant and Walter Whitmore invited extraordinary risk by their depredations: should things go awry, privateers were subject to serious official reprisal, and pirates to execution. What Suffolk so spectacularly fails to grasp—and what Shakespeare repeatedly emphasizes over the course of this scene—is the calculus of risk by which the mariners are constrained.29

Pirates and privateers operating on the margins of state authority were distinct from other sorts of mariners in that they are outside the commercial policies of the state. Although

merchants may threaten to do violence, doing so might put them at a disadvantage; neither Elizabeth nor James would have been happy to hear that potential economic allies had been alienated by their merchants’ callous decision-making. Privateers and pirates had to rely not on state authority, but their own ability to manage the risks of plundering on the furthest edge—or outside of—the law. If the first of the pirate’s tools for managing risk was negotiation, the second was ruthless, demonstrative violence. Faced with the incompetent diplomacy of Shakespeare’s Suffolk, negotiation has already failed; the Lieutenant and his men are in a tough spot. Although they would rather take a “ransom on the sand,” their next best choice is to “stain this discoloured shore” with Suffolk’s blood, if only to send a message to future captives. For them to fail to do this would be pirate-suicide; without the credible threat of violence, privateers and pirates were just merchants without a royal commission, impotent smugglers taking enormous risks.

In part because of this, pirates like the Lieutenant and Whitmore are practically obligated to kill a captive with whom they could not negotiate. Once the pirates’ persistent efforts to convey to Suffolk the mutual benefits of his surrender at ransom have failed, execution is for them the next best thing. In order to make the pirates’ attempt to elicit ransom rather than execution dramatically unmistakable, Shakespeare works in a final opportunity for the Duke to grasp his position and respond rationally. Walter Whitmore, who moments ago was acting positively murderous, is joined by the First Gentleman to plead that Suffolk agree to ransom:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whitmore</th>
<th>What, are ye daunted now? Now will ye stoop?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gentleman</td>
<td>My gracious lord, entreat him; speak him fair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffolk</td>
<td>Suffolk’s imperial tongue is stern and rough,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Used to command, untaught to plead for favor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Far be it we should honor such as these</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>With humble suit: no, rather let my head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stoop to the block, than these knees bow to any (IV.i.120–5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is rational self-interest which leads the pirates, at last, to execute the Duke of Suffolk. What Shakespeare seems to have been at pains to add, in this staged account, are the various degrees of uncertainty, imprecision, and maritime risk which make the scene, at once, so productive for an audience and so horrifying for the Duke. He has obstinately refused to participate to mutual benefit in this model of maritime negotiation; the Suffolk we’re left with is more than anything an embarrassing figure of diplomatic incompetence.

What Shakespeare seems to have been at some pains to add, in this staged account, are the various degrees of uncertainty, imprecision, and maritime risk which make the scene so productive not just for the theatre, but also as an opportunity for weighing the maritime conditions and practices that make those sorts of uncertainty so deadly for the Duke. *Henry VI* gives audiences a rough model for negotiation with pirates, insomuch at least as it can tell them what *not* to do, what it looks like when the process of negotiation breaks down, materializing the risk which ought to be subsumed and eliminated. Suffolk has proven obstinately incapable of participating—at least to his benefit—in this model of maritime negotiation. That this should happen through the agency of pirates, and in one of Shakespeare’s very earliest plays, only foreshadows the influential—and adaptable—role that negotiations will take in pirate encounters during the reign of a monarch rather less tolerant of piracy than Elizabeth.

The Kings Maiestie, having bene informed through the manifolde complaints made to his Highnesse by his owne Subjects as others, of the many depredations and Piracies committed by lewd and ill disposed persons, accustomed and habituated to spoile and rapine, insensible and desperate of the peril they draw upon themselves…
2.3 Pirate Logic in *A Christian Turn’d Turke*

Robert Daborne’s *Christian Turn’d Turke* (1612) begins with hazard. By this, I mean both the dice game called “hazzard” and the problem of “hazard,” or peril. The play opens with both, articulating a critique of early Jacobean economic policy in the context of a below-decks wager-turned-negotiation. As described in a Prologue, the opening of *A Christian Turn’d Turke* finds the pirate captain John Ward and his companion Gismund “upon the Irish shore / Where wanting men he invites some strangers o’er / Into his bark” to play hazzard, a fiendishly complicated early version of craps which immediately establishes Daborne’s stage as a space with economic stakes:

| Ward    | I’ll play no more. |
| Ferdinand | Set but my hand out. Here’s four hundred crowns unlost yet. Fortune may make them yours. |
| Gismund | Fortune’s a bitch, a mere strumpet. She hath turned up the ace so long, I have ne’er an eye to see with—she hath soaked me! |
| Albert  | We came aboard to venture with you: deal merchant-like, put it upon one main and throw at all. (1.1–7) |

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30 *By the King. A Proclamation against Pirates* (London: Robert Barker, 1609).

31 Hazzard was popular in both England and France from the 14th to 18th centuries, when it was gradually distilled into distinct, simpler versions. Charles Cotton, *The compleat gamester: or, Instructions how to play at billiards, trucks, bowls, and chess* (London: A.M. for R. Cutler, 1674). The game’s complexity resulted from what seems to have been programmatic variation of the rules from session to session. On this, see Thomas Kavanagh, *Dice, Cards, Wheels: A Different History of French Culture* (Philadelphia: Penn, 2005), 44–5. For a rigorous probabilistic treatment of late seventeenth-century hazard based on Cotton’s description see Stewart Ethier, *The Doctrine of Chances: Probabilistic Aspects of Gambling* (New York: Springer, 2010), 514–8.

What does it mean in 1612 to “deal merchant-like,” or to “put it upon one main and throw at all?” This mess of puns conflates maritime and ludic risk: the players bemoan a “Fortune” who soaks, and Albert’s pun on “main” is especially good: the “main” is the stateless portion of the sea left to venturers and pirates, while hazzard’s “main” is a winning throw. Albert’s pun implies, rightly, that maritime ventures and games of chance operate on similar principles. In what follows I show that Daborne’s *A Christian Turn’d Turke* uses the device of negotiation, a debate over the impressment of two Frenchmen, not only to destabilize the commercial standards which would have distinguished “merchant-like” dealing from piracy, but more importantly to articulate a shift in early modern English economic thought as it moved toward a form of free-market capitalism exemplified onstage by these pirates.

Much work on *A Christian Turn'd Turke* deals with John Ward’s conversion to Islam near the end of the play, ignoring or reducing the pirate action of the first scenes. This was, of course, a real and pressing anxiety during the period: ‘turning turk’ was one of England’s primary cultural bogeymen, as the work of Nabil Matar, Lois Potter, Daniel Vitkus, and others has established. Daborne’s play certainly capitalizes on this anxiety, and criticism has focused on it. And yet we have long been aware that for many mariners the religious aspect of turning Turk was subordinate to the economic aspect; accepting Islam primarily offered access to a new

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33 See *OED*, 3rd ed., s.v. “main” n.1 5a and “main” n.2 1a.


politics of trade and plunder. Take Barbara Fuchs’ important study, which contends that “[Turke] withholds its knowledge of the pirate’s economic betrayal of Europe…displacing the moral and ideological thrust” of the play from piracy to “religious apostasy.”36 Mark Hutchings, too, draws from the play’s “orthodox ending [that] Daborne had little interest in exploring the complex issues that lead men to abandon their country and their god.”37 This chapter seeks to account for the economic implications of turning Turk in Daborne’s play, and to reorient the critical discussion by demonstrating that Turke’s “subtle indeterminacy” around the politics of identity emerges in the aftermath of a game of hazard through a negotiation between pirates and merchants.38 Focusing specifically on the play’s first scene—on its foundational game of hazzard and the unexpectedly complex negotiation between pirates and merchants—my reading foregrounds the economic implications of piracy and the political risk it represented onstage. I will demonstrate that Daborne uses this early scene of negotiation not only to prime the threat of religious conversion, but more importantly, to establish the independent threat piracy posed to a national identity defined by economic contribution. When the death of a shipmate causes Ward to confront the precarity of the pirate’s position for the first time—“this bubble breaks, displays a vanity”—he chooses studiously irreligious terms (3.11). As important as religious conversion may be for the latter portions of the play, in its early scenes a ruminative pirate thinks more on “Fortune” and the uncertainty of life at sea: even “planetary bodies…observe the will of fate. The difference is: / They are confined, we are not. They are stars fixed, / We wandering” (3.43–

38 Claire Jowitt, Voyage Drama and Gender Politics, 1589–1642: Real and Imagined Worlds (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 140.
5.) In what follows, I read the negotiation between pirates and merchants as part of this irreligious Ward, a political figure more concerned with fortune, hazard, and the economic conversion implicit in “turning Turk.”

The pirate Captain Ward may well open the play by declaring that he will “play no more,” at hazard, but the two French merchants have other ideas; they insist on another round of hazard, either to put off their own financial loss or to maintain whatever profitable uncertainty that has left them with “four hundred crowns unlost yet” (1.2). Even among games of chance, hazard was infamous for this sort of gambler’s coercion—for instilling the paradoxical sense that by taking ever greater risks, players had a better chance of winning. Hazard’s perilous charms would later lead Charles Cotton, whose *Compleat Gamester* remained the standard guide to English gaming well into the 18th century, to call hazard “the most bewitching Game that is play’d on the Dice.”

The mechanism that made hazard so compelling to gamblers was called the *main*. Albert plays on it brilliantly when he demands that Ward and Gismund “deal merchant-like, put it upon one main and throw at all” (1.1.7). As it functions in the game of hazard, the main was a number determined by those who do not throw the dice, a kind of residual bet by the opposing side—in this case the pirates Ward and Gismund. Like calling a color in a game of roulette, putting money on a main in hazard is a mechanism by which risk is made to appear manageable in an otherwise uncertain enterprise. The scramble to exert even a meager influence on the odds of hazard must have seemed very familiar to a long-haul merchant in 1612, and Albert’s pun invokes the opportunities and incredible risks of venturing during the period.

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40 The OED observes at n.2 1a that this often changed so that the caster calls the main, but Cotton’s *Compleat Gamester* is careful to describe that “the chance is the caster’s, and the main theirs who are concerned in play with him.” I have deferred here to Cotton.
In its more general use, “the main” referred to the main sea, the area of the ocean beyond the territorial and legal influence of any particular nation—an unregulated space, a place of free enterprise and home to pirates.\(^{41}\) Albert’s punning challenge thus invokes the maritime balance between economics and politics just then developing throughout early modern Europe. In 1609, just three years before the quarto publication of *A Christian Turn’d Turke*, Grotius’s hugely influential *Mare Liberum* revolutionized maritime politics by arguing that the “sea can not become the property of anyone, but owes forever to all men a use which is common to all.”\(^{42}\) Grotius’ text, to which I will return below, launched an urgent debate across Europe: William Welwood’s *An Abridgement of All Sea-Lawes* (1613) produced a counter-point from London, and John Seldon’s *Mare Clausum* (1635) would later make clear that Grotius’ text would remain the key text for maritime debate throughout the seventeenth century. While critics like Claire Jowitt have recognized in Daborne’s play an abstract debt “to the oppositional dynamic of Grotius’ free seas argument,”\(^{43}\) I hope to go further, demonstrating that the negotiation between Ward and the French merchants engages directly in the contemporary debate over maritime economic policy.

Albert’s pun on “one main” invokes this common, main sea as the space of the boldest “merchant-like” ventures, where profits are to be had without universal deference to a regulating, financing state. By flattening merchant-like financial risk and gaming chance into one pun about an oceanic no-man’s-land, the economic practices figured through Daborne’s play are made to seem not just profitable, but so long as merchants and pirates each do business on the main, inevitable. The game of hazard ends suddenly when Gismund and Ward, tired of gambling,

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\(^{41}\) See *OED*, 3rd ed., s.v. “main” n.1 5a; “main” n.2 1a; “main sea,” n.


\(^{43}\) Jowitt, *Culture of Piracy*, 5.
inform the two merchants that they have in fact been kidnapped by pirates. While the French bemoan their misfortune—“we are betrayed,” Ferdinand wails (1.20)—Gismund indicates his companion, asking incredulously: “Do you [not] know this honorable shape? Heroic Captain Ward, lord of the ocean” (1.22). In 1612, Gismund’s shock would have been understandable; the anti-heroic exploits of Captain John Ward had been well known for nearly a decade in England, where he was coming to embody a populist spirit in conflict with English economic ideologies.

Robert Daborne's *A Christian Turn’d Turke* was an early entry into a growing corpus which eventually established John Ward role as “a national celebrity, whose name survived, long after his death, among advocates of free trade.” But even as these negotiations augur Ward’s future as an English ballad hero for financial deregulation, Daborne’s pirate also looks back, snidely engaging with emerging contemporary debates around mercantilism. Ward’s role in the centuries-long debate over the ethical imperatives of economic nationalism was predictable. New policies under James I had made the distinction between piracy and privateering a pressing issue. As much as Ward was the object of the state’s “loathing and detestation,” in proclamations describing his apostasy, he also served as a lodestone for English nostalgia over the privateering days of the swashbuckling 1590s.

In the same year (1612) that James issued the proclamation defaming Ward, a ballad entitled *The Seamens Songe of Captayne Warde, the Famous Pirate of the World an Englishman* was published in London. It was the first of several ballads, reprinted regularly, celebrating the pirate for valor, which was always figured as English-ness. Yet Ward was also becoming the

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English champion of the free sea, all paradoxes aside. The most famous ballad, *Captain Ward and the Rainbow*, was printed for the first time around 1620, and re-printed many times; it was especially popular around the dawn of the English Civil War in 1642. In the midst of national conflict, Ward functioned as a populist figure, representing a challenge to monarchy and an assertion of self-actualizing civil rights. The ballad was regularly reprinted and adapted thereafter, with nearly thirty instances of publication in the following hundred years. In a fascinating quirk of popular political myth-making, versions of the *Rainbow* broadside were eventually adapted to stir up popular spirit in another English civil war. Around 1780, two runs of the ballad were printed in Virginia, in the very recently united states. For the young American state, Ward—with his saucy rejection of English control—must have seemed like an appropriate figure.46

In part through Daborne’s early stage-version of Ward, the issues of nationalism and economic responsibility to the home country were in the process of being mythologized and fixed to his character; a dominant Englishness stood in for other forms of constancy. As one historian argues, Daborne “exploits contemporary ambiguities over the concept of ‘turning Turk’ in order to demonstrate how being English is not a choice but an unquestionable fact.”47 Secure in his immutable Englishness, Ward could still be viewed with pride by certain London merchants, celebrated as “very much a part of the popular history of the free-trade debates…the entrepreneurial history of old England.”48 In ballads, pamphlets, and above all in *A Christian

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46 “Captain Ward, the pirate. With an account of his famous fight with the Rainbow ship of war” [United States: c. 1775–1810].
47 MacLean, *Looking East*, 123.
48 Ibid., 130.
“Turn’d Turke,” “Captain Ward” rejected limitations on trade and openly championed the violent commercial opportunism that governmental institutions found ways to euphemize.

The man who would become known as the “Heroic Captain Ward” appears to have begun his piratical career in 1603, when he was a miserably poor common sailor for the Royal Navy’s Channel Squadron near Plymouth. Ward seems to have wasted no time before turning pirate: in short order, he had organized the capture of a large French ship and renamed it the *Little John*; by 1606, he had a base of operations in Tunis under the commercial aegis of Osman Bey, the *de facto* ruler of Tunis; by 1612, he had survived an assassination attempt, as well as a joint Spanish-French attack on Tunis, and commanded 1500 men on fifteen ships. Even while living in Tunis Ward was swiftly becoming a figure of popular fascination in England. Daburne’s play capitalized on the popularity of two 1609 pamphlets, *Newes from Sea* and *The True and Certaine Report of Captaine Ward and Danseker, the two late famous pirates*. Both pamphlets are written in a conflicted tenor regarding the Captain, at once a worthy leader and a sure criminal, who is described as having the “courage to out-brave death, and spirit to out-face danger,” and shockingly to Barker’s moralistic voice, as a leader “whose approbation was so much” among his men that he “made Cowards venturous.” Helped along in part by his very distance from the London market, Captain Ward became a manipulable figure in the English imagination—a representative figure of shifting economic policies.

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50 Andrew Barker, *True and certaine report of the beginning, proceedings, overthrowes, and now present estate of Captaine Ward and Danseker, the two late famous pirates* (London: William Hall, 1609), C1v-C2r. See also: *Newes from sea, of two notorious pyrats Ward the Englishman, and Danseker the Dutchman* (London: [Edward Allde], 1609).
Yet when Ward sued for English amnesty in 1607, a common enough practice in an era of rehabilitating privateers, he was denied. Just over a year later, the Crown issued the royal proclamation that serves as my epigraph, singling out “Captaine John Ward” from “other English Pirats,” by name as well as practice:

His Majesty doth hereby straitly prohibit all his subjects whatsoever that shall go to sea, that they nor any of them, shall sell, alien, barter, or exchange any ordinance, powder, cordage, or any provision whatsoever…with the said Ward… . Neither shall any of his Majesty’s subjects…dare to buy, barter, exchange, or receive directly or indirectly any goods taken at the seas.

The language of the Proclamation demonstrates how Englishness, economic policy, and piracy intersect in the person of the pirate captain. It is distinct from other Jacobean proclamations against pirates, of which there were many; those are generally shorter, more broadly condemnatory, and interested predominately in the tendency of pirates to do violence (usually against tenuous allies like France and Spain). The 1609 Proclamation against pirats, by contrast, is a document of economic policy—more trade-agreement than military or criminal indictment. When it claims Ward as an “English Pirat,” it is to limit his ability, as a subject, to “barter or exchange.” The Proclamation implies that unsanctioned trade constitutes the sacrifice of English subject-hood. English citizens would not “dare to” trade with pirates or even “receive…indirectly” their goods; the brave Captain Ward of English pamphlets was also, in the eyes of the Crown, a figure of economic disruption.

51 Despite Ward’s rejection of amnesty and his eventual conversion to Islam, he seems to have maintained some loyalty to England. He attempted to send money to his English wife, as well as paying for the freedom of English slaves along the north African coast. See: C. M. Senior, A nation of pirates (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1976) and Matar, Turks, Moors, and Englishmen.

52 Proclamation against pirates, 1609.

53 James I issued proclamations directed at restraining English piracy in 1603, 1604, 1606, and 1609; in 1623, a proclamation was issued specifically against “the carrying of munition to Algeers and Tunis.”
As I have shown above, contemporary accounts make it clear that the differences between English venturers and pirates lay less in their practices than in their relationship to English sponsorship and mercantile institutions like the Merchant Adventurers or the East India Company. Merchants as much as pirates were prepared to employ force, and the tactics by which they came to agreements with trading partners show that—like pirates—merchants very often mixed the two. In part for these reasons, many merchants of the East India Company found it difficult to be accepted as state-approved venturers rather than pirates throughout the first decades of the seventeenth century. In 1606, Henry Middleton’s brother, David Middleton, was again met in Java with considerable skepticism:

I understand by my Company, which was with them before my comming, that they would not be perswaded but that I was a Pirate, and had no Commission: and that it should appeare to the contrary, I came my selfe, and brought my Commission with mee, to manifest that I was no such person, but had the Kings Maiesties broad Seale to my Commission, and called to my man for it, and shewed it them, reading the first line unto them, and lapped it up againe. (3:241)

Middleton’s arrogant performance of international maritime authority proved successful. He goes on to describes how a negotiation over wine regarding the costs and availability of Javanese spices. Middleton is told clearly but mildly that “the [Dutch Governor] durst not give me leave to deale for any Spice, vnder paine of losse of his head” (3:240). In other words, the Governor is not authorized to sell spices—in this case, nutmeg and mace, gathered from the Banda islands of which they were ‘stewards’—to foreign merchants, however high a price they might offer. In response to this fine bit of honest negotiation from the Dutch, Middleton promptly lays siege to one of the nearby islands and “try what force the Hollander would send out to driue vs away” (3:242) and demonstrates that the Dutch were more or less right about Middleton’s
‘piracy’ from the outset.\textsuperscript{54} If nationally-sponsored commercial behavior was so difficult to distinguish from piracy, the negotiation between merchants and pirates in the first scene of \emph{A Christian Turn’d Turke} becomes especially noteworthy.\textsuperscript{55} Recognizing their captor as Captain Ward, the lord of the ocean, the French merchants mount a negotiation for their freedom that reads like a debate over economic policy.

As the 1609 \emph{Proclamation against piracy} demonstrates when it singles him out from other undesirable piratical trading partners, “Captaine John Ward” is the exemplary \textit{hostis humani generis}—the common enemy of all, a specter of statelessness—specifically because of his threat to English economic practices. \emph{A Christian Turn’d Turke}’s Captain Ward deviates from his historical counterpart in numerous well-documented ways, but regarding the pirate’s expulsion from England, Daborne’s portrayal is not only accurate, the play in fact anticipates the historical transformation of Ward into a figure of state-related economic tension: Ward’s expatriation is the heart of his threat to the French merchants, and the negotiation over their impressment is an index of anxiety about economic accountability to the state. When Gismund gives Captain Ward’s marquee introduction, he does so by deliberately mocking the form of the landed titles with which his audience would have been familiar:

\begin{quote}
Do you know this honorable shape? Heroic Captain Ward, lord of the ocean, terror to kings, landlord to merchants, rewarder of manhood, conqueror of the Western world, to whose followers the lands and seas pay tribute; and they to none but once in their lives to the manor of Wapping and then free ever after. This is he, my noble mummers. (1.21–7)
\end{quote}

Although this rehearsal of titles is meant to convey Ward’s power and influence over a vast geographical expanse, it names only one concrete location: Wapping. With this exception, the

\textsuperscript{54} Purchas, \textit{Hakluytus posthumus}, 242.  
titles are exceedingly vague—lord of which ocean, one might be tempted to ask, and conqueror of the entire Western world? A more typical rehearsal of titles, like the premature coronation of Cosroe in Marlowe’s 1 Tamburlaine, is an exercise of power balanced between geographical specificity and breadth; Cosroe, there, is “Emperor of Asia and Persia / Great lord of Media and Armenia / Duke of Africa and Albania / Mesopotamia and of Parthia / East India and the late discovered isles” (1.1.152–6). Especially for an English audience, who could not help but be aware of their nation’s encyclopedic system of peerage—and the indexical relationship between place and title—the lack of specificity would have been remarkable. Ward’s peculiarly oceanic authority is literally unplundered. It undermines the form of English peerage by rejecting geographical precision. According to Gismund’s description, the pirates embody a deferral of categories: not English, not merchant, and above all, not subject to a “home” or “country.”

Ward and his followers are attached, with a pride that rightly terrifies the French merchants, only to Wapping—where one could find pirate gallows on the north bank of the Thames. Paying tribute to the manor at Wapping is a fatal business, and many pirates did so. Numerous pamphlets describe simultaneous pirate executions in double digits; in 1609, one of the more popular such collections was Lives, apprehensions arraignments, and executions, of the 19. late pyrates. Nevertheless, Gismund’s description is more than a self-referential joke at the

56 David Bevington, gen. ed., Lars Engle et al. eds., Norton Anthology of Renaissance Drama (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004),
57 Compare this to obsessive correspondence between land and formal title elsewhere during the period. The insistence on this relationship was so great that dictionaries were printed to account for “all the present and ancient [place] names” in relationship to their lords. See Edmund Bohun, Geographical dictionary in which are represented all the present and ancient names (London: Brome, 1688). On titles and conventional English naming, see Lawrence Stone, The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558–1641 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 21–64.
58 Lives, apprehensions arraignments, and executions, of the 19. late pyrates (London: [Edward Allde, 1609]), C1r.
expense of their own mortality. As several of the accounts in 19. *late pyrates* describe, some pirates really did think of themselves as having a kind of share in the “manor of Wapping”; one Captain Harris, moments before his execution, was heard to declare “from a free and unburthened heart…I go…to make my death-bed at Wapping.” Like Ward’s, Harris’ metaphor may appear tongue-in-cheek, but by figuring Wapping as a place to make one’s bed, even if it is a death-bed, Wapping begins to look more a bit like domestic capital, as a kind of hazardous estate in which they bore the very real risk of being shareholders.

For Albert and Ferdinand, the horrifying prospect of impressment into piracy is rendered in similarly economic terms. When they finally find their voices after Gismund’s dire introduction, their response is to attempt to negotiate in terms of landed capital, with direct attention of economic accountability to their nation:

*Gismund*  …This is he, my noble mummers.
*Albert*  We are forever lost.
*Ferdinand*  If’t be our moneys that you covet, willingly we give it up. Only deprive us not of our fair home, our country: do but land us. (1.26–30)

The general idea of the pirate as determinedly nationless is hardly new, but Daborne’s Ward represents a unique articulation of this piratical standby, instilling in the French a terror poised somewhere between the merchants’ homeland and their “moneys.” They are apprehensive about Ward’s ability to dunk them, unwillingly, into a maritime identity organized by something

59 Ibid., C1r

60 Although they rarely venture into the early seventeenth century or deal with local economic policies as I do here, historians have long defended the pirate ship more generally as a political outlier for radicals and utopians. See, for example, Marcus Rediker, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Piracy in the Golden Age* (New York: Verso, 2004) and Christopher Hill, “Radical Pirates” *Collected Essays*, vol. 1 (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), 161–187. Michel Foucault moves beyond even these forms of alterity (political and economic) taking up the ship as the most complete of his “heterotopia,” or ‘other spaces’ more generally. Foucault, “Des Espace Autres,” *Architecture / Mouvement / Continuité* (March 1967).
like Hugo Grotius’ vision of political alterity: a sea “common to all” that exempts everyone not only from a national economic accountability to, but simultaneously strips them of their “fair home” or “country.” Yet even as Daborne’s debate engages with Grotius’ questions of the *mare liberum*, the positions of his pirates and merchants emerge as uniquely mercantilist—a matter of imaginatively-articulated economic policy more than a maritime territorial dispute. Within the negotiation over the impressment of the French, Daborne’s entrepreneurial pirates unsettle the early modern logic of national economic accountability, partly in view of the risk of execution and partly, I will argue, as an early entry into English conflict over mercantilism.

For Robert Daborne, the early modern distinction between the economic philosophies of pirates and merchants seems to have been a pressing question; for his mariners, it begins as not much more than an impressment joke. Initially, even the French have a hard time believing that Ward and Gismund are pirates: “Are you not merchants?” Albert asks, to which Gismund crows in reply, “How else? And deal by whole-sale, take up much at a long day” (1.19–20). Not only are they merchants, he jokes, but a sort of arch-merchants, better merchants—“wholesale[rs]” who profit, or “take up,” in accordance with their ambitious work ethic, their “long day[s].” But what is it, exactly, to “deal by wholesale?”

Like prostitution in London, to which (w)holesaling punningly alludes, piracy was near-ubiquitous, difficult to regulate, and often seen as eroding formal economic and domestic institutions. Thus when Gismund claims to “deal by wholesale” he appears to put the pirates in a mercantile bind. By implying that they trade in immense volumes—profusely and indiscriminately61—Gismund reinforces their arch-merchant status; by aligning them with an

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61 See *OED* 3rd ed., s.v. “wholesale” n. 1a, 2.
illicit market of bodies and holes, he has makes them dealers of “a product much sought after and yet eerily empty.” Jean Howard has pointed out how “the post-1546 decentralization of prostitution” allows Mistress Doll in Northward Ho (1605) to use her “eye to the main chance” for entrepreneurial profit. The root of the pun on “(w)holesale” for both pirates and prostitutes is their ability to make good on eroding regulations and a fragmenting market—to “take up much at a long day” by circumventing middlemen, retailers and regulators. In Westward Ho (1605), the original collaboration between Dekker and Webster, the merchant Justiano distinguishes between retailers and wholesalers in terms that evoke both his sexual and commercial endeavors:

Your vulgar and foure-peny-pen-men, that like your London Sempsters keep open shop, and sell learning by retaile, may keepe their beds, and lie at their pleasure: But we that edifie in priuate, and traffick by whole sale, must be vp with the lark….

The wholesaler, whether merchant or prostitute, is one who trades ambitiously, in private, and without an “open shop,” in an effort to evade regulation on their gray-market trade. By proudly touting themselves as “wholesale[rs],” Daborne’s pirates establish themselves as merchants who flout English maritime regulations precisely because they profit by the breakdown in a centralized market.

The negotiation between pirates and merchants in A Christian Turn’d Turke is part of the first rumblings in a debate over exports and monetary policy, one which would divide England in

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63 Ibid., 124.
64 My emphasis. The figure of Justiano is itself worth investigating: he is a successful merchant who plays at failure, and though he plays the wittol, has a loyal wife. Thomas Dekker and John Webster, Westward Hoe (London: [William Jaggard], 1607), B4r.
the early 1620s. Daborne’s pirates favor a form of free market capitalism, which is only enabled by uncoupling trade from the state—“venture” capitalism, quite literally—while the French merchants support a feudal model based on the expectation that international commerce should function as a sort of maritime rent, with a considerable portion of profit finding its way into the hands of the crown and associated institutions. Thus, much as in London’s contemporary mercantilist debates, *A Christian Turn’d Turke* responds to a deceptively difficult question about economic priority: ought a merchant think first of individual or national profit? Albert and Ferdinand attempt to “persuade [the pirates] out of [their] profession” (1.68) and Ward, for his part, argues for piracy by subverting prominent Jacobean metaphors that pointed to the dangers of global investment.

When they learn they are to be held captive, Albert and Ferdinand initially offer up “moneys,” explicitly attempting to negotiate in pecuniary terms, as though along the lines of the gambling they have just left off. In response, the pirates frame a denial in language remarkably attentive to commercial distinctions—for which the “monetary” denotes specie or actual coins, and for which the “economic,” is not far from the classical *œconomy*. Ward counters the merchants’ offer by explicitly shifting the stakes, at once confirming the hazard of denaturalization and its economic terms: “Know we have other use for you / Have not enticed you hither for your gold: / It is the man we want’” (1.31–3). Ward’s priority, like the merchants, is less monetary than economic—less interested in specie than in the means of production

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65 Gerard de Malynes, a prominent trade advisor to Parliament, had already written two influential tracts on these issues: *St George for England, allegorically described* (1601) and *The Treatise of the Canker of England’s Commonwealth* (1601). Later, the economist Edward Myselden and Thomas Mun, former director of the EIC, would contradict Malynes’ ideas to launch a pamphlet war and establish mercantilism as a field of proto-economics. For representative work, see Myselden, *Free Trade, or the Means to make Trade flourish* (1622); Mun, *Discourse of Trade from England the East Indies* (1621).
themselves: “man,” not “moneys.” In this chapter, “economic” concerns are those involving production, its regulation, and the rational choices which influence both. Dismissing the merchants’ plea for release, Ward uses a series of dense tropes to describe the conflict between a subject’s responsibility to national production and his or her capacity for international investment:

\[
\text{Ward} \quad \text{Is’t not a shame}
\]
\[
\text{Men of your qualities and personage}
\]
\[
\text{Should live as cankers, eating up the soil}
\]
\[
\text{That gave you being (like beasts that ne’er look further}
\]
\[
\text{Than where they first took food)? That men call “home”}
\]
\[
\text{Which gives them means equal unto their minds,}
\]
\[
\text{Puts them in action. (1.31–39; my emphasis)}
\]

At the heart of this knotty metaphor is a critique of state-oriented exchange. Ward implies that while domestic production is less risky, it is also inherently and “shame”-fully limited. To parse: domestic men of quality live as “canker” worms that also implicitly corrupt; they eat soil, but also the food of shiftless, homebody “beasts;” “home” itself is a layered abstraction that makes action possible only insomuch as it supplies resources for men’s ambitions, or “minds.” The metaphor is bizarrely complex, but Ward is saying that limiting merchants to a particular country detracted profoundly from their capacity to profit—both personally and systemically, on behalf of their “fair home.” These issues pressed heavily on English venturers in the first part of the seventeenth century, and what reads now as a broad bid for financial deregulation may have seemed in 1612 like a focused denouncement. Daborne plays on the popular figure of the “canker” to locate the pirates’ negotiation amid contemporary discussions of mercantilism,

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complicating Gerard de Malynes’ early condemnations of export and foreign investment while he was still a commissioner of the mint.67

During the same year that Malynes presented evidence to the House of Commons regarding insurance against maritime disaster, he published a tract titled The Treatise of the Canker of England’s Commonwealth (1601).68 In his Treatise, Malynes argues that the surest way toward national profit was domestic production.69 The problem, as he describes it, is fundamentally national—an issue of English competition against surrounding states in which, just as it is for Daborne’s Ward, the very earth is at stake: “our merchants buying deare, must sell deare, which bringeth a wonderfull overballancing, and causeth us to feede upon our native soile, giving the benefite thereof unto other Nations” (sig. D6v; my emphasis). For Malynes, if England maintained an export surplus it meant an imbalance in coinage—simple depletion of money, not exchange. The metaphors are more colorful: foreign trade consumes “native soile” at a net loss, implicitly reducing the ideal of England by reducing the land of the island itself.

Although Daborne’s Ward speaks too of “cankers, eating up the soil,” he reverses the economic implications of Malynes’ representation. From the piratical perspective, it is the _____________________________

69 Malynes condemns foreign trade on the grounds that Englishmen must literally give money away at the mercy of unfavorable exchange rates: “If the price of exchange be high beyond the seas, where generally our merchants are the deliverers of mony: then must they give much to have their monies made over, whereby the gaine of their commodities being sold formerly, is clipped” (sig. D5v; 42). As Jonathan Gil Harris explains, Malynes employed the canker as metaphor more to evoke alterations in the abstract value of English money amid the “unprecedented volatility of international exchange rates.” Harris, Sick Economies, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 93.
homebound merchants who are the canker-worms rather than those who trade freely. Merchants without an interest in expansion to foreign markets—in “look[ing] further,” as Ward puts it—are short-sighted ouroboros doomed to subsistence rather than profit. By the pirates’ metric, the soil-eating degradation of the canker occurs not because of over-trading, but out of under-ambitious foreign exchange: the resources of the nation are too long consumed to feed dull men with little means. For the pirates, “home” is only that space which equals the ambitions of its people—“which gives them means equal unto their minds.” In other words, Ward proposes that only the main sea can reward the ambitions of “men of your quality and personage,” and so Albert and Ferdinand ought to take up the citizenship of the ocean, the uncertain space of exchange itself. The stakes of expatriation are different for Ward and Malynes; a venture for the pirate is treason to the councilor, and the French merchants side with the Malynes. By engaging in such risky foreign exchange, they hazard Frenchness in the same way Captaine Ward—in Daborne’s play and in the proclamations of James I—has cast away his financial accountability to England.

Ferdinand and Albert disagree with Ward’s characterization of domestically-oriented merchants as cankers and frame a defense along Malynes’ lines, one that renders accountability to the state commensurate with economic policy. As Ferdinand and Albert figure it, national identity is managed through economic accountability to the state, and the effacement of that accountability is piracy’s primary risk, as well as it’s “theft most hateful” (1.58). Condemning piracy as theft and fearing it as a suspension of citizenship, distinct from the trade of the merchant, Ferdinand employs the specter of debt slavery in order to justify feudal mercantilism:

Ferdinand

Piracy, its theft most hateful, swallows up
The estates of orphans, widows, who—born free—
Are thus made slaves, enthralled to misery
By those that should defend them at the best.
You rob the venting merchants, whose manly breast
(Scorning base gain at home) puts to the main
With hazard of his life and state, from other lands
To enrich his own, whilst with ungrateful hands
He thus is overwhelmed. (1.58–66)

This is a complicated refutation of Ward’s case for financial deregulation which fails in part because of Ferdinand implicit concession to the pirates’ liquid, anti-mercantilist perspective. Even as he and Albert are on the verge of their own very-tangible impressment, Ferdinand insistently characterizes piracy as a disruption to the economic system more broadly. Piracy-as-theft, he argues, is not just physical theft: it creates an elision of capital, a default on investment without respect to place or country. It “swallows up” estates and places families in debt slavery, “enthralled to misery,” while the “venting merchant” hazards in direct variation to the enrichment of his own land. To be a pirate, as Daborne’s merchants propose it, is effectively to wager on debt—specifically, to wager on debt rendered to a state which is no longer theirs. For Ferdinand and Albert, wagering on the mercantile debt of France is as terrible a prospect as it was to Gerard de Malynes; a betrayal of the state, their “fair home.” Most critics see Ferdinand's attempt to negotiate with pirates in terms of economic policy as naïve given the “the inadequacy of their position,” which the game of hazard has already rendered so clearly.  

I would argue, instead, that it is not naïveté that prompts their misjudgment, but an increasingly outmoded economic model: a rational choice out of sync with Daborne’s Jacobean seas. The patriotic Frenchmen mistake the sea for a feudal commercial space, where trade-as-tribute constitutes

70 Jowitt’s reading diverges sharply from mine regarding the nature of the misunderstood terms. While I argue for the risk to political and economic identities, Jowitt sees the situation as most hazardous for its sexual anxiety: “Though [the merchants], unlike the pirates, try to argue that ‘hazard’ is more analogous with mercantile activity…than sex (which [Gismund]’s language invokes), their inability to understand the real nature of the peril they face shows the naïveté of their attitudes.” Jowitt, Voyage Drama, 165.
citizenship, but in the view of the pirates, value obtains instead by withholding such tribute, acting as “whole-salers,” in an unregulated market. The heart of the misunderstanding that critics like Jowitt have detected is not just that Albert and Ferdinand unwisely hope for maritime pacifism, but in the irony that they already employ the pirates’ policies, even if they do so inadvertently.

The fundamental object—the economic stakes—of the pirates’ negotiation is the association between the maritime entrepreneurship (merchants, pirates, investors) and the state. As Daborne’s debate makes clear, it is not at all a simple association. Historian Kenneth Andrews frames the complicated problem succinctly when he declares that “[t]rade and plunder were inseparable in the sixteenth century,” when Sir Francis Drake, plundering for the crown’s balance of trade, towered high in the English imagination. The primary difference in A Christian Turn’d Turke’s contemporary seas is England’s still-fresh, even conflicted, anxiety about that inseparability. So when Ferdinand proposes a model of trade in which merchants profit only insomuch as they benefit their home country, “from other lands to enrich his own,” he recalls an era in which nationality trumped the means of exchange. What Ward proposes, by contrast, is a forward-looking venture capitalism in which merchants’ profit are their own. Unattached to a king, country, or landlord, pirates offer tribute, as I have noted, but “once in their lives to the manor of Wapping and then free ever after” (1.25–6). Quite explicitly, then, the pirates’ model of maritime trade includes the continuous deferment of potential execution. Execution has never

71 Andrews, Elizabethan Privateering, 15.
72 As I allude to above, this was essentially the model by which merchant-statesmen and privateers operated prior to James’ ban on privateering in 1603. While some voyages were Crown-directed and others were free-wheeling, national loyalty guided both, as Andrews makes clear: these were “national undertakings in which the queen’s interest predominated, though her financial share might not be large” (5).
been a possibility for the pirates—English or impressed French—in the course of *A Christian Turn’d Turke*, however much they are aware of their share of risk in Wapping. Excluding themselves from their country of origin, they entertained a continuous state of uncertainty inherent in the elision of political identity. Ferdinand figures this elision as a physical “brand [upon] our foreheads,” a tangible condemnation of their separation from the state they should, instead, “enrich” (1.55–6, 65). Yet there is some irony to this condemnation, perhaps a way by which Daborne registered his ambivalence toward piracy and economic risk more broadly. Even as the merchants double down on their patriotic economic position, they re-characterize domestic production as “base gain at home,” and valorize the “hazard of his life and state” by which an idealized merchant would profit. The “state,” of course, is precisely what the pirates would have them hazard, or render uncertain, and precisely what Malynes would contend is never to be risked.\(^73\)

Ward’s piracy is represented, even by his captives, as a bold but bloodless investment for which the risk is more to “state” than “life.” This has not been the reading of most critics, including Jowitt, who asserts instead that “[m]orally, there is no doubt that the French merchants are correct in their position—piracy is a dangerous, bloody, and lawless affair.”\(^74\) But the conflict between the pirates and the merchants is strictly professional, an attempt on one side to “persuade [the pirates] out of [their] profession,” and on the other to convince the merchants that “men of your qualities and personage” should do as they themselves will later allow is the merchant’s ambition and “[scorn] base gain at home,” but in the form of the national allegiance

\(^73\) For a discussion of practical mercantilism, see: Irvin L. Jeffery, “Paradigm and Praxis: Seventeenth-Century Mercantilism and the Age of Liberalism” Ph.D. diss., (University of Toledo, 2008).

\(^74\) Jowitt, *Voyage Drama*, 165.
itself (1.68, 63). By debating the economic responsibilities implicit in their politicized identity, the French merchants sketch fearfully the uncertainty of the piratical “shape” even as they resign themselves to it, and to their identities’ suspension. It is Ferdinand, finally become a slave, who figures John Ward’s conversion to Islam in economic terms:

Ferdinand

Hear us but now,
We’ll forgive all our wrongs, with patience row
At the unwieldy oar; we will forget
That we were sold by you, and think we set
Our bodies against your soul, the dearest purchase
Of your Redeemer, that we regained you so.
Leave but this path damnation guides you to. (vii.259–265)

This is Daborne’s politic-but-indeterminate voice at its clearest. In what might seem like a suitable if tragic endpoint for an ex-merchant, ex-Frenchman captured by pirates, Ferdinand still attempts to negotiate an exchange: their bodies for Ward’s soul. But as Ward’s conversion will demonstrate, the market for souls is as ineffectively regulated as piracy, and this final attempt to negotiate with yet another form of (religious) identity proves rather less successful than their earlier, more rational economic one.

Whereas divers of the Ships, which were lately set to Sea in Our Fleete in October last, are expected shortly to arrive in some of Our Ports…no Souldier, which was imployed in any of those Ships, upon their arrivall in any Port of this our Realme…shall depart from his Colours, or be discharged from his Service…upon paine of the severest Punishments.

Commanding of all Soldiers…not to depart from their Colours (1625)75

2.4 Coda. Terms of Desertion

75 Proclamation for the Commanding of all Soldiers lately employed in the Fleet, upon their arrivall, not to depart from their Colours (London: Norton and Bill, 1625).
In Daborne’s *A Christian Turn’d Turke* the risk to national identity is organized by extrinsic terms, by political and economic responsibility. *Hamlet* and *2 Henry VI* also establish risk at the intersection of political uncertainty and personal identity, rendered variously through negotiations with stage pirates. To conclude this chapter, I turn to Philip Massinger’s *The Unnatural Combat* (1624–5), which features an inexplicable encounter between an admiral and his son, a pirate. The confrontation turns on the concealment of its motive, leaving the risk of negotiation to inhere in the terms themselves. The hazard of filial violence and political desertion are self-actualizing; they are the justification for the encounter as well as its stakes. Thus, the *Combat* represents pirate negotiation as a theatrical trope that reveals itself for what it is: a theatrical device asserting maritime risk at the intersection of politics and identity.

*The Unnatural Combat* is set in Marseille, a city besieged by a fleet of pirates. The leader of the pirates, Malefort Jr., is the son of the city-state’s celebrated Admiral Malefort. Their negotiation plays out in two complementary scenes: first, through a challenge delivered during Malefort Sr.’s treason hearing, and immediately after when father and son debate the uncertain terms of the betrayal. Each of these instances foregrounds the messy conflation of political and filial stakes without revealing a motive; the negotiation is the thing itself, a spectacle of political uncertainty and maritime risk. When the play begins, Malefort Sr. has been placed on trial for treason, “all presuming / The world of outrages his impious sonne, / Turn’d worse than Pirat in his cruelties / Expres’d to this poor Country could not be / With such ease put in execution” without the aid of the father (1. 1.139–143).76 In short, Massinger’s Marseille imagines it is about to be raided by a pirate fleet whose siege has been facilitated by their leader’s treasonous

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father. The trial of Malefort Sr. is initially strictly political, a matter of national loyalty and “the
ruine of Marsellis!” (1.1.262). When a captain from the pirate fleet interrupts the trial, the nature
of the conflict changes abruptly; he comes with a formal challenge from Malefort Jr., the pirate
admiral, not to the city but to the person of his father:

Sea Captain He does salute you fairely, and desires
   It may be understood no publike hate,
   Hath brought him to Marsellis, nor seekes he
   The ruine of his countrie, but aimes only
   To wreake a private wrong; and if from you
   He may have leave, and liberty to decide it
   In a single combate, he'll give up good pledges
   If he fall in the triall of his right,
   Wee shall waigh anchor and no more molest
   This towne with hostile armes. (1.1.349–58)

What appeared to be a military threat is revealed instead as intensely personal, a matter of
“private wrong.” And yet, the terms presented by the sea captain turn on both elements. The
challenge seems conflicted, occluded by its own description: even “wreak[ing] a private wrong”
between father and son will obviously have implications for the city of Marseille when the son is
an admiral whose fleet will “waigh anchor” in the event of his loss. Compare this situation to
Turke’s debate between Ward and the merchants, or the screed delivered to Suffolk by the
pirates. In those encounters, hazardous economic and political consequences of piracy come to
animate negotiations and give them their implicit risk. For Suffolk, ransom negotiations turn on
socioeconomic implications; for Ward and the merchants, economic policy positions constitute
or efface national identity. Marseille is more like Denmark, where the consequence of
negotiation—Hamlet’s survival—clarifies both what was at stake and the negotiation itself. This
encounter stands for itself: the risk inherent in the terms of this conflict—desertion, treachery—is also its motivation.

This works in large part because Massinger conceals the motivation for Malefort Jr.’s challenge. The concealment is crucial to the structure of the play: it refuses ethical knowledge, as well as any knowledge about the implications of the duel. It can be read only for the frame it sets up, for the terms of its engagement. For the moment, the Maleforts’ encounter has only form—no content. Both Marseille and the pirates are baffled; the challenge is — “[s]trange and prodigious,” “[w]ondrous strange,” “[p]ast my apprehension”—but even in the face of this constant confusion, neither man will articulate the cause of the siege or the challenge (1.1.361, 2.1.29–30). The son pleads “from my grieved soul” for an explanation of some unidentified “deed of horror,” but Malefort Sr. responds with vacuous finality: “mountaines sooner fall / Beneath their vallies… Ere my tongue / In one short sillable yeelds satisfaction / To any doubt of thine (2.1.145–6, 154–5, 157–9). Without an ethical or narrative basis, the encounter consists entirely of its form—its terms.

The terms of Malefort Jr.’s challenge remain indexical, recursive. When those terms are questioned to glean the stakes of the encounter, they only point to themselves. The political stakes are also personal stakes, the personal stakes political. The risk of desertion and filial disloyalty are simultaneously, precisely, what Malefort Jr.’s representative articulates when he

77 Massinger does not reveal until the fifth act that the situation is typically Jacobean familial-grotesque. Upon the death of his daughter, Malefort Sr. confesses “that my lust compelling me to make way / For a second wife, I poison’d [the first], and that / The cause (which to the world is undiscover’d) / That forc'd thee to shake off [my son’s] filial duty” (5.2.286–90).
proposes “single combate…the triall of his right.” Discussions that animate a growing risk of desertion and betrayal are organized around negotiations based on those actions. Even after Malefort Sr. has accepted his son’s challenge of a duel to the death, the cause of the conflict remains obscured by its terms, or “articles.” The pirate captains emphasize the recursive quality of the challenge, only to turn again to fruitless questions about cause:

2 Captain Did he accept the challenge then? 
1 Captain Nay more, 
Was overjoy’d in’t…
3 Captain Are the articles Sign’d to on both parts?
1 Captain At the father’s suit 
With much unwillingnesse the governour Consented to ‘em.
2 Captain You are inward with Our Admirall; could you yet never learne What the nature of the quarrell is, that renders The sonne, more then incensed, implacable Against the father?
1 Captain Never. (2.1.1–2, 6–12)

There is a kind of exasperation here—“could you never yet learne?”—in having to admit to continued ignorance. The captains reinforce for one another that the roots of Malefort Jr.’s challenge are also its branches: there are no knowable stakes beyond the “articles / sign’d to.” Even those articles consist mostly of the relationship between the challengers: “sonne and father,” pirate and statesman.

There are no stage directions for the duel in The Unnatural Combat’s only printing (Q, 1639), and when it does occur it is still overshadowed by a discursive frame. For eight or nine lines, father and son spar verbally “in a perplext form and method,” over the connection between risk, deed, and filial piety: “Who train’d thee up in armes but I? Who taught thee / Men were
men onely when they durst looke downe / With scorne on death and danger” (2.1.168–70). The duel itself is traceable only by subdued commentary from onlookers:

\begin{tabular}{ll}
\textit{Beaufort Sr.} & They are at it. \\
\textit{2 Captain} & That thrust was put strongly home. \\
\textit{Monterville} & But with more strength avoided. \\
\textit{Belgarde} & Well come in, \\
& He has drawn blood of him, yet well done old Cocke. \\
\textit{1 Captain} & That was a strange miss. \\
\textit{Beaufort Jr.} & That a certain hit. \\
\textit{Belgarde} & He’s fallen, the day is ours. \textit{Young Malefort slain.} \\
\end{tabular}

The combat is ultimately anti-climactic, soon bypassed for more pressing affairs (more murder, more betrayals, and incest). It matters less as a spectacle than as the culmination of pirate negotiation—only because the audience has been made so breathlessly and tiresomely aware of its recursive stakes. I have been arguing for the previous pirate encounters that risk inheres in the negotiation around hazardous events rather than their often-literal execution, but this has never been so clear as in the \textit{Combat}. Here, the distinction between the nature of terms and the nature of hazard are collapsed: the hazard presented by piracy inheres directly in the actions of the pirate.

The overlap between identity and politics in \textit{Combat} corresponds in part to England’s shifting naval policy; it was becoming easier, again, to think of pirates as part of the state.\footnote{Jowitt contends that piracy in \textit{The Unnatural Combat} expresses “dissatisfaction with Stuart rule” through attacks on “James and his policies.” Alternatively, I read the \textit{Combat} looking forward rather than backward, affirming Charles’ concern with desertion as a serious risk in a new maritime era. For readings of the \textit{Combat} as Jacobean political critique see: Jowitt, \textit{“Pirate Typology,” Culture of Piracy}, 192–8 and \textit{“Piracy and Court Scandals in Massinger’s Unnatural Combat,” Cahiers Elisabethans 67} (2005): 33–42; Margot Heinemann, \textit{“Drama and opinion in the 1620s: Middleton and Massinger,” Theatre and Government Under the Early Stuarts} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 237–266.} After the ascension of Charles I in 1625, the state’s relationship to piracy began to tack. Throughout the earliest part of the seventeenth century, the prime concern of the Crown had been the
tendency of ex-privateers to assault the merchant fleets of other state powers. The rearrangement of naval priority that accompanied the end of James’ monarchy soon saw English pirates not as loose cannons aimed at the Mediterranean but as indirect threats within England itself. This is because piracy represented a tempting alternative for young English conscripts: the profitability and cultural freedoms of piracy made navy sailors into flight risks. The proclamation in my epigraph, Commanding of all Soldiers...not to depart from their Colours, establishes the logistical problems of maintaining a navy: “those Souldiers, who, should they retire themselves and be dis-banded, should not be easily gathered together again.” This way, Charles hoped to avoid a bleed-into-piracy similar to the one that followed his predecessor’s ban on privateering in 1603. When Massinger takes up this problem, pirate negotiation is the surest medium to deliver the risk of desertion, even in the absence of a motive.

Unnatural Combat’s direct treatment of the anxiety over desertion demonstrates that even at the spectacular end of Jacobean drama, negotiation remains the site of risk. It is still the means by which the consequence of piracy is qualified—political, economic, identitarian, mortal—and thus the means by which the risk of pirates is articulated. Massinger’s play marks a key transformation in the infamously violent and unmanageable relationship between English maritime policy and her ex-privateers, in all the forms mapped out by Shakespeare’s mariners’, Purchas’ accounts, and Daborn’s Captain Ward. Each of the texts dealt with in this chapter

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80 Even the tone regarding Turkish pirates was shifting during the 1620s. Redemption and recovery narratives are increasingly common in drama—as in Massinger’s more famous play The Renegado (1622)—as well as in prose. See, for example: John Rawlins, The Famous and Wonderful Recovery of a Ship of Bristol, Called the Exchange, from the Turkish Pirates of Argier, (London: For Nathanial Butter, 1622). Reprinted in Vitkus and Matar, Piracy, Slavery and Redemption, 96–120.

81 For the economic logic of pirate desertion especially for naval deserters, see: Leeson, Invisible Hook, 159–178.

82 Proclamation for the Commanding of all Soldiers lately imployed in the Fleet, vpon their arrivall, not to depart from their Colours (London: Norton and Bill, 1625).
figures hazard in discursive play between political uncertainty and personal identity. The *Combat* formalizes that figure in Malefort Jr. and his challenge: the prodigal pirate-son is an embodiment of risk for a changing regime anxious about desertion. Massinger’s play returns to the directness of *Hamlet*, for which the consequences of piracy inhere in the very terms of their negotiation; there is no mistaking the programmatic articulation of filial loss, or of the risk to Marseille, in Malefort’s challenge to his father. The troubled spectacle of 2 *Henry VI* and *Turke*’s complex debates are here reduced to their essential element; in the *Combat*, Massinger isolates the element of negotiation, clarifying it as the theatrical technology that articulates what is at stake in a pirate encounter.
The Company furnished the Plantations with 6000 *Negroes* and upwards every year; which were more than they would buy of the Company, who were forced to keep many of them on their hands until they perished.

*An Answer of the Company of Royal Adventurers of England Trading into Africa* (1667)

3.1 Enslavement: Risk in the Market for Perishable Bodies

The early modern English stage rarely addresses the burgeoning Atlantic slave trade, and when it does, it approaches the matter obliquely. This chapter examines two such moments: scenes of human sale in Christopher Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta* (1589) and Shakespeare’s *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* (1608); in the first case, Marlowe presents a fully-realized slave market for “Grecians, Turks, and Afric Moors,” (2.2.9) and in the second, Shakespeare surrounds the sale of Pericles’ daughter Marina to a brothel with the theatrical tropes of the clever slave. In both cases, the plays emphasize the economic risk undertaken on both sides of the exchange—buy the buyers and the sellers of slaves. For Barabas, the titular figure in *The Jew of Malta*, the purchase of a slave, Ithamore, is a way to shift markets—from trade in gems to murder; for *Pericles*’ Bawd and Pander, buying the virgin Marina is defers bankruptcy by addressing the pathological problems of the sex-trade. Ithamore and Marina are valuable precisely because their bodies are disposable, because they serve as vessels for the risk which their owners would otherwise face;

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2 David Bevington, gen. ed., *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2002), 311. All subsequent citations of Marlowe’s play are from this edition and will be parenthetical by act, scene, and line number.
the stage makes a spectacle of their frailty. Yet it is from their position as perishable bodies that both Ithamore and Marina marshal their own devices, their own tricks, to manage the risk of their own enslavement.

Both *The Jew of Malta* and *Pericles* are concerned with the interplay between economic policies, the state, and venturers. By staging slaves as vendible objects who are themselves capable of action, these plays represent the slave trade as a troubling way through new economic policies. For the slaves themselves, the problem is concretized in their own bodies; their very perishability means they become financial instruments to owners for whom their death represents the maturation of an investment. In these two plays, this process manifests in performative devices. Both slaves execute tricks, instigating duels, exchanging letters, performing piety, singing; these performances are ways of managing the risk which has been displaced onto their very bodies. For Ithamore, these tricks ultimately turn too far. In the case of Marina, the performance of tricks not only manages risk but results in profit, and preserves her own perishable body. To early modern Londoners, the stage device of the slave’s trick would have seemed familiar from the Plautine topos of the clever slave or servant, but slavery as an explicit trade in human persons may have seemed foreign.

While Sir John Hawkins had been celebrated for the exceptional profits of his slave-trading expeditions in 1562, 1564, and 1567, the English were nevertheless haughty about the

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fundamental incompatibility of enslavement with their nation.\textsuperscript{4} A 1569 court case involving a Russian slave on English soil gave self-righteous Londoners a point of reference for their dismissal of domestic slavery. Although no records from the case itself remain, its expression quickly became one of the definitive judgments on England’s relationship to the slave trade:

In the Eleventh of Elizabeth [1569], one Cartwright brought a Slave from Russia, and would scourge him, for which he was questioned; and it was resolved, That England was too pure an Air for Slaves to breath in. And indeed it was often resolved, even in Star-Chamber, That no Gentleman was to be whipt for any offence whatsoever; and his whipping was too severe.\textsuperscript{5}

The central image is strange. The expression that that England is “too pure an Air for Slaves to breath in,” is almost emblematic—a clear, definitive vision of a nation obsessed especially during this period with its own national image. Yet part of the expression’s appeal is in its ambiguity. It appears to mean two contradictory things: first, that no base slave could survive in the rarified air of England, but also, perhaps, that the air of England would as though by natural force make any slave who breathed it free. The image held persistent appeal, and it is reused, revised, and reinterpreted for centuries. More than two centuries later, Granville Sharpe explicated the image in the latter way, describing the verdict of \textit{Somerset v. Stewart} (1772) by declaring the air of England as a kind of panacea: “everyone who breathes it becomes free.”\textsuperscript{6}

And yet this did not prevent the dregs of English villeinage, nor did it prevent Mansfield, in


\textsuperscript{5} John Rushworth, “Historical Collections: 1637 (3 of 5),” \textit{Historical Collections of Private Passages of State: Volume 2, 1629–38} (London, 1721), 461–481.

\textsuperscript{6} Another record of the Earl of Mansfield’s verbal capitulation in \textit{Somerset v. Stewart} has it that “this air is too pure for a slave to breathe in: I trust, I shall not quit this Court without certain conviction of the truth of that assertion.” See the court records at 98 ER 499, (1772); 20 State Tr 1, (1772).
Somerset v. Stewart, from calling slavery “odious”—a remarkable turn of phrase, given the sense of the slave as subject to atmospheric ephemera, or to English culture.

English mariners had been involved in various institutionalized forms of early capitalist enslavement at least since Hawkins’ voyages in the 1560s, and English traffic with human bondage had gone on for far longer. Nevertheless, in the English imagination around the turn of the seventeenth century, as several scholars have recently shown, slavery was a form of bondage leveled against the English. One point of origin for this can be located in the Anglo-Spanish War, which “was easily couched as a struggle between freedom and slavery, [feeding] into the notion that the English were, ipso facto, anti-slavery.” Another is to be found in England’s protracted political and religious conflict with Turkey, which came to a kind of head in 1621 when James I sent the fleet of Sir Robert Mansell against Algiers in a failed attempt to wrench back his countrymen. Undaunted, Turkish statesmen, merchants, and pirates continued to capture and sell Englishmen with such impunity that by 1624 a complaint to the House of Lords on behalf of 1,500 “English Captives, under the miserable Oppression of the Turks, in Algier, Tunis, Sally, and Tituane” prompted a general “Collection through the whole Kingdom of England, for Redemption of those miserable Captives.” As Roslyn Knutson has explained, rather than being

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7 A search for the origin of such practices quickly leads toward English chronicles, where pseudo-mythical Albion’s inhabitants are often the victims of enslavement, as when William Harrison laments, “Oh how miserable was the estate of our countrie under the French and Normans…. Oh what numbers of all degrees of English and British were made slaves and bondmen, and bought and sold as oxen in open market!” Raphael Holinshed, The First and Second Volumes of Chronicles (London, 1587), 7.


9 Guasco, Slaves and Englishmen, 20.

a unique event, whole sets of Christian practices grew up around the persistent Mediterranean market for the “redemption” of captive Englishmen. The market was funded largely by charitable English parishioners, though venturing companies and English pirates had their turns. In Samuel Gardiner’s *Cognizance of a True Christian* (1597), almsgiving and ransoming are twinned; it is the final and perhaps most generous form of charity to “aidest him that is oppressed with injurie, with thy authoritie and counsell: thou dost hearten the afflicted soule with godly comfort if thou ransomest the prisoner.”

The practices associated with the late sixteenth-century Mediterranean trade in English and Turkish captives appear on the London stage primarily as a device for demonstrating unerring Christian resilience in the face of threatening Muslim conversion. In Robert Daborne’s *A Christian Turn’d Turke* (1612), for example, this role is allotted to Albert and Ferdinand, two French captives of the infamous English pirate Captain John Ward. Even after Ward has sold the Frenchmen in Tunis, they persist in their attempt to ransom the pirate captain’s soul: “we will forget / That we were sold by you, and think we set / Our bodies gainst’ your soul.” Although Albert and Ferdinand are unsuccessful in preserving Ward, their effort lends support to the sense that English politicians may have avoided the condemnation of slavery by reframing it as a

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12 Even John Ward, the piratical English anti-hero, is reported to have made a habit of ransoming English slaves along the north African coast. See Daniel J. Vitkus’ introduction to *Three Turk Plays from Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 27–8.

13 *The cognizance of a true Christian, or the outward markes whereby he may be the better knowne: consisting especially in these two duties: fasting and giuing of almes: verie needfull for these difficult times* (London: Thomas Creede, 1597), H4r.

spiritual opportunity for the devoted Christian.\textsuperscript{15} As Thomas Dekker declares in his 1608 prayer book, \textit{Foure Birds of Noahs Arke}, “A Christian can take no hurt by beeing throwne into [Turkish] [\textit{sic}] captiuity, for euen in those his fetters, wil his God come to him.”\textsuperscript{16} Other plays are even more optimistic. In Philip Massinger’s \textit{The Renegado} (1624), Antonio Grimaldi—a pirate turned Turk for commercial benefit—is redeemed religiously and politically by the play’s faux-Italian protagonist, Vitelli. In such cases the focus of the drama is consistently on Christians \textit{not} ‘turning Turk’ or on the redemption of the lapsed, rather than what one might imagine as an attractive alternative: the conversion to Christianity of captive Turks. This omission is even broader than it might initially seem.

Despite the widespread English awareness of slavery as an economic or market-driven set of religio-political practices, and despite a more hesitant acknowledgement of increasing English involvement in the market for redemption and enslavement around the turn of the seventeenth century, there are only two plays extant from the public stage that feature a slave market. One is Fletcher and Massinger’s \textit{A Very Woman} (1634) and the other is Christopher Marlowe’s \textit{Jew of Malta} (1589).\textsuperscript{17} They underscore the silence of the six-thousand men and women whose deaths constituted credit for the Royal African company. Where was slavery on the public stage? Where was the slave-trade, already in fully-institutionalized-swing well before

\textsuperscript{15} For the development of this argument, see Carolyn Prager, “‘Turkish’ and Turkish Slavery: English Renaissance Perceptions of Levantine Bondage,” \textit{Centerpoint} (Fall 1976), 57–64.
Walter Cohen has evocatively described such omission on the scale of a global market as a failure of economic perception: “[w]here Shakespeare could not see, we too remain blind.” Yet, what for Cohen was a matter of rapacious capitalism, for the present case is a matter specifically of the conversion of human persons into instruments of credit used to manage risk. In spectacles of enslavement, and especially in the omission of scenes of a slave-trade, “[t]he plays are thus an early but unwitting witness to a continuing dilemma.”

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Cuculo
That’s he.
He never fails monthly to sell his slaves here;
He buys them presently upon their taking,
And so disperses them to every market.

Merchant
Begin the song, and chant it merrily.

Fletcher and Massinger, *A Very Woman* (1634)

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3.2 Maltese Policy in *The Jew of Malta’s* Slave Market

Christopher Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta* turns on a protracted scene of enslavement that is one of only two slave markets I have been able to locate in the drama of early modern London. On the face of it, the claim that Marlowe’s scene is of such a rare sort—one of two slave markets—

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18 Although 1619 is a typical date for fixing the origin point of English (and American) involvement in the Atlantic slave-trade, I agree with Michael Guasco that the date is not only late but in certain ways an occlusion of the endurance of the enslaved. As Guasco asserts, “[t]he ‘from-this-point-forward’ and ‘in-this-place’ narrative arc silences the memory of the more than 500,000 African men, women, and children who had already crossed the Atlantic against their will.” Michael Guasco, “The Misguided Focus on 1619 as the Beginning of Slavery in the U.S. Damages Our Understanding of American History,” September 13, 2017.


21 The other is in Fletcher and Massinger’s *The Very Woman, or The Woman’s Plot*, quoted in the above epigraph, probably written amid the glut of maritime drama around 1621. The play resembles several of Massinger’s other contemporary works involving pirates and political drama, and additionally features this slave market, which is described as a monthly event in Palermo, Italy.
appears so unlikely that one is made to call to mind scenes of outright slavery, impressment, debt bondage, captivity, ransom, sex trafficking, and other subjugation of all kinds. Of these there are many and various, too many to account for: captivity in Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* (1587); ransom in Shakespeare’s *2 Henry VI* (1594) and embodied debt in *The Merchant of Venice* (1596); impressment in Dekker’s *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* (1599) and debt bondage added to that in Daborne’s *A Christian Turn’d Turke* (1612); sex trafficking in Shakespeare’s *Pericles* (1608); captivity and subjugation a raft of Fletcher and Massinger’s maritime dramas: *The Sea Voyage* (1621), *The Double Marriage* (1622), *The Unnatural Combat* (1625); and finally, the single other market in Massinger’s strange late play *A Very Woman*. In spite of the early modern theater’s overabundance of subjugation in all these forms, Marlowe’s play gives us the Elizabethan theater’s only scene with a systematic exchange of enslaved persons—the only scene that could motion effectively toward what would come to be understood, but not for nearly a century, as a systemic English “slave-trade.”

The titular *Jew of Malta* is the merchant Barabas, an exceedingly wealthy man with a fortune built through a combination of high-return long-haul merchant ventures and conservative wealth-management. The traffic of his ships is described in the sort of comforting detail that Shakespeare’s Antonio in *Merchant of Venice* (1596) could only envy:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barabas</th>
<th>How now?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Merchant</td>
<td>Barabas, thy ships are safe,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Riding in Malta road; and all the merchants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>With other merchandise are safe arrived,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>And have sent me to know whether yourself</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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22 See OED, 3rd ed., s.v. “slave-trade” n.1. “Traffic in slaves; spec. the former transportation of black Africans to America.” Although the OED’s earliest citation is 1734, this seems quite late. *An Answer of the Company of Royal Adventurers of England trading into Africa* (1667) regularly employs the phrase “Trade in Negroes.”
Striking about this discourse in the first act is its emphasis on a mercantile paradox: numerous incoming reports confirm the physical safety and financial surety of Barabas’ ventures, even as those very same reports insist on the extraordinary hazards implicit in his investments. This is not to say that Barabas is not anxious, like Antonio, about the status of his ships and goods. He is, and implies as much by asking insistently, “And saw’st thou not / Mine argosy at Alexandria? (1.1.71–2). In response, the first merchant can only marvel at Barabas’ willingness to venture so boldly:

First Merchant
I neither saw them nor inquired of them.
But this we heard some of our seamen say:
They wondered how you durst with so much wealth
Trust such a crazéd vessel and so far. (1.1.77–80)

There is some tension in Marlowe’s depiction of the boundary between the mercantile and the financial. As David Thurn has noted, not only is “the Jew…a great merchant who risks his resources in crazed vessels buffeted by chance winds, Barabas also appears in a dazzling surfeit of selfish gain: the movement of the opening sequence quickly produces an impression that these are investments with guaranteed returns.”23 Sitting in his counting house, the merchant mulls over his trade “in metal of the purest mold… / [b]ags of fiery opals, sapphires amethysts,” calculating “[s]o that of thus much that return was made”:

Barabas
This is the ware wherein consists my wealth;
And thus, methinks, should men of judgement frame

23 David H. Thurn, “Economic and Ideological Exchange in Marlowe’s ‘The Jew of Malta’” Theatre Journal, Vol. 46, No. 2 (May, 1994), 163. By importing the tired contemporary division between usury and trade, into a monologue without a single reference to usury, Thurn is one of several critics to miss the thrust of Barabas opening speech.
Their means of traffic from the vulgar trade,
And as their wealth increaseth, so enclose
Infinite riches in a little room. (1.1.33–7)

This enthusiastic discourse of devil-may-care venturing in high-value goods marks Barabas out not only from other merchants but also from other Jewish stage-Machiavels—Shylock chief among them—for whom usury is the ultimate or primary source of income. Barabas’ profit is elsewhere: in long-haul venturing with unregulated luxury goods taken at high price and high risk. Marlowe goes to some length, in this first act, to emphasize the materiality of Barabas’ trade and their profits: if not a “vulgar trade,” his practice is nevertheless far from the ephemerality of usury or other financial approaches more suited to the redistributive state which Marlowe’s Malta is in the process of becoming.

Barabas’ persistent mercantile braggadocio is matched, for the rest of the act, by quiet securities which soothe his financial concerns. In response to the merchant’s accusation that he trusts a “crazéd vessel,” Barabas responds dismissively, “Tush, they are wise! I know her and her strength,” and then moments later, once the merchant exits, he can’t help but anxiously “wonder at this argosy” (1.1.81, 84). When in the next line, a second merchant enters with news of that very “argosy from Alexandria,” now safely arrived in the Maltese harbor, it can hardly feel unexpected (1.1.85). More surprising is the merchant’s news of “a Spanish fleet… / That had the galleys of the Turk in chase,” which will irrevocably drive Barabas out of the market in high-risk luxury goods toward the purchase of a slave, altering the structure and theatrical mechanics of the play accordingly.

Critics have often noted that while *The Jew of Malta’s* first half celebrates the merchant’s magisterial grasp of commercial practices, things come unhinged as the play progresses. The
Jewish merchant morphs suddenly, in the second act, into a Jewish villain, perpetrating increasingly horrifying acts of questionable vengeance and unmitigated brutality. Explanations for this have diverged. It was once infamously the case that Jew of Malta was a multiple-author, “bad” play for failing to reconcile the apparent dichotomy between the magisterial commercialism of the first half and the farcically violent devices of the second. There are softer ways of framing this, although strange ones: for example, Alan Friedman’s reparative reading situates a paradoxical cohesion in “Barabas’ decreasing ability to circumscribe events,” but finds no theatrical impetus for his progressive unraveling. Emily Bartels, also writing against the tendency to divide the play into halves and discredit its unity, argues that “the discrepancy within his characterization extends throughout the text and emerges not as a textual problem but as a strategy of representation,” which reveals the difficulty of stereotyping Marlowe’s Jew. Yet none of these critics, although committed to a vision of Jew of Malta as divided, pays much attention to the spectacle which nevertheless splits the play into its constituent halves. I will not argue that Jew of Malta is the work of multiple authors, or that it is a bad play, or that it devolves into farce, but that there is a turn toward the end of the second act from something like a merchant play—what might have been a city comedy—into a revenge drama. The cause of this

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25 Like all such accusations, this one is simultaneously always already in the past and an ever-present anxiety. T.S. Eliot, an appropriately dated voice, writes that only “if one takes The Jew of Malta not as a tragedy or a ‘tragedy of blood,’ but as a farce, [does] the concluding act becom[e] intelligible.” The Sacred Wood and Major Early Essays (New York: Dover, 1998), 53.


turn is no mystery. Perhaps only the insistent discussion of Barabas’ self-fashioning has drowned out the theatrical event which clearly marks the shift from merchant to Machiavel: a slave market.28 The spectacle of enslavement toward the The Jew of Malta’s second act relocates Malta’s economic interests, torqued and disfigured, in the enslaved body of Ithamore the Turk. As I will show, the slave trade in Marlowe’s The Jew of Malta is figured as a market for perishable bodies; Ithamore is a slave who turns to theatrical devices—“trick[s]—in order to redistribute risk from Barabas’ body to his own.

As I have shown above, early modern Londoners preferred to imagine themselves as alienated from the slave-trade, economically, rhetorically and representationally. Perhaps by reason of this supposed alienation, Marlowe’s play takes some pains to demonstrate how a slave market would operate, first in terms of the simple mechanics of pricing and assessment. Although the London audiences of The Jew of Malta would have had some familiarity with the concept of a slave market from foreign references, it would been natural to think of slave markets as occurring elsewhere, often in a Spanish or Turkish context. It is impossible to say for sure how often or whether slave markets might have been held in London, or Liverpool, during this period; there is no record of such events occurring during the 16th century.29 Thus even the representation of one, as here in The Jew of Malta, may well have been a remarkable spectacle. Yet as I will show, Malta’s changing economic policies make the slave market also a showcase for the disconcerting abstraction of a human person from a laboring body to a medium of risk displacement.

The Spanish fleet arrives in Malta just after the arrival of Barabas’ “argosy from Alexandria;” they are just in time to persuade the Maltese leadership to break their “tributary league” with the Turkish bashaws (2.2.24). The Spanish Vice-Admiral Martin del Bosco’s rhetoric of persuasion is political, a bid for military force in the service of empire: “My lord and king hath title to this isle, / And he means quickly to expel [the Turks] from hence” (2.2.37–8). Compelling as this promise may sound, the real substance of del Bosco’s proposal—and his motivation for offering military aid—is tacked to the establishment of a new market which will allow him to unload his ship’s human cargo:

Del Bosco  
Our freight is Grecians, Turks, and Afric Moors.  
For late upon the coast of Corsica,  
Because we vailed not to the Turkish fleet  
Their creeping galleys had us in the chase;  
But suddenly the wind began to rise,  
And then we luffed, and tacked, and fought at ease.  
Some have we fired, and many have we sunk,  
But one amongst the rest became our prize.  
The captain’s slain; the rest remain our slaves,  
Of whom we would make sale in Malta here. (2.2.9–18)

As I have described above, this sort of thing was not uncommon in reverse: so long as it was Christians captured by Turks or pirates, the opportunity for religious redemption made enslavement good theater. The situation in The Jew of Malta is quite different. There is no sense that del Bosco’s “Grecians, Turks, and Afric Moors” are in need of redemption, or have it available to them. On the contrary, the introduction of the Spanish slaves calls upon The Jew of Malta to make room for a marketplace, a spectacle that sets itself apart in its marked physicality.

The Governor of Malta, Ferneze, anticipates the inherent theatricality of such a market when he gives his permission for its establishment: “On this condition shall thy Turks be sold.— / Go, officers, and set them straight in show” (2.2.41–2). Marlowe sets up the slave market as The Jew of Malta’s central spectacle, an enactment of enslavement and of economic conversion: commodities who were once men, now bodies for the displacement of the risk which will be performed in Barabas’ later treacheries.

Marlowe’s play is so self-conscious about the introduction of the market as a spectacle that it might seem to serve as an example for Londoners, still largely unfamiliar with the mechanics of the early slave-trade. In the 1633 quarto, the stage direction reads “Enter Officers with slaves,” and those officers immediately demarcate the stage as an economic space:

| First Officer | This is the marketplace; here let’em stand.  
|              | Fear not their sale, for they’ll be quickly bought. |
| Second Officer | Every one’s price is written on his back,  
|                | And so much must they yield or not be sold.  
|                | Enter Barabas. |
| First Officer | Here comes the Jew. Had not his goods been seized,  
|              | He’d give us present money for them all. (2.3.1–6) |

In spite of this dire introduction, Barabas does not engage the officers nor the slaves for nearly one-hundred lines. Instead, he ruminates on “swine-eating Christians,” and begins the process of entrapping his daughter’s suitor Lodowick. Taking into account the stage direction of the quarto, “Enter Officers with slaves,” it would seem as though the dialogue between Barabas and Lodowick happens to one side, while the officers arrange their several slaves—“here let’em stand”—positioning them prominently in the middle of the stage. By the time the merchant and his companion turn to the slave market, Marlowe’s audience would have had ample time to

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consider the emphatically embodied scene laid out in front of them. If critics have been perplexed by Barabas’ actions late in the play, it is in part because they have misread his early policy—“the need for a site of permanence and economic security”—as his only policy, when in fact he is insistent about reframing his behaviors in the context of Ithamore, his slave, a vessel for risk who enables him to reimagine his policies and those of the Maltese state. Barabas may once have been a careful merchant, but the discourse around the purchase of slaves suggests that he has changed: rather than resist the political and economic shifts in the state of Malta, the Jew recognizes and adapts to this instability, buying Ithamore to serve him as a device at once theatrical and financial.

Barabas’ growing bitterness turns on the collision of politics and economics implicit in *The Jew of Malta*’s organizing conflict. In an earlier exchange that marks out Malta’s crisis as a failing tributary to Spain, Ferneze decides to repay the city-state’s vast debt by levying a discriminatory tax. The Governor maintains the distance of a politician, weaponizing the abstraction available to the Maltese state by framing the new tax as unavoidable at the several removes of a bureaucracy. These are the “articles of our decrees,” numbered and read from papers by a functionary knight of Malta: “[f]irst, the tribute money of the Turks shall all be levied amongst the Jews, and each of them to pay one half of his estate” (1.2.67–70). Barabas, who mistakenly supposed that strangers and Maltese alike might contribute “equally” to this tribute, is shocked: “Why, know what you did by this device? / Half of my substance is a city’s wealth” (1.2.63, 85–6).

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What Ferneze abstracts through bureaucratic rhetoric, Barabas frames practically, even theatrically, as a “device”: a scheme, a trick. Much like the “new trick” of the Moorish slave an act later, the financial program of the Maltese state is figured as theft: “Will you then steal my goods? / Is theft the ground of your religion?” (1.2.95–6) Malta is an early capitalist state where financial redistribution has superseded economic production as the more effective mode of wealth accumulation—tax, rent, interest, and never labor. As Ferneze’s ruthless, discriminatory tax on the Jews makes clear from the outset, labor and exchange—the previous mechanisms of Barabas’ trade—have been undermined or eliminated, replaced by state “device[s],” “new tricks.” By his behavior on the slave market, the merchant communicates that he has understood this shift from a productive to a redistributive economy. Just as Ferneze pushes the threatening cost of the Turkish tribute onto Malta’s stranger Jews in his series of bureaucratic pronouncements, the slave market presents a theatrical locus for the redistribution of risk. Thus Barabas, rather than looking for a laboring slave, looks for a “device”—a financial and perhaps theatrical instrument.

The character of the market as an economic space is rendered legible on the very bodies of the slaves, as in the nested implications of their yield. As the helpful Second Officer explains to his companion, “every one’s price is written on his back,” perhaps in chalk, and “so much must they yield or not be sold” (2.3.3–4). While there should be no need to explain the basic mechanism of commerce—price, sale, yield—to the audience in a public theater, this exchange

33 Although patrimonial capitalism has always been a foundational concern of Marxism, capitalism’s apparently-systematic imbalance between labor and rent has reached the public consciousness of French and English-speaking people again and quite urgently in the post-Recession work of Thomas Piketty. See Piketty, Arthur Goldhammer trans., *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Belknap; Harvard University Press, 2014).
of human persons is afforded a peculiarity which conveys not only the dogged English naïveté
toward enslavement in general, but also reaffirms the performative implications of a slave
market. The prices “written on [their] back[s]” make clear the slaves’ unmediated status as
commodities with bodies, their identities at first inherent only within their salability—while the
language of the officers, particularly the word “yield,” plays on the financial complexity
involved in the sale of a human person. When the officer describes that the slaves must “yield”
or not be sold, he evokes production as well as profit, subjugation as well as surrender. The
slaves will labor to produce a yield, and they will themselves yield up a profit in their own sale;
they have been forced to yield up agency in a way that effaces their humanity, and yet are made
perversely to muster a form of agency in order to yield as though to enslaving capitalism as their
conqueror. These layered senses of the word “yield” capture the slippage between trade and
investment, in part because the objects of trade—human persons—are embodied, and in part
because unlike other commodities, these are uniquely able to do things, to function in more ways
than objects; to wit, they “yield” variously.

When Barabas finally addresses the officers and the slaves displayed for sale, he
reinforces the financial usefulness of what might otherwise be laboring bodies. The merchant
pokes fun at their appearances in a host of cruel puns and entendres: the Moors appear too dark,
while a Turkish slave is “under color;” the same Turk is too fat (2.3.121). The mass of a slave’s
body is punningly conflated with his cost: “What’s the price of this slave? Two hundred crowns?
Do the Turks weigh so much?” (2.3.99–100). As though comically ignorant of the pun on

34 See OED, 3rd ed., s.v. “yield,” v.13c “furnish or produce as profit, bring in,” v.7a, “reward, remunerate,
recompense, repay,” v.16b, “give way, be subjected, submit; occasionally to break down, succumb,” v.15
“give oneself up, surrender, submit, as to a conqueror.”
“weigh,” an officer reiterates, “[s]ir, that’s his price” (2.3.101). What the officer misses, Barabas does not: his conflation of weight and price figures the slaves as bullion, to be valued by mass like Spanish plate—a raw material or even a currency. The effect of the officer’s mock-confusion is to repeat this conceit, confirming for an audience that The Jew of Malta’s slaves have been made by the evaluation of their theatrical market-value into an especially strange mixture of specie and commodity, a duality torqued still further by the subsequent discussion of other ways the slaves might yield. Their capacities for labor, like their bodies, come under rhetorical attack from their potential buyer. Barabas frames slave labor from the start as unproductive and immaterial, suggesting that it would yield only through financial redistribution—theft—supplemented by regulatory sleight of hand. Hearing the first Moor’s price confirmed at two hundred crowns, Barabas inquires sneeringly about what it would mean to buy such a slave as an investment:

What, can he steal, that you demand so much?
Belike he has some new trick for a purse
And if he has, he is worth three hundred plates,
So that, being bought, the town seal might be got
To keep him for his life time from the gallows. (2.3.102–6)

This is mockery at Malta’s expense, a tightly-wound jab at the economic value and function of the enslaved within the organization of the city-state. As Barabas implies, surely no productive labor could justify the purchase of a Moorish slave at such a high price. As Barabas frames it, only theft could yield enough, a novel form of theft: “some new trick for a purse.” Yet even so, to make the venture profitable in the long-term, Barabas would need to procure a “town seal”—a warranty against criminal prosecution—in order to keep the Moorish slave from being hung for
pickpocketing.\textsuperscript{35} As a market for labor, Barabas suggests, Malta’s slave trade is laughable: the cost of a slave could never be offset by his productive capacity. If not labor, how else could a slave be profitable—by what device but theft, or tricks?

To follow the model laid out by the Governor of Malta, an effective device ought, like Ferneze’s decree, to displace risk—of default, of violence, of censure—onto an Other, whether they are Malta’s stranger Jews or Turkish and Moorish slaves. Rightly recognizing this turn toward a redistributive economy, Barabas seeks less a laborer than a man without qualities. Barabas rejects a second slave, a young Turk who “has more qualities,” on the grounds that he is too skilled, too healthy (2.3.112). To have a profession, to “cut and shave,” is in fact a problem: it makes the slave himself into a threat rather than a means of shifting threat away. Barabas accuses him of being “an old shaver,” a swindler who will turn labor toward deception:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Slave</th>
<th>I will serve you, sir—</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barabas</td>
<td>Some wicked trick or other. It may be, under color of shaving, thou’lt cut my throat for my goods. Tell me, has thou thy health well?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slave</td>
<td>Ay, passing well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barabas</td>
<td>So much the worse. I must have one that’s sickly, an’t be but for sparing victuals. (2.3.120–8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Health is another difficulty Barabas would also prefer to avoid in a prospective slave, perhaps for the tendency of a healthy body to endure as well as to eat. Healthy bodies tend to persist, and to participate in the sort of productive economic system which Barabas has come to understand as outmoded in Marlowe’s Malta. To buy a slave with a trade, or with health, is to buy a laborer. Instead, Barabas repeatedly demonstrates that he wants to buy a man with a different sort of

“yield,” a kind of temporary device which, like the cargo of the Royal African Company, will be perishable.

When Barabas asks the officers to see a final slave, his priorities are pinned to the economic transformations which have already taken place in the Maltese state. His choice, for a malleable device over healthy, skilled bodies, also prefigures the theatrical transformations in the structure of the *The Jew of Malta* itself; the play is shortly to become a series of spectacular episodes, “new trick[s]” and “device[s],” by which the merchant-turned-Machiavel will attempt to destabilize the state in his favor. After considering and then dismissing both the Moorish and the Turkish slaves, Barabas asks “[l]et me see one that’s somewhat leaner” (2.3.128). This last slave, as he himself describes, is born “[i]n Thrace; brought up in Arabia;” hearing as much, Barabas expresses notable satisfaction—“[s]o much the better; thou art for my turn”—and buys him for a hundred crowns (2.3.132). This is the last in the series of responses within the financial discourse of the slave market by which Barabas slyly suggests that he knows more than he explicitly communicates. They provoke questions: why “so much the better,” exactly? What else does Barabas know about this market that he isn’t telling? What’s good about this “leaner” slave, or his disjointed origins? A “leaner” slave will not only be less healthy and so more

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36 For the purposes of this analysis, I have taken as a “trick” any scheme orchestrated jointly by Barabas and Ithamore in which other citizens of Malta are deceived to the political and economic gain of the two strangers. These include: a) the fight between Don Mathias and Don Lodowick; b) the poisoning of the nunnery by pottage; c) the murder of Friar Bernardine and the subsequent entrapment of Friar Jacomo; finally, Ithamore’s extortionist collaboration with Pilis Borza and Bellamira (pimp and courtesan) illustrate how the uncoupling of Barabas and Ithamore puts both at financial and later political risk, as I note below.

37 For an account of this evidence with implications for self-fashioning, see Mark Hutchings, “‘In Thrace; Brought up in Arabia: The Jew of Malta, II.iii.131,” *Notes and Queries* (December 2000), 428.
perishable, but also a man inherently lacking: a deficient strain of bullion, as much vessel as vassal. Barabas demands an account from him:

**Barabas**

Now, let me know thy name, and therewithal
Thy birth, condition, and profession.

**Ithamore**

Faith, sir, my birth is but mean, my name’s Ithamore, my profession what you please.

**Barabas**

Hast thou no trade? Then listen to my words,
And I will teach thee that shall stick by thee. (2.3.169–72)

When Barabas refused to buy the earlier slaves, as I have argued, it was in part because of their skills and their health; not so Ithamore. As Mark Hutchings has pointed out, Barabas seems to see similarities between himself and the slave: both men are “displaced and stateless, their very identity subject to confusion and (mis)-fortune.” But moreover, Barabas is drawn to Ithamore because his leanness and his background suggest his readiness for impression and abuse, for being rewritten and used in a way the merchant seems to feel he has been used by Malta. Barabas, seems to recognize that in Malta’s political and economic climate it is the deficient strain of bullion that will in fact serve best, not to labor or to endure but as a body onto which he can displace the risks, financial and physical, to which a merchant-turned-Machiavel might otherwise be subject.

By Barabas’ logic of enslavement, the man without qualities—a “lean” man with “no trade”—is precisely right for a Maltese state on the brink of financial ruin. In the remaining acts of the play, Ithamore’s body will constitute a means of navigating what Andrew Hiscock has called the “profoundly unstable landscape of Malta's capital.” This phrase which alludes to the

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38 See OED, 3rd ed., s.v. “lean,” n.4a: “Wanting in rich elements or qualities. Said, e.g. of soils, limestone, water, etc.”
39 Hutchings, “‘In Thrace,” 428.
perilous sequence of events in *The Jew of Malta*’s second half, ought also to be thought of punningly, in economic terms: Malta’s relationship to capital is unstable, as Barabas—stranger Jew, taxed for “half of my substance”—knows better than anyone. Barabas knows, too, that his new slave Ithamore’s best function will be in his tricks. As he has it, Ithamore will “make account of [him];” the slave will serve as as a risk-bearing extension of Barabas’ own financial agency.

Cartwright, shewing the harde and unconscionable dealing of Raulins against him, by whome he hathe been detained in prisone…yt hath appeared that Raulins by lewde and fraudulous devices hathe drawen the poore man into the daunger of forfeyture of two bondes, the whole debt being but [twenty pounds].


3.3 Barabas’ Devices, Ithamore’s Tricks

*The Jew of Malta* animates Barabas’ risk-bearing “policies” through the performance of his slave Ithamore in a series of theatrical devices, or tricks. Marlowe often seems concerned, particularly in the variation of Barabas’ rhetoric, with collapsing the boundaries between these categories: for this play and for the city-state of Malta, financial policies, stage devices, and Ithamore’s tricks are implicated concurrently—in the same scene, the same action, with the same result. The word “trick” is used infrequently in Marlowe’s play. It is twice the term for the potentially deceitful action of slaves, and it is used once to frame a distinctly financial scheme in the self-fashioning narrative just after Barabas purchases Ithamore: “I [was] an usurer, / And with extorting,

cozening, forfeiting, / And tricks belonging unto brokery / I filled the jails with bankrupts in a year” (3.2.194–7). Following this rehearsal of the accounting “tricks” which Barabas claims to have orchestrated, he develops a plan which will reframe slave deceit as financial deceit in the course of a theatrical device. Ithamore is implicated and then made executor of a complex device to orchestrate the mutual murder of Don Mathias and Don Lodowick, the son of the Governor Ferneze. Their language is concurrently theatrical and political, both of which spring up in Ithamore’s articulation of risk as a form of commerce:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barabas</th>
<th>Now tell me, Ithamore, how lik’st thou this?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ithamore</td>
<td>Faith, master, I think by this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You purchase both their lives. Is it not so?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barabas</td>
<td>True; and it shall be cunningly performed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ithamore</td>
<td>Oh, master, that I might have a hand in this!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barabas</td>
<td>Ay, so thou shalt; tis thou must do the deed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Take this and bear it to Mathias straight,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>And tell him that it comes from Lodowick. (2.3.368–75)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The organization of Ithamore’s first trick involves purchase, performance, and policy all at once. This is the means by which Ithamore will “make account” of his master: he will perform the devices which Barabas has imagined, extending his master’s financial opportunities while taking on the potential political and physical risk which might otherwise have fallen on the Barabas’ head.

Although the Jew is the architect and the manager of each device, Ithamore, executing them, bears the physical and political risks implicit in the pair’s increasingly wild behaviors. Marlowe’s rhetoric is various and suggestively precise; the newly bought slave will himself participate in the “purchase” of more lives just as he will participate in the “perform[ance]” of the first device by which the dispossessed stranger Jew will hope to destabilize the Maltese state.
and so by his own policy win back economic dominance. The multivalent trick is performed precisely as the co-conspirators hoped it might: within barely more than a scene, Don Mathias and Don Lodowick have killed each other in a duel. Afterward, the grieving Governor Ferneze converts his son’s violent performance back into financial terms in a speech to the mother of Don Mathias and the gawking Maltese citizens: “Come, Katherine. Our losses equal are; / Then of true grief let us take equal share” (3.2.36–7). Like cosignatories to an insurance contract or shared investors in an imperiled venture of political stability, the Governor, Katherine, and the citizens of Malta distribute loss among themselves while Barabas profits from the instability rendered by his slave’s risky “deed,” this fatal trick.

Ithamore’s other tricks follow a similar trajectory: after Barabas frames the device in terms of its potential for political and economic gain, his slave executes an action which places him at considerable risk of retribution. As the devices become increasingly elaborate and devastating to Malta, Barabas constantly reiterates his relationship to that perishable surrogate, his slave. When a letter from his daughter Abigail implies that she “knows—’tis so!—of [his] device / In Don Mathias’ and Lodovico’s deaths,” the entrance of Ithamore throws Barabas into a fit which can only be calmed by the slave’s promise to give his life on the merchant’s behalf: “Why, I’ll run to some rock and throw myself into the sea. Why, I’ll do anything for your sweet sake” (3.4.7–8, 40–1). Here, again, Ithamore’s crucially perishable body is rendered in terms of investiture and figured as a financial proxy: “I here adopt thee for mine only heir / …Spend as myself,” urges Barabas (3.4.43–5). As a result of this renewed assurance, Ithamore once more takes on the risk of a still more complex device, a plan to murder Abigail and her fellow nuns by feeding them a poisoned “pot of pottage” (3.4.90). Here again Barabas, in the orchestration of
this device, redistributes risk from himself to his slave—“Ithamore, must thou go place this pot” (3.4.85)—a risk made more explicit yet when Barabas promises, in an aside, to “pay thee with a vengeance, Ithamore” (3.4.118). The language of economic risk is threaded through The Jew of Malta’s constant discourse of procedural and political collusion, and Ithamore is thrust into the center of things such that he cannot evade the end of his own tricks; the same merchant who places him at risk will capitalize, in language eerily echoed by the Royal African Company, on the capacity of Ithamore’s enslaved body to bear physically the loss of life his purchaser is content to figure financially.

The risk from which Ithamore has been sheltering Barabas is most obvious when their chattel bond is ruptured—when Ithamore finally refuses to execute his master’s devices in the hope of reaping his own profits from another perilous enterprise. In collusion with a pimp and his courtesan—Pilia-Borza and Bellamira—Ithamore awkwardly plans to extort Barabas by threatening to reveal their previous devices to the Governor, Ferneze:

_Bellamira_  Prithee, sweet love, one more [letter], and write it sharp.

_Ithamore_  No, I’ll send by word of mouth now. Bid him deliver thee a thousand crowns, by the same token that the nuns loved rice, that Friar Bernardine slept in his own clothes—any of’em will do it. (4.4.83–5)

In trying to turn a trick upon his own master, Ithamore rehearses two previous tricks they had orchestrated together: the poisoning of the nuns with pottage, and the subsequent murder of Bernardine, strangled by his own friar’s “girdle, [made] a handsome noose” (4.1.146). Ithamore hopes to enact the same kind of operation Barabas has (“by the same token”), making of his past devices a fresh trick, and quite explicitly shifting the risk of prosecution onto Barabas. He even

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prices his device, assessing the risk to Barabas and placing the present value of his deception at a thousand crowns. But Ithamore fails to consider what Barabas, Pilia-Borza, and Bellamira have not for a moment forgotten: the Turk is a slave, and at least in Marlowe’s play, the slave’s tricks deposit risk onto his own body—never elsewhere.\textsuperscript{43} Ithamore and his last trick are just one more device by which \textit{The Jew of Malta} demonstrates the redistribution of risk onto the body of the slave, but this time by the slave’s own agency and to disastrous effect. Rather than participate, Ithamore’s erstwhile conspirators simply report the Turk and Barabas both to the Governor Ferneze.

A contemporary London audience may have recognized Ithamore’s attempt to play counter-tricks as a turn toward the period’s English laws regarding financial fraud, around which Marlowe’s play has been circling. An English audience in the latter part of the sixteenth century would very likely have associated Ithamore’s tricks with the “lewde and fraudulent devices” constantly bemoaned by the Privy Council for causing the incarceration of an enormous and increasing number of debtors tried before the King’s Bench.\textsuperscript{44} The source for this memorable phrase is from a particularly devious scheme by a man named Cartwright, and serves above as an epigraph. As Amanda Bailey points out, “[t]ricks had serious consequences in a legal context that did not discriminate between honest and dishonest debtors.”\textsuperscript{45} In 1589, “the number of those whose fortunes were decayed by fire, shipwreck, robbery, or piracy was small” in comparison to

\textsuperscript{43} The result of this attempted extortion should hardly come as a surprise, but critics have often seen it as paradoxically too tidy and too chaotic. For a reading of Ithamore’s turn in structural and characterological terms, see Friedman “Shackling of Accidents,” 162–4.


\textsuperscript{45} Bailey, “Prison Prose, the Pit, and the End of Tricks,” 119.
the number of fortunes ruined by financial trickery—bad loans, weak surety, and extortion of the very sort perpetrated by Ithamore on Barabas. Thus it may have seemed fitting for this slave to be caught in his own device, even as he attempts to turn the tables on his exploitative master Barabas. Underlying the dissatisfaction at such trickery is a sense that financial risks are inextricable from sociopolitical ones. *The Jew of Malta* renders Ithamore as the locus of all these risks, first as the successful executor of theatrical devices on behalf of the merchant Barabas, and then—as slave, inevitably—a victim of his own attempt an extortion trick.

The economic and political alterations brought about in the course of Ithamore’s tricks strike Ferneze, near the conclusion of the plot, like a shipwreck. In a lamenting exchange with Barabas, the island’s political conflict is again imbued with the financial rhetoric of policy:

Ferneze  This, Barabas: since things are in thy power,
I see no reason but of Malta’s wrack…

Barabas  Governor, good words! Be not so furious…
And, as for Malta’s ruin, think you not
’Twere slender policy for Barabas to
Dispossess himself of such a place? (5.2.57–8, 61, 64–66)

Barabas here collapses political risk and ruin, as well as his own economic self-interest, into this word, policy. Barabas’ smug barbs dig because they communicate so proudly the merchant’s ruthless financial and theatrical policy. Unlike Ferneze, who has throughout the play hidden under a specious rhetoric of egalitarianism in loss—“of true grief let us take equal share”—Barabas has been prepared, since the reorganization of the Maltese state as rapacious and redistributive, to make use of the slave Ithamore’s tricks to restructure his own policy without risking himself.

Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta* makes Ithamore’s slave tricks into stage devices, collapsing the political and economic implications of the slave trade into the articulation of deceitful action. This theatrical process reaches its apotheosis and its breaking point through the final, infamously spectacular device by which Barabas mistakenly orchestrates his own demise: “*The cable cut, a caldron discovered*” into which Barabas has fallen (5.5.63sd).\(^\text{47}\) The discourse of trickery, enslavement, trade, and treachery is the only language of the play’s final spectacle, distilled just as the theatrical action has done: Barabas plans to “mak[e] a profit of my policy” by “effecting this device” to “purchase towns / By treachery and sell’em by deceit” (5.2.112, 117; 5.5.47–8). The visible construction of a system of “cords,” “hinges,” “cranes,” and “pulleys” is followed by negotiations in which Ferneze offers Barabas “a hundred thousand pounds,” just before delivering a significant aside in response to the Jew’s mockery of the Turkish Bashaw: “How the slave jeers at him!” (5.55.1–2, 20, 56)

It is almost too neat that Barabas, who thinks of himself as a merchant in a “kingly kind of trade,” is glossed as a “slave” in the metatheatrical discourse of Ferneze. The reiteration of this language—policies, devices, and slaves—at the very moment when *The Jew of Malta*’s last, deadly trick materializes in the construction of the scene precisely the way in which risk inheres in the body of the subjugated and the enslaved. As it was in the first act, when conservative merchant Barabas was made suddenly subject to Malta’s redistributive financial politics, so it is again; although Ithamore’s tricks gave Barabas a way to displace the risk to himself, Marlowe’s play is finally insistent that economic risk—particularly to this stranger Jew—can only be

\(^{47}\) This spectacle and its properties were distinct enough—and the play popular enough, not least because of this scene in particular—to merit specific reference in Henslowe’s account of the inventories of the Admiral’s Men, where it is referred to as “*Item, j caldern for the Jewe.*” R.A. Foakes, ed., *Henslowe’s Diary*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 321.
deferred, and that its culminating articulation should be at once physical, economic, and political, located in the body of a slave: no longer Ithamore, but Barabas.

So that all things come into commerce, and pass into traffice (in a manner) …this man maketh merchandise of the works of his own hands, this man of another man’s labor, one selleth words, another maketh traffic of the skins and blood of other men; yea there are some found so subtle and cunning merchants that they persuade and induce men to suffer themselves to be bought and sold, and we have seen in our time enow and too many, which have made merchandise of men’s souls.

John Wheeler, A Treatise of Commerce (1601)\textsuperscript{48}

3.4 Turning Tricks in \textit{Pericles}

Not all slaves are displaced Turks like Ithamore, valuable for their peculiarly, ultimate perishability. That model, as I have shown in Marlowe’s \textit{The Jew of Malta}, positions the slave-trade as a market in disposable tricksters, architects of the very devices of which they were likely to be the victims. There, the radical perishability of the body is a precondition not only for the existence of the market, but also for the play’s use of the slave in theatrical action. Although I will maintain that the slave’s function as a site for displaced risk is inherent to their dramatic representation, and that \textit{tricks} are the means by which the stage enacts this displacement, not all tricks are like those of Ithamore and Barabas: dark-of-night schemes, poison, and cauldrons. Death as a risk-imbued surrogate is the endpoint for Ithamore, but this is not so of \textit{all} slaves or of all slave markets; this is not so of the traffic in women as represented in Shakespeare and Wilkins’ \textit{Pericles} (1608).

Many of the connections between the London theater and prostitution industries have been well-marked. In what follows, I attend to one connection that has been less in the limelight: the prostitute’s performance of a slave’s tricks, and thus her participation in the re-organization of risk that repeatedly manifests through the subordinated slave trade in early modern maritime drama. The spectacular enslavement of Pericles’ daughter Marina—her capture by pirates and subsequent sale to a brothel in Mytilene—has striking implications for how Shakespeare’s play positions her subsequent behavior. The critical conversation around Marina tends toward her emblematic qualities: Marina as a figure communicating virtue; or for appropriate familial relations in a play festooned with disastrous ones; still others imagine Marina’s behavior in the brothel as an enactment of particular politics. By contrast, I make the case that Pericles, Prince of Tyre recognizes what many modern critics have avoided articulating outright, though it is everywhere apparent in the economic concerns which subtend the play.

Marina is a slave and Pericles, like the brothel, depends as entertainment on Marina’s performative slave labor: her tricks. To think of Marina’s actions in Pericles as tricks turned by a woman enslaved is to re-consider not only the seventeenth-century slave-trade’s roots in the

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market for gendered sexual bodies, in women-at-risk, but also to reflect on the theatrical sleight of hand by which Shakespeare’s play subsumes the economic risk implicit in Marina’s exchange into the dynamic, adaptive performance of tricks. Marina, unlike Ithamore, takes advantage of the market for risk implicit in her enslavement. Rather than buy into a system of exploitative devices, Marina actively sells out. She manages the risk inherent in Pericles’ gendered enslavement by turning the performance of the prostitute into that of a tricksy slave, producing in the process a theatrics of billable eloquence.

Pericles’ slave-trade resolves the final episode of a play concerned throughout with the risks of economic expansion and organized by the practical oceanic hazards inherent in globalization. While Pericles has often been unfairly ignored by critics dismissive of a perceived “atheatrical, episodic quality,” the reiteration of “economic undercurrents if not explicitly economic foci,” give the play thematic unity around questions of maritime loss and the economic consequences of such loss. In fact, I would argue that an impression of the play as episodic in a derogatory sense—structurally piecemeal, unmanageable, unproductively chaotic—derives directly and mistakenly from Pericles’ deliberate theatrics of globalization. Shakespeare and Wilkins make use of a prose romance trope, the disastrous sea voyage, to render in theatrical structure a series of only-apparently disjointed exchanges which constitute a globalizing economy. Thus, to what Valerie Forman has rightly recognized as the manifestation of economic concerns through the deployment of an episodic dramatic structure, I would add an oceanic

Shipwrecks and pirate abduction, though tempting to wave off as incidental spectacles, are necessary matter for maintaining the conditions of maritime uncertainty which come to a head with the sale to a Mytilean brothel of the storm-whirred Marina. Over the course of the play, these maritime incidents materialize an economy in the throes of early capitalism, driven by risky ventures most completely enacted by Marina’s sale into prostitution.

Marina, consumed from the outset by maritime disaster, is the fluid locus of the circulation of capital in *Pericles*. Before she is sold into slavery in Mytilene, she is by her own description the central subject of watery loss in a play overflowing with it. *Pericles* bluntly foregrounds the interrelation between its many maritime disasters and the market it constructs around Marina and her body. In the first place, the market for Marina’s body is a near-direct transmutation of the maritime hazards of the sea into a market for violence at the sea’s shore: a bloody contract between Dionyza Queen of Tarsus and the assassin Leonine, who has agreed to murder Marina at Tarsus as the two walk “[o]’er the sea margin” (4.1.27). Marina, wholly absorbed in connecting herself rhetorically with the sea and its hazards, is oblivious to this most recent vital market. She expresses her relation to *Pericles*’ world in terms of a storm and a death at sea: “Ay me, poor maid, / Born in a tempest when my mother died, / This world is to me a

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55 As much as Forman is invested in the materialization of a tragicomic form, of “loss transformed into gain” within the project of globalization, she does not address the explicitly maritime quality of *Pericles*. My analysis here, while much indebted to Forman’s, attempts to more rigorously account for the particulars, the oceanic matter, of Shakespeare and Wilkins’ play. See Forman, “The Voyage Out: *Pericles*,” *Tragicomic Redemptions*, 64–84.

56 Forman observes that Leonine is “himself an impoverished slave offered money and freedom” in exchange for the execution of his “commission,” though I find nothing in the play to support the position that Leonine was necessarily enslaved. Forman, *Tragicomic Redemptions*, 225n35.

lasting storm” (4.1.18–21), reliving at every opportunity the hazards surrounding her birth at sea. She rehearses the episode even to the very man who has been paid to kill her:

Marina

Never was waves nor wind more violent.
And from the ladder tackle washes off
A canvas-climber. “Ha,” says one, “wolt out?”
And with a dropping industry they skip
From stern to stern. The boatswain whistles, and
The master calls, and trebles their confusion— (4.1.59–65)

With this language of confusion, prefiguring another tempest that will sweep on stage a few years later, Marina constructs her own watery mythology. Only when Leonine encourages her to “say your prayers” does she seem to realize that she is subject to a new sort of risk (4.1.66). Marina’s body is subject not just to the sea’s natural hazards—not just the violence of waves and wind—but also to its ventures, to its economic violence. Jolted, she quickly recognizes that Leonine is part of a market for murder and puts her pleas in economic terms: “How have I offended / Wherein my death might yield [the Queen] any profit?” (4.1.79) Like the slaves in Marlowe’s Jew of Malta, hers is suddenly a body that might yield. As I have argued above, this word works variously to efface its subject’s humanity through suggestions of subjugation, surrender, and here, for Marina, the profit to be had from her perishable body. She enters the market for human persons precisely where her body will yield most readily: in the transitional space where oceanic exchange emerges from the shore, in a literal “sea margin.”

58 Shakespeare’s The Tempest (1610), in which a storm is represented through a series of then-extraordinary stage technologies used to produce “A confused noise within,” (1.1.55sd) amid the constant yelling of a boatswain and master: “Fall to’t yarely, or we run ourselves aground. Bestir, bestir!” (1.1.3–4).

Marina’s murder is prevented by the sudden and apparently fortuitous arrival of a band of pirates, who rush howling down the shore to seize “a prize, a prize!” (4.1.91) A commodity, rather: calling Marina a prize, the pirates emphasize her salability, her unwilling status as something plundered from the seashore. Like the cargo of a ship hijacked at sea, Marina’s body is made suddenly part of still another maritime economy, this one suggested by other piratical valences. “Half part, mates, half part,” they crow, suggesting that, like any other pirate booty, Marina is to be divvied up and distributed equally among the pirates (4.1.92). Even Leonine, listening from the wings, understands the pirates’ announcement as prefiguring Marina’s rape: her distribution among her captors as a sex object, a spoil to be spoiled. The assassin is so convinced of this that he thinks of it as the awkward worst-case scenario: “perhaps they will but please themselves upon her, / Not carry her aboard. If she remain, / Whom they have ravished must by me be slain” (4.1.98–100). Yet Marina is never at risk of violation. The pirates are better assessors than the assassin and perhaps more rational; they seem to recognize that Marina will profit them best as an undamaged commodity—that is, a prostitute, if not a virgin slave.

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61 The Oxford English Dictionary is once again notable for its contemporary precision on this, in a way that suggests these categories—prostitute, slave, maritime prize, commodity—were indeed being worked out interdependently during the period. The entry for “commodity,” n.3d cites Thomas Dekker’s The Belman of London (1608), his most popular in a series of successful cony-catching pamphlets, with: “The Whore, who is called the Commodity.” Dekker, The Belman of London (London: Nathaniel Butter, 1608), H1r.
The sex trade was infamously widespread in early modern London, as well as inextricably caught up with the theater industry in terms both representational and economic. Jean E. Howard has shown the striking consistency with which London prostitution seems to have tracked representations of the bawdy business onstage, where—as in *Pericles*—sexual and economic transactions are collapsed in the process of staging. Prostitution’s cultural prevalence in the city was impossible to miss, especially for players and play-goers on their way to a performance. As Howard describes:

Prostitution was a part of London life, and theater practitioners certainly knew it. Theaters on the Bankside and in the northern suburbs, in particular, including Shakespeare’s Globe, stood in the middle of well-known brothel districts; the theater manager Philip Henslowe made money from a quartet of Bankside whorehouses; and Edward Alleyn the famous Elizabethan tragic actor also owned brothels.

Jacobean pamphlets and city comedies, particularly in the first decade of the seventeenth century, repeatedly figure London as an urban space overgrown with whorehouses, a city with an almost fantastical overabundance of female bodies at market. As Kim Hall has suggested, it was difficult for early modern Londoners to separate “commerce and intercourse” from matters of gender. More precisely, they may have struggled to separate the economic and sociopolitical in the exchange of female bodies; the two matters seem to have been inextricable: “women’s bodies [in Jacobean plays] become the site of struggle between…the need for both colonial trade and

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62 Historians have repeatedly noted the disparity of between literary representations of prostitution—of which there were many—and the sparse archive of contemporary papers regarding the sex trade. The very absence of historical record in the face of such cultural comment would seem in this case to suggest a ubiquity of service that made formal accounting, with some exceptions, unnecessary. Most of the exceptions are court records, primarily those associated with Bridewell. For the most thorough treatment of the Bridewell material, see Paul Griffiths, “The structure of prostitution in Elizabethan London,” *Continuity and Change* Vol. 8, No. 1 (1993): 39–63.

cultural assimilation through union.” If the “omnipresence of bawdy houses in the city drama” tracked the abundant market for sexual services in contemporary London, perhaps less visible were the modes of coercion, economic as well as social, which brought women to the sex trade in the first place.

In the section from Treatise of Commerce that serves as epigraph to this section, John Wheeler, spokesman for the Merchant Adventurers, uncomfortably describes the absorption of even “selves” and “souls” into the seventeenth century’s globalizing market:

> So that all things come into commerce, and pass into traffice (in a manner)…this man maketh merchandise of the works of his own hands, this man of another man’s labor, one selleth words, another maketh traffic of the skins and blood of other men; yea there are some found so subtle and cunning merchants that they persuade and induce men to suffer themselves to be bought and sold, and we have seen in our time enow and too many, which have made merchandise of men’s souls.

Wheeler’s approach is somewhat oblique, but his terms suggest a market in which labor, bodies, and souls are becoming too close to one another—in which salable capital has begun to include those whose capacity for embodied labor, or “service,” may make them enslaved. While he distinguishes those who would sell “another man’s labor,” and those who would sell the “skins and blood of other men,” he nevertheless groups both of these with recognizable disapproval among those who “[make] merchandise of men’s souls.” If the London prostitute seems conspicuously absent in Wheeler’s account, it may be in part because her body is suspended inconveniently between the explicit sale of “[other] man’s labor,” those who “suffer themselves

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65 Howard, Theater of a City, 127.
to be bought and sold,” and the laboring bodies themselves sold like raw materials, “skins and blood.”  

I am not suggesting that London prostitutes were enslaved, but that they were subject to the emerging logic of a globalizing economy in the same way that other subjects of debt bondage —of the “merchand[izing] of men’s souls”—would have been. Rather than slaves, strictly speaking, sex workers in 1601 or 1608 may well have been not slaves in the way that, during this decade, the colonist-laborers of the Virginia Company were not slaves. As Amanda Bailey has convincingly demonstrated of those men, the boundary between the economic coercion of debt bondage and the physical coercion of enslavement was permeable, if not imaginary:

In 1606, in the earliest phase of English colonization in the Americas, the Virginia Company inaugurated an aggressive recruitment program aiming to entice, if not force, young Englishmen to work in the colony. …Company officials and port agents resorted to coercive measures in “recruiting” able-bodied young boys, including kidnapping and plying them with alcohol in order to trick them into boarding ships.  

In Wheeler’s representation of commerce it would seem that the elided whore’s body, like that of the colonist-laborer subject to a predatory labor contract, “anticipated a novel species of money developed further by elaborate networks of global investors that regarded the body of the slave as at once useful and as a form of transferable and speculative property.”

The abduction by pirates of Marina from the coast of Tarsus—while on the one hand a kind of salvation—is also

67 I follow Howard by focusing on the absence of the prostitute from Wheeler’s account, but want to stress still more forcefully how the sex worker’s position is occluded in the glaring juxtaposition of the three categories which would seem to intersect precisely in the body of the prostitute economically dependent upon her bawd. Howard, Theater of a City, 127.
69 Ibid., 25.
her entrance into just such a network of speculative property, effected once more by “the lasting storm” with which *Pericles* has so forcefully associated her.

The Mytilean brothel to which the pirates will sell Marina is foundering for practical reasons which appear at first to be entirely a matter of simple supply and demand: in a city “full of gallants,” they are “wenchless” (4.2.3–5). Yet as the brothel’s two managers, Pander and Bawd, discuss the peculiarities of their situation, *Pericles*’ prostitution industry is revealed to be, like London’s, a complex financial and ethical market. An escalating series of bawdy jokes between Pander, Bawd, and their man Bolt threatens to conceal some fairly technical observations about the play between epidemiological market ethics and the purchase of disposable—once again, perishable—embodied investments. Bawd laments that their prostitutes, three poor “creatures,” are “as good as rotten;” by this she means first that they are diseased, but also that they have ceased, as investment vehicles, to *yield*, as one would expect ripe fruits to do (4.2.6–8). When Pander’s responds, this pathological rhetoric is rendered as economic ethics: they must find “fresh ones,” he concludes, because if “there be not a conscience to be used in every trade, we shall never prosper” (4.2.9–11).70 Conscience comes up again, moments later, when Pander further laments the way their syphilitic “creatures” have been killing off their clientele: “the poor Transylvanian is dead that lay with the little baggage” (4.2.19–20). This ought to lend a strange and discomfiting air to the sense of a profitable moral “conscience” in this context. Rather, the joke turns on an understanding of a trafficking “conscience,” or an ethic

of trade which is precisely immoral: a logic of the potential loss to be sustained when their “creatures,” or their sick prostitutes, threaten to cull clients.

In a manner that should seem as horrifying as it is humorous, Pander and Bawd collapse the perishability of their de-humanized prostitutes—first “creatures,” then “commodities”—into the financial risk the spread of disease might posed to their venture. In practical terms, Pander and Bawd discuss the relationships that constitute risk: “Oh, our credit comes in not like the commodity, nor the commodity wages not with the danger. Therefore if in our youths we could pick up some pretty estate, ‘twere not amiss to keep our door hatched” (4.2.27–30). Pander’s lament, though somewhat technical, is a remarkably explicit treatment of risk, framed presciently as a relationship between credit, commodity, and danger. As before, the humor or horror of this scene depends its audience’s ability to recognize that in each of Pander’s terms—credit, commodity, and danger—inheres simultaneously in the body of the prostitute as well as her incorporate possessor, the bawdyhouse as venture. To paraphrase: Pander laments that the brothel’s credit (at once reputation and potential for suspending capital) seems incommensurate with their commodities (at once profit and prostitutes), and indeed that neither profit nor prostitutes vary sufficiently with the danger of economic loss as well as of syphilitic transmission. The unique insight here is that Pander marks out the problem as one of “wages”: that is, of the variance between profit, the health of the prostitutes, and the potential for economic or pathological loss. The risk to his prostitutes and his clients—and so to his venture—has become too great to be balanced by his profits. While Valerie Forman has read this exchange as a celebration of the “infinite profits [that] can be accumulated (as prostitutes can be
circulated),” Pander seems, on the contrary, explicitly concerned with the fact that his prostitutes *cannot* be infinitely circulated: that they are, once again, perishable bodies.\(^{71}\)

When Bolt returns from the Mytilean slave market, with the pirates and a captive Marina, it is her virginity—and thus her lack of disease—that makes her salable. Yet the rhetoric of the scene foreshadows the trick by which she will turn sexual performance into other theatrical forms. When Bawd inquires after her skills or “qualities,” much as Barabas did in Marlowe’s more spectacular slave-market, Bolt’s account on her behalf is explicitly metatheatrical—“[s]he has a good face, speaks well, and has excellent good clothes”—a warrant for her entrance as a stage performer as much as a prostitute (4.2.43–4). If there is a joke implicit in the collision of Marina’s preparation for euphemistic “entertainment” and Bolt’s assurance that her “[p]erformance shall follow,” it is humor at the expense of the Pander and Bawd who have anticipated that Marina, like Ithamore, would turn tricks on their behalf and so serve as a vessel into which to displace risk of their venture. Instead, by turning sexual tricks into theatrical “performance[s]” of rhetoric Marina enacts a remarkable recuperation of her own agency within and even through the conditions of her enslavement.\(^ {72}\)

When Bawd attempts to convey to Marina how the ideal behaviors of a virgin slave and a willing prostitute might intersect, she emphasizes the profitability of conflicted performance. To turn tricks is to manage risk:

\[\textit{Bawd} \quad \text{Pray you, come hither a while. You have fortunes coming upon you. Mark me: you must seem to do that fearfully which you commit willingly,}\]

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\(^{71}\) Forman, *Tragicomic Redemptions*, 80.

\(^{72}\) Stephen Spiess, recognizing the difficulty with the agency of prostitutes also as a problem with criticism, has rightly noted that “marginal historical subjects pose a particular hermeneutic challenge to scholars, especially as absence or silence can encourage victimization paradigms that efface agency.” Spiess, “Shakespeare’s Whore,” 10.
despise profit where you have most gain. To weep that you live as ye do
makes pity in your lovers. Seldom but that pity begets you a good opinion,
and that opinion a mere profit. (4.2.105–110)

In these terms, ironically for the brothel, Marina is to prove too effective a performer. “I understand you not,” she replies, and repeatedly works to reframe this discourse of profit, loss, and fortune into other sorts of theater (4.2.111). Shortly after, the rantings of Pander and Bawd over the unexpected losses of their investment convey that Marina has been curiously successful in her turn from prostitution into something else: when she ought to be satisfying clients, Bawd rails, she instead “has me her quirks, her reasons, her master reasons, her prayers, her knees, that she would make a puritan of the devil if he should cheapen a kiss of her” (4.6.7–9).

When the Mytilean Governor Lysimachus approaches the brothel disguised, Marina uses the discourse of her own enslavement to turn a slave’s tricks to her own profit, functioning at once as a vessel for risk and its most effective manager. Lysimachus is, at first, playfully over-eager, asking for “a dozen of virginities” and remarking with exhausting predictably that Marina “would serve after a long voyage at sea” (4.6.17, 38). When he asks her privately “how long have you been of this trade?” Whether coy or earnest, Marina’s response definitively performative: returning a question, “What trade, sir?” destabilizes their exchange, opening a space for other forms of action. It is difficult not to hear again the exchange between Ithamore and Barabas—“my profession what you please. / Hast thou no trade?”—transported here from Malta to Mytilene (4.6.56–8). Unlike Ithamore though, Marina turns a trick not in Lysimachus’ service, but upon him:

Marina

For me
That I am a maid, though most ungentle Fortune
Have placed me in this sty, where, since I came,
Diseases have been sold dearer than physic—
That the gods
Would set me free from this unhallowed place,
Though they did change me to the meanest bird
That flies i’th’ purer air! (4.6.84–91)

The effect of this speech on Lysimachus, if one hand morally redemptive, is at least as economically effective. Marina’s engagement with “ungentle Fortune” has been to turn her own, selling eloquence in place of disease and so mitigating venereal and financial risk in the same trick. If there were doubt in the salability of Marina’s performance, it ought to be dispelled by Lysimachus, who admits he has gotten more than he bargained for: “I did not think / Thou couldst have spoke so well, ne’er dreamt thou couldst. / Had I brought hither a corrupted mind, / They speech had altered it. Hold, here’s gold for thee” (4.6.92–4). In fact, the Governor pays greater dividends yet toward Marina’s investment in her own turn; barely ten lines later, he gives her still more, as though to emphasize the effectiveness of Marina’s turn: “Hold, here’s more gold for thee” (4.6.102). When Marina turns to Bolt with this recently-earned gold, he quickly recognizes the potential in her tricks: not only can Marina marshal eloquence for profit, she can also “sing, weave, sew, and dance”—performative tricks without the risk of disease which has so endangered the Mytilean brothel as a venture (4.6.168). Rather than going awry, the investment in Marina’s performing body by the “master and mistress [who] hath bought you” has produced, in the dramatic a still more effective way of managing risk in both pathological and economic terms (4.6181). Marina is a slave whose tricks manage not only her purchasers’ risk of financial default, but also what she sees as the risk of her own debasement in economic or monetary terms—like the slaves of Marlowe’s market, as a form of coin.
Yet the final act of *Pericles* makes grim comment on the proximity of the woman’s and the slave’s body, both for their capacity to turn tricks and to function as disposable coin. To see that *Pericles* treats Marina’s body as a monetary vehicle, one need only look to her second exchange, orchestrated this time by her own father. Once Pericles has come to in Mytilene’s harbor after hearing Marina’s song, his first fully-coherent action is to once again cast this daughter, by now long-figured as a storm-tossed commodity, once more to sea without her comment or consent:

*Pericles*  
Shall we refresh us, sir, upon your shore,  
And give you gold for such provision  
As our intents will need?  

*Lysimachus*  
Sir, with all my heart,  
And when you come ashore,  
I have another suit.  

*Pericles*  
You shall prevail  
Were it to woo my daughter (5.1.242–8)

What use is Pericles’ gold when his daughter will suffice? Despite Marina’s turn in Mytilene, she remains an object of exchange, too accustomed to being sold from ships. The exchange of Marina to Lysimachus is, in certain ways, more mercenary than the pirates’ sale of her to Pander and Bawd. Pericles could easily determine that the Governor has venereal disease; he has been a frequent enough visitor to the Mytilean brothel that they recognize him even disguised. Yet her father seems quite willing to let Marina’s body suffer the danger of pathological ruin; even for him, she remains a vessel for the displacement of risk. As Stephen Spiess has pointed out, “this scene denigrates prostitution as an illicit form of sexual commerce, reproduces chaste femininity as a marital ideal, and preserves the marital traffic in women;” by it we are reminded yet again that Marina has been throughout *Pericles* a prize, another piece of “little baggage” who
somehow, while actively enslaved, has been able briefly to turn her tricks to establish her own agency.73

That Marina ultimately fails at this—that Shakespeare and Wilkins finally turn the clever slave into a bride at risk of syphilis—does not undo the economic logic of her earlier turn. Indeed, if critics have misconstrued Marina’s positive performance practices, her slave’s tricks, it has been to frame them as static emblems in a defensive moral economy, rather than in the often-tragically shifting economy of globalizing ocean. When Nona Fienberg explains that Marina “creates a market for her moral discourse,” it leads Fienberg toward an unsettling evaluation of Marina’s chastity as a “synecdoche for inner value as well as her value in the marriage market,” a position which ought to be difficult to maintain in the context of Marina’s consistent reversals of the subjugating tropes of marriage and social bondage more broadly.74 Rather, Marina’s project of risk-management ought to help us “rethink economic problems as economic rather than moral problems,” and to see this distinction as meaningful for the recuperation of the financial logic at play in Marina’s maintenance of her own chastity.75 Marina’s agency depends on her demonstrated capacity for thinking of her own value, even while enslaved, as inherent in more than her body. She recognizes the value implicit in a theatrics of virtue which, like Ithamore’s fiendish devices, function as mechanisms for managing the risk of financial and bodily default. though it does demonstrate that the body of the slave is definitively perishable, a vessel for the

75 My emphasis. On the tension between morally redemptive and economically redemptive systems in Pericles, see Forman, Tragicomic Redemptions, 64–84.
risk inherent in the globalizing maritime economy, and that at least in *Pericles* the woman’s body will always be perilously close to the slave’s.\(^76\)

\(^{76}\) On sexual logics and sex as an epistemological form in literature and drama during the period, see Valerie Traub, *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).
His Majesties Plantations (having been the most considerable Trade of this Nation) were at first raised, and have been brought to the perfection they are now at, and now do, and did alwaies principally subsist by the labour of Negro Servants, and a plentiful supply of them.

*An Answer of the Company of Royal Adventurers of England Trading into Africa (1667)*

Coda. “Until they perished”

The Company of Royal Adventurers of England Trading into Africa (RAC) was established in 1660 as an English joint-stock monopoly for the trade of all African commodities, chiefly gold, and the enslavement of all African persons, chiefly inhabitants of the Gold Coast or Guinea. Although the East Indian and Atlantic slave-trades had long been an integral part of England’s economy and culture, it was for the nation’s merchants, statesmen, and dramatists a difficult thing with which to come to terms; the enslaved themselves had no terms at all. It is jarring to recognize the logic by which English came to terms with the economic risk of the slave-trade. How is a human person made to function as a financial instrument?

In 1667, when the Royal African Company had fallen into massive debt through “great losses” due to piracy and naval conflict with the Dutch West India Company, they were attacked in print by an agglomeration of London merchants led by Paul Painter. Painter argued against the Company’s monopoly on the basis that they were unable to maintain responsible credit relations with their various investors, as with the Crown, the “Plantations,” and the English people more generally. The *Answer of the Company of Royal Adventurers*, which prints side by side Painter’s allegations and the Company’s response, is an unpleasant document. On the verge

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77 *An answer*, A2r.
78 Ibid., B2r.
of their bankruptcy, the Answer is a mess of economic self-aggrandizement supported by constant affirmations of their unique ability to enslave and sell extraordinary numbers of Guinean men and women to the English plantations in the Americas. In a remarkable combination of the financial and the rhetorical, enslaved bodies bear up Company credit:

2. The said late erected Company are of late very much sunk in their Credits amongst Merchants, Owners of Shipping and Tradesmen, to whom they are very much indebted for Freight of their Ships and Goods. It’s too true, That the Company is indebted to several persons, occasioned by their great losses. …But these losses could not have sunk the Companies Credit, had the planters and Merchants, especially those of Barbados, complied with their obligations, who owe the Company 90000 l. Sterling. …Nor have they only enough left to pay their debts, but likewise to carry on the Gold-Trade, and furnish the Plantations yearly with as many Negroes as they shall have occasion for.80

What is notable about this exchange is less that the Royal African Company is being castigated for economic failure—such accusations are common, even constant, for English venturers and venturing companies81—but that their response is to agree. “It’s too true, That the Company is indebted to several persons,” they write, reorganizing an admission of loss into a statement of authority premised on a savvy re-imagination of what it is to be “sunk in their Credits.”

Copious historical work on the emergence of the early modern European financial industry, and on credit in particular, has shown the shifting means through which financial trust and obligation was managed. For Craig Muldrew, early modern credit was a “currency of

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80 An answer, B1v-B2r.
reputation”; for Carl Wennerlind, credit at the dawn the English Financial Revolution (1688), although “too local,” was morphing into something “based on anticipations and imaginations.” The accusation against the Royal African Company makes use of the former sense—to be “sunk” in credit is to have a low reputation—while the RAC’s response moves toward grimly toward the latter. Their credit cannot be “sunk,” they argue, not because they are not in debt or because their reputation is untarnished, but because they are themselves owed massive debts by “the planters and Merchants…of Barbados.” Painter and his co-accusers might press on this: where are those debts, precisely? And how, if they are prepared to admit their “great losses” and unimaginable debt, can the Company possibly continue to “carry on the Gold-Trade and furnish the Plantations yearly with as many Negroes as they shall have occasion for?” The Company’s response is simple, implicit in their last phrase. The trade in “Negroes” is unaffected by the outmoded sense of credit as a form of reputation. The traffic in human persons has no use for trust. Nina Levine has recently described how, in the city of London, “credit relations grounded in the processes of mutual consent and mutual gain also afforded opportunities for economic and political agency.” Such rosy terms, not unreasonable for London—mutual gain, mutual consent, credit relations—mark out just how different the market described in the Answer really was. The credit of the Royal African Company, debt or no debt, inheres in the bodies of the enslaved—those bodies for which they are still owed “90000 l. Sterling” by Barbados, bodies for which the extraction of the human is also an extraction of value. The RAC is well aware that the conversion of the enslaved

into a form of embodied credit is vital to their enterprise. They crow elsewhere in a turn of toxic pride that “the Trade of the Gold-Coast cannot possibly be maintained without the Negro Trade,” to the “advantage and profit of this Crown and Nation.”85

Whatever was “profitable” about the later development of the trans-Atlantic slave-trade depended on the financial logic of risk and investment in terms of credit. When Ian Baucom describes that it was “as much a trade in credit as a trade in commodities,” he does so in reference to early financial instruments like the “ocean-crossing bill-of-exchange…promissory notes which the merchants would have agreed to honor, with interest, some six or twelve months later.”86 Interpersonal bills of exchange signified, on the part of the issuing investor-merchant, the expectation of profit to be generated by the venturer-merchant, and so gave documentary existence to otherwise imaginary monetary value. The practices that Baucom and other scholars have held up as the “abnormal” inherence of “credit as the basis for knowledge of the slave-trade” in the Zong massacre of 1781 were in fact typical even by the turn of the seventeenth-century, although the epistemology itself is not.87 There is nothing new in the late eighteenth century about the use of credit for maritime ventures; there is no surprise that the financial “success” of the trade in human bodies depended on a theory of economic value as inherent in absence. Even when Baucom describes that “central to that theory was a mutual and system-wide determination to credit the existence of imaginary values” the process by which that collective imaginary might obtain credit remains obscured; if it is “central to that form was a reversal of the

85 An answer, B1r, A2r.
87 Per Baucom’s argument, it was not until the Zong that it was possible to think of the “fiction of value encoded in [a] marine insurance policy” as a form of legal proof—to turn the very absence of people-as-capital into an evidentiary epistemology. Baucom, Specters, 16.
protocols of value creation proper to commodity capital,” these reversals are only circumscribed. The creation of credit through the financial and economic practices surrounding human loss and enslavement is persistently decentered.

English investors and merchants need already in the seventeenth-century a means of looking away, of sublimating the material conditions of enslavement into the imaginary values of a financial abstraction. That they do so by redistributing the hazards of venturing from English bodies to proto-colonial ones—to Turks, islanders, “Negroes”—is less remarkable, perhaps, than the economic sleight of hand by which that redistribution is effected. Rather than conceive of their cargo as human, or even as a commodity, English merchants re-locate the economic risk implicit in their practices, materializing it in the bodies of the subjugated not just as a form of credit but as an abstraction of possible loss that would vindicate at once the treatment of those bodies and the ventures in general. The missing center of the vast and morbid path of the seventeenth-century market for slaves is the collective practice of imagining loss as threatening enough, of coming-to-terms with risk, and finally of decentering that risk onto the bodies of the enslaved. Out of this comes the translation of commodity-into-credit, the broadening of the trans-Atlantic slave-trade into the eighteenth century, and in some macabre part, the development of economic risk as some hazard to a population, displaced and financially mitigated.

Against the allegation that they have been—and will be—unable to supply enough slaves to English plantations due to a contract to send some to the Spaniards, the Company responds in a register of such reasoned practicality that it is challenging, initially, to register the atrocity that is being described:
3. They have contracted with the Spaniards to supply them yearly for a term of years with thousands of Negroes, which the Spaniard implores in planting the same Commodities in his Plantations, are are now planted in His Majesties Plantations.

[N]otwithstanding that agreement [with the Spaniards], the Company furnished the Plantations with 6000 Negroes and upwards every year, which were more than they would buy of the Company, who were forced to keep many of them on their hands until they perished.

The language of the pamphlet is at once procedural and indignant, as it must be. And for a moment, to parse it effectively, we must effect the same: for the Royal African Company, Painter’s accusation is an affront not only to the Company’s national loyalty, but also a blow against its capacity for meeting demand and for sustaining loss. The RAC is more than capable, they claim, of supplying the Plantations with all the “thousands of Negroes” they could possibly need—six-thousand and upwards every year—and indeed, it would appear they exaggerate that number. They possess a superflux of capital, and in the last line, a unique capacity for sustaining loss to their stock. The Company is so financially saturated that they can sustain, aggrieved but without default, the loss of more productive capital than the Plantations can even use. For the Company, this is a regrettable inconvenience. To keep capital “on hand” is to lose the opportunity to deploy it elsewhere, either to sell it or invest it; early modern merchants kept as little “ready money” on hand as they could. Capital kept “on their hands” was essentially cash, inherently inefficient, and communicates considerable financial magnanimity on the part of a Company prepared to sacrifice gain elsewhere in the service of English plantations. More than a statement about wealth, this is a statement about credit, a translation of economic into financial

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89 See OED, 3rd ed., s.v. “ready money” n. “Cash or funds immediately available for use; esp. (in early use) money in the form of coins or banknotes; (also occasionally) immediate payment in cash for anything bought.”

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surplus, from the means of production to the capacity for loss. The company which can bear the loss of such capital must have in the market the credit to replace it: the more risked, the more lost, but the greater their claim to credit.

The other side of the Company’s boast is an accusation of financial conservatism—and perhaps a lack of patriotism—levied toward the plantations. That “the Plantations” are unwilling to buy the full stock suggests that they lack credit of their own, or perhaps that they accord insufficient weight to their own service as the “most considerable Trade of this Nation,” by refusing to capitalize on the financial risk sustained by the Royal African Company in order to provide such a surplus of “Negroes” in the first place. The conservatism of the plantations is framed as a form of economic violence; the RAC is “forced” to sustain losses which a more creditworthy buyer could have prevented. If it is ever in question that risk is here the relevant metric given this sort of force, one need only shift finally, wrenchingly, away from economic euphemism and toward the material conditions they conceal.90

While this statement is for the Company an account of loss, it is also an index of a different sort of lost account. What can be said on behalf of the six-thousand men and women, many of whom “the Company [was]…forced to keep…on their hands until they perished?” The six-thousand have no voice here or in any textual elsewhere. Their account inheres only in absence, and in the impossible irony of a Royal African Company indignant at its own abuses. The Company is “forced to keep many of them on their hands,” an inversion of the violence which would have been turned against the enslaved. For them to be kept as though a form of

90 For a treatment of the material conditions of later Royal Africa Company ventures, and so for at least some insight into this one, see William Pettigrew, Freedom’s Debt: The Royal African Company and the Politics of the Atlantic Slave-trade, 1672–1752 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).
ready money, “on their hands,” is to say they were held indefinitely in the holds of the Company’s ships. And it was so, as the Answer puts it, “until they perished.” Presumably, the enslaved died from starvation or disease while kept “on hand,” although it impossible to say how, or perhaps to say—to engage in the recapitulation of history on behalf of the dispossessed and enslaved. Thus, while the missing account of those who perished is an irrevocable lacuna, the Company’s clipped narrative of sustained economic loss remains at once an artifact of indignant deferral of risk onto a silenced population for whom it resolves only when “they perished.”
That many adventures are incident to such as put themselves into the
service on the Seas, I doubt not but is easily conjectured by all men, as
well as have made perill with trial thereof.

Henry Roberts, Newes from the Levan[t] Seas (1594)

4.1 Perilous News: Risk in Merchant Correspondence

This chapter argues that staged maritime news contributed to the articulation of economic risk in
early modern London. Previous chapters have addressed perspectival and diplomatic realizations
of risk in maritime drama, wherein representations of oceanic hazards anticipate the
transmutation of risk into an economic concept. “Perilous News” takes up maritime news,
exploring how several plays develop stage-news as a trope which enacts the complex,
perpetually uncertain relationship between mercantile communities and their oceans of trade. I
argue that some early modern city comedies articulate maritime risk by dramatizing merchants’
“perrilous newes”—reports of shipwreck and war, failed trade deals and pirates—news which
impacts the outlook of each play’s urban financial community. Shakespeare’s Merchant of Venice
(1596) and Haughton’s Englishmen for My Money (1598) both rely on the discourse around
doubtful news to structure their relationship to maritime risk, and stage-news of all sorts reaches
a natural endpoint in Jonson’s Staple of News (1626), a caricature of news’ commercialization.
These plays show that one way of staging economic risk was to render perilous events at sea in
urban financial discourse—to stage merchants’ correspondence as maritime news. This chapter
addresses how news in Englishmen and Merchant is a way for those plays to manage and

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1 H[enry] R[oberts], News from the Leuane Seas. Describing the many perrilous events of the most
woorthy deseruing gentleman, Edward Glenham, Esquire. His hardy attempts in honorable fights, in great
perrill. With a relation of his troubles, and indirect dealings of the King of Argere in Barbarie (London:
Printed for William Wright, 1594), A2r.

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evaluate maritime risk, before closing with a brief coda on the commercialization of news discourse, thirty years later, in *Staple*.

Plays like *Englishmen* and *Merchant* animate the immaterial, procedural uncertainties inherent in contemporary merchants' correspondence by staging such correspondence as news: they establish analogic epistemologies of risk between venturers and spectators. Letters are constantly exchanged among merchants (and their factors) involved in long-distance sea ventures during this period, and those letters often appear onstage transmuted by performance into urgent announcements, debates, and other forms of financial discourse. In prose, conveying the epistemological uncertainty of venturing was difficult to do; correspondence *itself* was difficult to do. Communication between London and distant ports was fundamentally imbued with risk by very practical limitations: venturers' and factors' reports had to traverse distances measured in oceans, on voyages that could last years. In part because of these fundamental challenges, merchants often acted as economic, diplomatic, and exploratory agents all at once. Their reports

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2 The India Office Records possesses just 123 letters from the Company’s first decade (1602–1613), and barely any appear to be missing; only a few letters could have been expected from each voyage, even over the course of years. These early letters are maintained in the India Office Records of the British Library, class E: East India Company: General Correspondence 1602–1859. Most are reliably transcribed in: *Letters Received by the East India Company from its Servants in the East* [1602–1617], eds. F. C. Danvers and William Foster, 6 vols. (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1896–1902).

3 Merchants’ correspondence inevitably concerned the financial risks of venturing. As Francesca Trivellato has described, international news during this period was nearly always mercantile, whether directly or indirectly: “the content and sources of news relevant to merchants overlapped with those used by diplomats, missionaries, travelers, and others,” in part because merchants often were diplomats, missionaries, and travelers. “Merchants’ Letters Across Geographical and Social Boundaries,” *Correspondence and Cultural Exchange in Europe, 1400–1700*, eds. Francisco Bethencourt and Florike Egmond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 80.

4 Even as the busiest continental merchants of the sixteenth century could receive several letters a day from domestic trading partners or European ports, venturers’ news from ships and factors’ reports from distant ports (Asia and the Americas) remained exceptionally infrequent. Most European correspondence was domestic, urban or personal. For example, the Spanish merchant Simon Ruiz received an average of three letters a day for a total of 50,000 between 1558–1598,. See: Henri Lapeyre, *Une famille de marchands: les Ruiz* (Paris Librairie Armand Colin, 1955); Valentin Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres marchandes d’Anvers*, 4 vols (Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1960).
strove to be exhaustive as a matter of necessity, addressing events in all their forms and moving between historical, proleptic, legal, and economic registers. The implicit uncertainty of correspondence that found its way into factors’ letters consistently demonstrates anxiety about whether they can be true—about whether it is possible to establish epistemological fixity over oceans, and if not, how to manage the systemic maritime risk that such documentary practices involve.

One of the East India Company’s earliest extant letters is Gabriel Towerson’s report from Bantam (Indonesia), written in December 1607 and received in London ten months later. Although the comparative flatness of textual practices inhibit Towerson from enacting uncertain modes of maritime news, his letter shows that documentary practices are every bit as important to merchants, factors, and the Company as shipwrecks or pirates. The report amalgamates two years of news regarding English and European ventures in the region, but among the news of shipwrecks and cargo reckonings, his most immediate concern is the crippling unreliability of getting news back and forth from Bantam to London. The letter describes Towerson’s skepticism of EIC Captain David Middleton, who lacks a “letter from your Worships…Captain Middleton told me he had none, showing me many reasons for it.”

5 Towerson describes a Portuguese shipwreck off the horn of India (“a Portugal ship chased ashore where she split and all the Company drowned but two or three which the Fleming saved”), recently arrived Dutch ships and their cargo (“the Black Lion laden at Ternata with cloves and mace”); and tallies up trade conducted with David Middleton’s recently-arrived ship, the Consent (“as per the invoice here inclosed may appear 20 ff. 5 great chests qtt. 214 corges…[etc]”). Although Gabriel Towerson’s previous reports to the East India Company have been lost, a letter from the Court of Directors to the factors at Bantam refers to four letters which had been received from him at London in 1605. The Register of Letters etc. of the Governor and Company of Merchants of London trading into the East Indies, 1600–1619 [The First Letter Book], eds. G.C.M. Birdwood and W. Foster (London: 1893), 148.

practical terms how “the badness of his ship” in the Indian Ocean forced him to separate from other ships on the same voyage which carried more recent letters from the Company in London. As Towerson frames it, the account conflates the structural hazard implicit in the “badness” of Middleton’s ship with broken correspondence.

The 1607 account offers a quiet invoice of the uncertainties of venturing by organizing maritime hazards in terms of correspondence. For both Middleton and Towerson, documentary practices will either motivate or mitigate action in the ongoing conflict with the Dutch:

By this pinnace I did [torn away] my letter which sent to your Worships per the next [torn away] the night before [torn away] to warn Captain Middleton that if he did make sale of victuals to the Spaniards on Ternatta or Teedore, he should not expect any favours or friendship at the Hollanders’ hands that were before those places and that he had writ his letters to that effect...Middleton answered that he went hither as a merchant man and if the Hollanders should offer him any violence he must think he must be called to account for it.7

Although the syntax of Towerson’s account is confused by damage to the manuscript, he seems to be cautioning the captain in the subjunctive mode: unless Middleton were to account for his trade with letters “writ [to the Dutch] to that effect,” he would need to be wary of violent retribution. For Towerson, the Company’s senior factor at Bantam, effective correspondence is coterminous with managing risk: in a postscript, he describes how a Portuguese ship, having failed to communicate with the Dutch, “for fear of them set herself afire.”8 As Towerson’s letter suggests, merchants’ correspondence could subsume the nature of maritime hazard into their own practices, establishing as well as managing the risks of venturing. It was less capable of

7 “Gabriel Towerson to the East India Company” (December 1607), British Library OIR/E/3/2; see Letters Received, eds. Foster and Danvers, 7.
8 Ibid., 8.
conveying to Londoners, oceans away and receiving it all at once, the logic of an epistemological maritime uncertainty in all its disjointedness.

Plays like *Englishmen* and *Merchant* represent the implicit risk of venturing correspondence in part by breaking it up into discrete reports, each qualifying the doubts of the foregoing. For early modern Londoners—merchants, diplomats, and theatre-goers alike—the hazards of sea-venturing were not easily extricable from the accumulation of maritime news onstage. Dramatizing merchants’ correspondence implicated the diverse audience of early modern London theater in a skeptical calculus of uncertain news from the sea. A few examples drawn from *Merchant of Venice* will demonstrate the diverse forms merchants’ correspondence could take onstage. Although it comes about in different ways and addresses a range of concerns, maritime news is often signaled explicitly by some variation on a simple “What news?”

- **Solanio**  
  Now, what news on the Rialto? (3.1.1)

- **Shylock**  
  What news on the Rialto? Who is he comes here? (1.3.33)

- **Graziano**  
  Your hand, Salerio; what’s the news from Venice?  
  How doth that royal merchant, good Antonio? (3.2.47–8)

Despite the similarity of these questions, each questioner gets not only a different sort of response, but a different dramatic form in response. In the first case, Solanio hears from “my gossip Report” and by way of Salerio that the news on the Rialto is hazard: “Antonio / hath a

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9 Stephen Wittek notes that ‘what news,’ often figures, “dramatic utility aside…as a straightforward reflection of contemporary speech.” Although I acknowledge that “what news?” is a common form of address in early modern drama, it would be unproductive to think of it as meaninglessly phatic; its constant use as a mode of address also indicates how central the spoken transmission of news really is to the mercantile community. Wittek, *Media Players: Shakespeare, Jonson, and the Idea of News*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), 28.

ship of rich lading wracked on the / Narrow Seas” (3.1.2–4). This unverifiable rumor of disastrous events at sea is the simplest sort of maritime news: mercantile news, oral. In the second case Shylock, asking about news before he recognizes that the newcomer is the “fawning publican” Antonio, is thus answered by Antonio’s arrival—by the very person of the merchant—and by the obligatory bond they presently work out: financial news, embodied. Finally, in the case of Graziano, “the news from Venice” has come in a letter addressed to Bassanio, and Graziano’s answer is at once the most complete and most oblique, communicated as it is in several dramatic modes. Upon reading the letter, Bassanio pales horribly, Portia reacts in alarm—“What, worse and worse?” (3.2.245)—and while the contents of the letter remain momentarily concealed, a frantic exchange nevertheless ensues: “is it true, Salerio? / Hath all his ventures failed? (3.2.264–5). Salerio responds that they have, and that Shylock has demanded his bond—the pound of flesh—despite “[t]wenty merchants” (3.2.277) pleas and more; as the letter makes clear when it is read aloud, The Merchant of Venice’s whole enterprise is at risk of collapsing. Thus the news from Venice is complex: epistolary in form and all at once private, public, legal, and mercantile, realized onstage in a moment of self-conscious discussion between Bassanio, Portia, Gratiano, and Salerio. Materializing Antonio’s news variously—as public announcement, extended discourse, or physical spectacle—Shakespeare transmutes the financial risk which attended early modern mercantile voyages into theatrical practice, and so implicates spectators in the epistemological uncertainty of venturing.\footnote{For an analogue from Shakespeare’s history plays, see: Alan Stewart, “The forms of news from France in Shakespeare’s 3 Henry VI,” Formal Matters: Reading the materials of English Renaissance Literature, Allison K. Deutermann and Andras Kisery eds., (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013): 151–55.}
This chapter argues that *Merchant of Venice* and *Englishmen for My Money* stage merchants’ correspondence such that it is transformed into a discourse which brings to the stage “high level of skepticism and uncertainty” already implicit in news. Maritime risk obtains in the uncertainty of staged news as it accumulates, either within a scene (in the case of *Englishmen*) or throughout the play (as in *Merchant*). Individual reports and their momentary information are broadened onstage into an extended financial discourse. In this way, staged maritime news “generate[s] an extended present of duration, not instant,” like the ruthlessly elongated, precarious present of the 2016 presidential election. Each of these plays uses news repeatedly to unsettle maritime knowledge, and to build a discourse of financial uncertainty. In fact, maritime news’ doubtful re-iteration is what makes it especially effective for implicating audiences in the ongoing uncertainty of an extended present. When economic relations appear momentarily stable, merchants overwhelmingly receive ‘perrilous newes’ as of their ship “wrecked on the narrow seas” (*Merchant* 3.1.4); when financial disaster is about to take its pound of flesh, it often happens that some “strange accident” brings to light “better news…than you expect” (*Merchant* 5.1.273–4). Yet whether it is good or bad (and it is usually bad), onstage news in these plays is characterized by scrutiny and reversal: venturing news is “uncertain,

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14 Where the word ‘news’ actually appears in Shakespeare’s work, it overwhelmingly refers to misfortune, and often it does so with energetic effect, as in the case of King John’s “news fitting to the night: black, fearful, comfortless, and horrible” (5.6.20–1). On incidents of usage in Shakespeare, including good news as “deceptive reverse-image of bad news yet to come” see: Wittek, *Media Players*, 27–34.
provisional, contradictory, messy.”

Offstage, merchant correspondence inevitably communicates narrative, articulated en masse as in Towerson’s letter; staged maritime news is uniquely capable of assembling risk piecemeal, amid enacted, unmediated financial discourse which implicates the audience in the financial community of London (or Venice) onstage. Individual reports of ships lost to pirates, storms, or war, become news as they accumulate; enacting an evaluative discourse around their accumulation, staged maritime news implicates the audience in the crippling uncertainty early modern merchant-venturers must really have felt.

Wher [at the Royal Exchange] they minte more news then siluer a the Tower...

Sir Henry Herbert to Viscount Scudamore (1632)

4.2 Financial Community in Haughton’s Englishmen for My Money

William Haughton’s *Englishmen for My Money* features an extended scene in London’s Royal Exchange which is organized around the delivery of letters and the resulting discourse of maritime news. The merchant Pisaro, a denizen Portingale who is the central figure of the play, is a man afflicted by news: first by its lateness, then by its delivery, and finally, by the frantic uncertainty that comes with its overabundance. He and his fellow merchants are constantly inquiring after it, repeatedly asking “What news, what news?” and complaining about the systemic unreliability of maritime report, “Where is this lazy villain, this slow post?”

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15 Stewart, “The forms of news,” 150.
The so-called ‘regular’ post was hardly a new institution in 1598, but merchant correspondence from oceans away—or even from Europe, comparatively near—was often exasperatingly unreliable. When the Post does appear, it is as a haggard and darkly tanned young man carrying letters from merchant’s factors in distant countries, and his arrival is loudly heralded. Although news is a difficult thing to materialize onstage, Haughton’s approach is simply to double down on its theatricality. The play marks this moment out, emphasizing the arrival of maritime news and its transformation into a spectacle of risk.

*Englishmen for My Money* stages the period’s clearest and most emphatic treatment of maritime report as an organizing element for the venturing economy. When the Post comes into the Bourse, he so completely absorbs the attention of the merchants that their interactions with him must be narrated by onlookers, as if to emphasize the spectacularity of the news’ arrival. A trio of gentlemen, outsiders and non-merchants, stand aside and remark on what becomes a frantic scramble:

Pisaro
[To the Post] O, sirrah, are you come?

Walgrave
Hoyda, hoyda! What’s the matter now?
Sure yonder fellow will be torn in pieces.

Harvey
What’s he, sweet youths, that so they flock about?
What, old Pisaro tainted with this madness?

Heigham
Upon my life, ’tis some body brings news. (1.3.89–95)

I want to emphasize here the way this scene must have looked onstage, as rendered by the discourse of the three onlookers. Even though there are no stage directions in *Englishmen’s*
quarto, the onlookers’ narration suggests the movements of the merchants, and their rough physicality. The gentlemen appear shocked by what they see: merchants “flock” around the Post with such a desperate enthusiasm for their letters that Walgrave wonders whether the young man will be “torn to pieces;” Harvey, whether the erratic behavior of “old Pisaro” suggests he has gone mad. It is hard to tell for certain whether their expressions of shock are wry or earnest. They could be both: a self-aware commentary on merchants’ urgent relationship to reports from overseas, or an expression of actual confusion regarding the goings-on of the Royal Exchange. For many in the diverse audience of the London theatre, the urgency and uncertainty implicit in overseas news probably was unfamiliar. Jean Howard, thinking of urban cultural practices in precisely this play, has provocatively asked “how many audience members of Englishmen for My Money would have had any direct experience with the practices of international merchants and of the day to day working of the Exchange?…[M]y guess would be: not most of them.”

Thus, as the three gentlemen watch the frenzy over the Post, their narration serves as a familiarizing gloss for what may have been an unfamiliar practice. They model one way of reading the spectacle by attending to its strangeness. For them, the news is embodied, through Pisaro’s urgency, as an object of desire, a means of bringing together the many merchants in the Bourse. In this light, the framing commentary of the three staged outsiders is one way the play enacts coming to terms with the strangeness of Exchange business. Their commentary emphasizes the spectacularity of interaction between merchants and Post, presenting it as one form of the maritime cultural practice captured by the term news.

Amid this news-spectacle, the gentlemen use metaphor and self-conscious critique to evoke the physical hazard involved in venturing, even as they struggle to understand its transmission by the Post. When Heigham ultimately recognizes, “[u]pon my life, ’tis some body brings news,” it is mostly a index, but also, quietly, a wager. By index, I mean that Heigham condenses the flurried interaction of Post and merchants into one signifying element, as if to point and say this is news. Using the expression “upon my life” is not quite so performative a speech act that it independently constitutes staking a bet, nor would it really put his life in danger if it did. Here, it primarily acts as an emphasis, a certification of Heigham’s conclusion regarding the nature of the Post’s letters. For its force, though, “upon my life” depends on the existence of real threat elsewhere, which it cannot help but briefly call up. After all, venturing news is a matter of life and death, as Englishmen—via Pisaro’s letter—will presently demonstrate: pirate attacks; ships swept up in storms, run aground; wars; lost cargo. In this way Heigham’s wager is of a kind with the rest of the gentlemen’s commentary, which is sprinkled with metaphors that figure violence while also undermining it. Walgrave and Harvey gape, “Sure yonder fellow will be torn in pieces” (1.3.91); “What, old Pisaro tainted with this madness?” (1.3.93), mostly lending a certain silliness to the spectacle of a gaggle of old men so anxiously mobbing a youth with letters. But there is something else, too, in the inflections of violence. Like the frantic spectacle itself, the gentlemen’s commentary evokes the real urgency of maritime report, the transmission through news of venturing’s uncertainty and its mortality.

News is on everyone’s lips in Englishmen for My Money’s Royal Exchange. Themobbed Post is only the most extraordinary example. By treating this as a representation of early modern maritime news more broadly, I intend to demonstrate several key characteristics which will be
present, in various inversions, in all of this chapter’s news. These points regard the character and efficacy of maritime news on the early modern stage. Haughton’s spectacular Post has suggested three qualities of maritime news: first, that maritime news does economic work, inasmuch as the merchants of the Exchange treat it as productive knowledge capital even without knowing the contents of the report. Second, following from the previous, that news is not report, but is instead comprised of discourse, and ought to be attended to as an independent theatrical quantity. In other words, news is neither the material letter nor the verbal announcement, but an ongoing discursive practice which emerges from both. Third and finally, Haughton’s spectacle suggests that maritime news as a theatrical discourse is inextricable from the risk associated with venturing—with what I have called venturing’s uncertainty and mortality. As this chapter shows, the stage brings maritime news to bear in a variety of ways, and I am proposing now that these qualities, exemplified by the spectacle of the Exchange’s Post, will be latent in all of them, however variously.

*Englishmen for My Money*’s “Exchange scene” (1.3) inscribes within itself the social patterns and limitations of London’s Royal Exchange, constructing a financial network mostly cordoned off from the rest of the play. Within the Exchange, London is a market, an avalanche of rapid economic interactions which show how tightly-bound financial relationships are constructed by venturing news, and as Jean Howard has written of the behavior of Londoners in Haughton’s *Englishmen*, this earliest of citizen comedies would have “helped [audiences] make

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22 Outside this scene, *Englishmen* is closer to an Italianate farce than a London city comedy. On the origins of citizen comedy in the Italian tradition, as well as on Jacobean city comedy, see: Alexander Leggatt, *Citizen comedy in the age of Shakespeare* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), esp. 7.
discursive sense of the city.” Howard’s formulation deserves to be pressed. There are many discursive modes early modern audiences may have learned from Englishmen to make some sense of London, and in the Exchange scene audiences were uniquely exposed to the maritime news discourse which helped them shape their economic sense of the city.

In the play’s opening lines, Pisaro positions himself within a complex, evocatively maritime mercantile network. He begins smugly, describing his “laden ships from fertile Spain” bourn homeward “upon this moistening southwest wind” (1.1.4–5):

\[
\text{But come what will, no wind can come amiss,}\\
\text{For two and thirty winds that rules the seas,}\\
\text{And blows about this airy region,}\\
\text{Thirty-two ships have I to equal them,}\\
\text{Whose wealthy fraughts do make Pisaro rich.}\\
\text{Thus every soil to me is natural.}\\
\text{Indeed, by birth I am a Portingale… (1.1.5–11)}
\]

This opening reverie has been routinely misread as signifying either overwhelming wealth or anti-English independence. It does neither. When Pisaro says he has “thirty-two ships,” he does not mean that he owns them, as critics have tended to assume. Around the turn of the seventeenth century, investors in ventures of a few ships could number in the hundreds (for

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23 Howard, Theater of a City, 39.
25 For example, in Howard, Theater of a City, 42.
example, the list of debtors to East India Company’s second joint stock, as tallied in 1624, shows seventy-three names on just one of several pages). Of course, in 1598 Pisaro could not quite have been a member of a self-determined joint-stock company—the EIC, England’s first joint-stock, was not established until 1601—but most of the 16th century was nevertheless dominated by guild-based, collusive trade in which merchants invested together to defray risk. Robert Brenner’s work demonstrates convincingly that the English textile industry, in the form of the Company of Merchant Adventurers and as early as the 1550s, participated in simplified versions of the investment practices later refined into the EIC’s joint-stock model. Indeed, Pisaro suggests his own membership in the Adventurers when he haggles with an English merchant over the price of cloth: “What, shall I have these cloths? / For I would ship them straight away for Stoade” (1.3.83). “Stoade” appears to be a contemporary spelling of Stade, a trading city near Hamburg, where the Adventurers had established a profitable cloth trade around 1587. Later, in a moment to which I will return in considerable detail, merchants discussing Pisaro’s despair over a trio of lost ships describe that “There’s twenty merchants will be sorry for it, / That shall be partners with him in this loss” (1.3.197–201). In short, Pisaro introduces himself by

26 See Figure 1. British Library, India Office Records, H/39: Miscellaneous Papers, “List of the adventurers yet unpaid for the 2nd joint stock,” f.26. This is an incomplete table of seventy-three debts owed in 1624 by investors in the East India Company’s second joint stock (1617–1628), itself a set of many voyages that distributed costs to shareholders.


describing his *stake* in thirty-two ships, thus suggesting his integration into the English financial network as well as a particular sort of financial acuity.

Reimagining *Englishmen for My Money*’s opening monologue as a vexed narrative of economic integration into the merchant community helps to explain the events which take place within the Exchange as typical of the economic space of Haughton’s London. It challenges readings which position the events of the Exchange entirely outside the behaviors in the rest of the play, which we are otherwise to understand as accommodating some Anglophile economic norm. Crystal Bartolovich, in one such reading, sees economic chaos on the floor of Haughton’s Exchange: it “display[s] the market as a sphere of vast, impersonal, unpredictable and chaotic forces.”

For Bartolovich, the Exchange is a space of mercantile diffusion that alienates London audiences from the behavior of foreign merchants like Pisaro and the Strangers. Matters are resolved only by normalizing the otherwise threatening alien market through later scenes which forget the Exchange and stage “London as a culturally triumphant safe haven from [merchants’] economic disruptiveness.” Yet it is important to distinguish real chaos, and real alienation, from a developing system and a public in the throes of its own formation.

Haughton’s representation of the Royal Exchange has its own techniques for managing, if not normalizing, the economic space of the stage. What Bartolovich reads as alienating chaos, I would reframe as mercantile action which is ordered, if frenetic—organized by the articulation of maritime report and centered on the spectacular arrival of the Post with which I began. Somewhere in every critical case for cultural exclusion—be it the way *Englishmen* alienates


30 Bartolovich, “London’s the Thing,” 151.
Londoners from their own economic system, or the “exuberant xenophobia” implicit in the play’s “unapologetic mimicry of national stereotypes and vernaculars”\footnote{Levine, “Trading in Tongues,” 79–80.}—is the underlying sense that Pisaro is a outsider, figured discretely from an established English economic system. Instead, Haughton’s Exchange models a system in the process of formation, one to which Pisaro is shown to be central by the risky venturing investments materialized in news discourse. At the “hub of [London’s] early modern information networks,”\footnote{Natasha Glaisyer, The Culture of Commerce in England, 1660–1720, (Rochester, NY: Boydell and Brewer, 2006), 27.} *Englishmen for My Money* depicts mercantile action as a flurry of communication organized around the dissemination of report.

While the Royal Exchange served a variety of purposes in 1598, it was above all an organized, if urgent, space for the circulation of mercantile information and venturing news. Contemporary accounts from visitors to the Exchange agree on this, and English regulation enforced it when the space faltered in that purpose. In 1576, a visiting Frenchman described the Royal Exchange as an international clearinghouse in both the financial and informational senses of that word:

> Each nation has its own quarter…[h]owever, they are all at liberty to go hither and thither through the Exchange according to their need. Their letters can reach them there, and letter-carriers deliver [messages] to those to whom they are addressed. Here also one regularly hears the news of other countries and regions, which is a great convenience for those who traffick in merchandise across the seas.\footnote{L. Grenade, “Les Singularitez de Londres, 1576,” The Royal Exchange, ed. Ann Saunders, Publication No. 152 (London: The London Topographical Society, 1997), 48.}

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These affairs—in particular the delivery of report and the discourse of news—were subject to a clear schedule that persisted at the Bourse through the 16th and into the 17th century.\textsuperscript{34} Although the Royal Exchange was full of shops and other sorts of commerce transacted throughout the day, its main business as an international clearinghouse took place under very limited hours, generally eleven to noon and five to six. At least as it is represented in \textit{Englishmen for My Money}, this schedule seems to have created an environment of precarity as well as exigency. The audience first hears about the Exchange as a place to which Pisaro is already late: “‘tis past eleven, Exchange time full” (1.1.222). Haughton drives home this urgency in the character of Balsaro, a merchant who emphasizes several means by which the schedule of the Exchange exerted force on its participants. Balsaro complains that he has “run about” and “toiled all day to find [Pisaro]” by reason of the Portingale’s initial lateness to the Exchange (1.3.157–8). Shortly after, he narrates the ringing of the Exchange’s bell: “Master Pisaro, the day is late; the bell doth ring / Wilt please you hasten to perform this business?” (1.3.271–2). Complaints like Balsaro’s must have been lodged fairly frequently. For example, Thomas Gainsford insists in 1616 that a presence at the Exchange is one key way of maintaining financial credit: “for if he faile at his daies, and absent himself from the common place of entercourse, as we cal it the Bursse, let him

\textsuperscript{34} In the latter part of the 17th century several pieces of regulation were instituted to restore what officials felt was the greater efficiency of the turn-of-the-century Exchange by reinstating “the Ordination and Vsage of former times”: “[W]hich for meeting were at Noon by Eleven, and for departing at Twelve of the clock; and at Nights, from \textit{Michaelmas} to \textit{Lady-day} at Five and Six, and from \textit{Lady-day} to \textit{Michaelmas} at Six and Seven; and a Bell used to be rung for warning to all persons to depart, and a certain Penalty appointed that was wont to be levied upon any that remained beyond those Hours…” Another regulatory announcement, this one from 1673, appeals to the “antient Custom of this City of \textit{London}” to set standards for brokers which would prevent “usurious Contracts and Bargains, false Chevesance and other corrupt Devices and crafty Deceits;” in doing so, the note limits the number of brokers on the floor of the Exchange, English and foreign combined, to 118. \textit{Commune Concilium tentum in Camera Guild-hall civitatis London, die Sabbati, vicesimo primo die Februarii,}(London: Andrew Clark, 1673).
never be so rich, he looseth a good opinion, and hazardeth his reputation for ever.”

As Natasha Glaisyer explains, “such was the importance of making merchants available to attend the Exchange at the appropriate hours” that London’s Court of Aldermen rescheduled their meetings, encouraging the “East India and Levant companies, among other metropolitan mercantile bodies, to do the same.”

This stringency would have meant that all of London’s elite merchants heard the same information at roughly the same time, at once creating an epistemological standard within the financial community and reinforcing an implicit uncertainty alongside that standard.

Pisaro reaches the Royal Exchange late, just after eleven o’clock, “Exchange time full” (1.1.222). From the first moment, he is busy reaffirming economic relationships with other merchants. The process of forming these relationships, what we might now call networking, is made up in large part by discussing maritime news. Although the arrival of the Post is the centerpiece—the spectacular moment which literally gathers the merchants together—news either launches, interrupts, or resolves nearly every interaction in the Exchange. To list them, even partially, gives an appropriately manic picture of Haughton’s Bourse and its morning hour: upon entering the Exchange, Pisaro greets several foreigners as “Masters Strangers” and proposes to have a trio married to his three daughters (1.3.1); the English merchants Moore and Towerson report that “long-expected ships” from Spain have come into port at Plymouth (1.3.32), and from which Towerson brings Pisaro a bill of exchange; he immediately denounces the bill as “counterfeit,” cursing the “slow Post” which has failed to verify it (1.3.40–54); he defers loans to the three English gentlemen—Harvey, Walgrave and Heigham— instead inviting

them over “between the hours of two and three” to discuss their mortgages, which are already on
the verge of default (1.3.64–78); he haggles with a Merchant Adventurer, “Master Browne,” over
the price of cloths for trade near Hamburg (1.3.81). All this occurs before the spectacle of the
Post; after the Post arrives and the merchants accost him as I have described above, matters turn
perilous: Pisaro, reading his factor’s letter, learns that three English ships have “met and are
beset with Spanish galleys / As they did sail along by Italy” (1.3.120–1). This news animates the
remainder of the scene, driving Pisaro’s arguments with Towerson and Walgrave (1.3.119–56)
before becoming the subject of general discussion among the many merchants on the Exchange
“[t]hat shall be partners with him in this loss” (1.3.201) and an origin of confusion for the three
English gentlemen, whom Pisaro, in his distraction, subsequently mistakes for foreigners. More
news comes for Pisaro, first in the form of Balsaro and his indeterminate “business,” and then
carried by Alvaro the Italian, who conveys the shocking, contradictory news from his factor in
Venice that a storm has made “de [Spanish] galleys run away for fear be almost drowned,” and
that the three English ships have not been captured after all, but rather are “all ‘scaped
away’”(1.3.248, 264). Promptly after this report from Alvaro, the Exchange bell rings one
o’clock; Pisaro pays the Post, satisfies the bill of exchange, and repairs to his home, exulting at
the topsy-turvy mercantile life that has him “in a moment cursed, in a trice blessed” (1.3.260–1).

In all of this, Englishmen for My Money represents venturing news almost dialectically,
as a series of contradictory reports which accumulate into an ongoing discourse of maritime risk.
Pisaro’s responses, and those of his fellow merchants, model an ordered way of coming to terms
with the unpredictability of maritime report. The discourse of news, and the economic
rationalities which come along with that discourse (credit, investment, divestment, willing debt),
are not symptoms of a chaotic economic space, but a developing one. Haughton stages the formation of a community woven together by economic discourse, in the process of receiving perilous news: conflicting accounts from factors who disagree, and the condition of uncertainty that obtains from their delivery.

The spectacular arrival of the Post with his letters may be the best index of news’ centrality in the theatrical construction of the Royal Exchange, but the majority of the scene’s news is circulated by word of mouth. This meant that news was nearly always social, creating a financial community as well as registering, in terms of news’ constant oracular precariousness, the community’s disruption. Recent work on news historiography has shown that this was historically the case even after the rise of newsprint in the 1620s. As one historian has pointed out, all news “depended heavily on spoken transmission,” and plays in particular “lay across the permeable interface between the oral and the written”: even physical letters like those carried by the Post are, once received, read aloud onstage—“divulged to others by word of mouth.”

Pisaro’s first interaction on the Exchange with English merchants begins with the common refrain, “What news, what news?” (1.3.27). The news, for the moment, is very good:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Pisaro} Master Moore.
Marry, with all my heart good morrow, sir.
What news, what news?
\textit{Moore} This merchant here, my friend, would speak with you.
\textit{Towerson} Sir, this jolly southwest wind with gentle blast
Has driven home our long-expected ships,
All laden with the wealth of ample Spain (1.3.26–31)
\end{quote}

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The exchange between Pisaro, Moore, and Towerson exemplifies the simultaneously social and theatrical efficacy of news. In the social terms of Englishmen’s mercantile community, Towerson’s news gets him an introduction to Pisaro, and in theatrical terms, it establishes a basis for a financial discourse between these three men which develops over the course of the crowded Exchange scene.

If we are to take Towerson at his word, the three merchants are mutually invested in “our long-expected ships.” This is the first of many conversations in Haughton’s Exchange which emphasize the way news creates connections between economic actors. Pisaro, delighted by the good fortune, almost immediately turns to his fellows and begins committing his influx of credit toward social connection: “How like you this news, friends? Master Vandal / Here’s somewhat towards my daughter’s dowry. / Here’s somewhat more than we did yet expect” (1.3.37–8). His reaction is notable for two reasons. First, it demonstrates the practical influence of news on credit, and thus on solvency more generally. Pisaro responds quite rationally; he immediately registers that this news has changed his outlook. The sudden improvement of his expected long-term returns does indeed directly alter the attractiveness of contemporary investment, such that he envisions adding “somewhat towards my daughter’s dowry.” Second, Pisaro’s response invites the attention of the other merchants onstage—“how like you this news, friends?”—and so offers a sliver of financial networking in progress. Public-making, of course, is not a static process, and Towerson immediately protests, “But hear you, sir, my business is not done / From these same ships I did receive these lines, / And there enclosed this same bill of exchange / To

pay at sight, if you so please accept it” (1.3.40–3). Bills of exchange were promissory notes that notified the recipient of a debt to the bearer, and subsequently constituted a request for payment upon delivery.39 In this case, the bill would require Pisaro to pay Towerson immediately for debts incurred by one of his factors. Here, just as a moment ago, Pisaro’s reaction to news is immediate and suggestive; he refuses to pay, protesting that he has not yet received notice of such a debt: “Accept it? Why? What, sir, should I accept? / Have you received letters, and not I?… / I would not have you bring me counterfeit” (1.3.44–5, 49). The play between this piece of news and the last constitutes financial uncertainty, a reversal. The introduction of Towerson brings to bear two pieces of contradictory financial news, and puts the audience, like Pisaro, in an epistemological quandary. We are witnesses to news of profit, then of debt, and are ultimately suspended between them, uncertain along with Pisaro. Without more news, newer news, the bill of exchange cannot be verified. In financial terms, Englishmen seems to be calling for an impossible due diligence from spectators already placed in an indeterminate position. As Pisaro attempts to determine whether or not he should pay Towerson, he and the audience are poised together between doubtful reports in the midst of a developing conversation regarding distant events. This brief exchange offers a microcosm of venturing news in performance: a discourse that emerges from report and subsequently models a means of coming to terms with uncertainty.

When the Post does arrive with letters shortly thereafter, the sense of financial uncertainty established in the debate over the bill of exchange is addressed, but very pointedly not resolved. Pisaro receives two letters from the Post and stands aside, reading each aloud:

39 See OED, 3rd ed., s.v. “bill,” n.3 9a. “A written order by the writer or ‘drawer’ to the ‘drawee’ (the person to whom it is addressed) to pay a certain sum on a given date to the ‘drawer’ or to a third person named in the bill, known as the ‘payee’.”
Our duty premised, and we have sent unto your worship sack, Seville oils, pepper, Barbary sugar, and such other commodities as we thought most requisite. We wanted money; therefore we are fain to take up 200 of Master Towerson’s man, which by a bill of exchange sent to him, we would request your worship pay accordingly.’ You shall command, sir, you shall command, sir. ‘The news here is that the English ships, the Fortune, your ship, the Adventure, and Good Luck of London, coasting along by Italy towards Turkey, were set upon by two Spanish galleys. What became of them we know not but doubt much by reason of the weathers calmness.’ (1.3.100–10)

Together, these letters exemplify the condition of sustained uncertainty under which Pisaro—and all venturers—must have operated. Neither bears good news, as the discourse they produce bears out. The first letter validates Towerson’s bill of exchange, and Pisaro, acknowledging as much, implies his intent to make good on the debt: “You shall command, sir, you shall command.” Yet the second letter brings another blow to fortune: it reports that three English ships have been attacked by Spanish pirates, and Pisaro has stakes in at least one of them. Reading these two letters in sequence, he resolves one unfavorable situation only to encounter another point of maritime indeterminacy: “what became of them we know not, but doubt much.” By reading these letters aloud, converting documentary report into theatrical news discourse, Pisaro represents the venturer’s experience of risk as the perpetually inconsistent knowledge of potential loss at sea.

Pisaro wastes no time before sharing his factor’s report with the assembled merchants of the Exchange. His choice to do so is worth noting in part because it flies against the guidelines of contemporary merchants’ manuals. A practicing venturer in early modern London would probably not have told his fellows about the attack on his ship, as the Portingale does here in Englishmen. One of the late sixteenth century’s more popular merchant manuals, The marchants aviso, counseled that a wise factor should keep his news close to his chest: “And when you have learned of anie ship that commeth for England, doe not yourselfe make it knowne to anie bodie
at all: but write and deliver your letters secretlie, for it shall sound much to your especial
credit.”

As Browne’s *viso* implicitly recognizes, such reports constituted a form of financial
capital which lost their individuated value in free distribution. In other words, not only did
reports *address* financial affairs, such as the Spanish bill of exchange, they were themselves
financial; possessing a unique report has financial implications in a space like the Exchange,
where the circulation of news is the primary business.

So when Towerson asks, “Now, sir, what doth your factor’s letters say?” it is strange that
Pisaro responds so immediately and honestly: “Marry, he saith these witless, luckless dolts /
Have met and are beset with Spanish galleys / As they did sail along by Italy” (1.3.120–2).
Towerson responds dully that the news of pirates “makes nothing of my bill of exchange / This
dealing fits not one of your account”—by which he puns on credit—Pisaro explodes,
admonishing his fellow venturers regarding the relationship between perilous news and financial
solvency: “And what fits yours? / …That sees the world turned topsy-turvy with me, / Yet hath
not so much wit to stay a while / Til I bemoan my late excessive loss?” (1.3.133–7) This retort
frames Towerson’s insistence on immediate payment not just as insensitive, but more
importantly, as blind to the realities of financial uncertainty brought on by perilous report. It
reinforces news’ effect on the Exchange’s financial community: the risk inherent in the newly
“topsy-turvy” world is exactly what makes Pisaro unwilling to pay his debts. All the same, this
interaction continues to reinforce the bourse’s financial community simply because Pisaro is so
easily convinced to make his report into news very much in ignorance of practical convention.
Thus, Haughton marks out the (inadvisable) articulation of maritime report as an object of news

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discourse, rendering permeable the boundary between documentary, oral, and theatrical practices in the course of modeling financial risk.

*Englishmen for My Money* represents financial risk as a persistently dialogic uncertainty that is shared as news among the merchant-venturers of the Royal Exchange. After Pisaro announces his misfortune to the assembly, the other merchants stand aside to consider the financial implications of a pirate attack for London's venturing public:

*Moore*  
Assure ye, Master Towerson, I cannot blame him.  
I warrant you, it is no easy loss.  
How think you, Master Stranger? By my faith, sir,  
There's twenty merchants will be sorry for it,  
That shall be partners with him in this loss.

*Stranger*  
The Spanish galleys have beset our ships,  
That lately were bound out for Syria.

*Merchant*  
What not? I promise you I am sorry for it. (1.3.197–205)

This moment is the culmination of the corporate economic rationality materialized in Haughton’s Royal Exchange. The venturing news around which the whole, long scene has been organized—and by which financial risk is transmitted from factor to merchant—is framed as a risk to everyone, Englishman and Stranger alike. This is the discourse which drives home the sense that Pisaro, denizen or not, is integral to the financial community of London, illustrating a kind of mutual *economic* sympathy even among merchants which may otherwise be frustrated with foreignness as a sociopolitical condition. It is worth noting that in 1598 “most English Crown debt was still in the hands of Continental bankers and merchants,” which meant that “the money market and overseas trade itself had an alien inflection for Londoners.”

Indeed, Haughton stages cultural alienation and financial integration dialectically, through the many reversals of

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41 Bartolovich, “London’s the Thing,” 140.
perilous news. Along one vector, the audience is presented with a foreigner-by-birth whose domestic concerns—land ownership and the marriage of his daughters—are at odds with sociopolitical English-ness. Along another, they are asked to recognize that Pisaro’s financial engagements have enmeshed him in the London merchant community. If Haughton frames all merchant action as alienated—even in the Royal Exchange, and even the action of London merchants—it is more by rendering all merchant action as imbued with uncertainty than by ostracizing Pisaro and the Strangers.

Within their ongoing discussion about the the Spanish galleys, Moore, the Stranger, and the (English) Merchant demonstrate how the economic effect of misfortune at sea fails to differentiate by nationality. Foreigners and Englishmen sympathize with each other: they are implicated in the risk of lost cargo as a unified financial community, not divided ethnic ones. Crystal Bartolovich has written insightfully of how Englishmen explores this process:

On the one hand, then, the scene seems to emphasize the sociality of exchange—demystifying it by insisting that it is a human and relational process—on the other hand, however, it ultimately shows human economic interchange to be governed by an unnamed, diffuse, mysterious force, a juncture of contingencies of weather, whim, and luck, that even the merchants themselves have no control over, as Pisaro’s buffeted emotional state in this scene illustrates.42

Yet even more than Bartolovich acknowledges, Haughton actively demonstrates the confusion wrought by maritime uncertainty on structured ‘sociality.’ Pisaro, buffeted indeed, fails to differentiate nationalities not just as the sea does—abstractly—but in a practical theatrical sense. Distraught by the news of his pirate-beset ships, he mistakes his English debtor Walgrave for Vandal, a Dutchman, and apologetically invites him to dinner: “Master Vandal, I confess I wrong

42 Bartolovich, “London’s the Thing,” 147.
you / …I beseech you and your friends / Defer your business till dinner time” (1.3.208). Hearing this, the English gentlemen comment to one another on his befuddlement, “Tis midsummer-moon with him; let him alone. / He calls Ned Walgrave Master Vandal” (1.3.211–3). The gentlemen are poking fun at Pisaro in his misery, to be sure, but Haughton is doing something more: suggesting that the unpredictable “contingencies of weather, wind, and luck” bear directly, actively, on London sociopolitical relations. It is almost as though nationality is unmoored by the constantly shifting reports of maritime hazard, or at least subordinated to more pressing financial concerns. Thus Englishmen for My Money models the emergence of a specialized financial discourse, through which participants alienate themselves economically, not nationally. Although Pisaro’s foreignness is never ignored, discourses like the one above, worked out between Englishmen and Strangers regarding a Portingale’s news of general loss, suggest that national identity can be subordinated to economic identity within London’s developing financial network.

Given the financial uncertainty already articulated by Pisaro’s conflicting reports, it is almost inevitable that the report of Spanish galleys is ultimately contradicted. Moments after the socio-economic uncertainty of the Exchange has seen its exemplification in Pisaro’s confusion, Alvaro the Italian enters and asks, a final time, for news: “Wat news make you look so naught?” (1.3.237) As each subsequent report in Englishmen’s Exchange scene has illustrated, they are only constituent entries into the larger, perpetually uncertain news-discourse among the venturers onstage. Alvaro, hearing from Pisaro about the captured English ships, promptly contributes to the ongoing discourse yet another reversal, a “lettre from my factor de Venice, dat after un piculo battalion, for un half hour de come a wind fra de north, and de sea go tumble here, and tumble dare, dat make de galleys run away for fear be almost drowned” (1.3.245–249).
In other words, a storm drove off the pirates, the English ships made safely on for Crete, and Pisaro crows that “My goods [are] all safe, my ships all ‘scaped away” (1.3.264). The economic discourse of news in Haughton’s Exchange, as we have seen, is constituted from just such reversals: ships from Spain are safe at Plymouth, others off the coast of Italy are beset by pirates, and then again, finally, in a letter brought by an Italian, Alvaro, those very same ships are quite secure. This last piece of news arrives even as the stage directions signify the end of Exchange Time—“The Exchange bell rings” (1.3.270n)—and in a practical, theatrical sense, the closing-out of Englishmen’s financial community.

Pisaro, as well as Englishmen’s audience, have by this point been jointly implicated in the persistently uncertain discourse arising from maritime report. The Portingale remains skeptical, recognizing even within Balsaro’s “good” news the problems of epistemological uncertainty which have plagued all news in the Exchange scene, and so employing here as elsewhere a discursive sort of risk management in the form of an evaluative outburst: “How, sir! / …Much should I doubt me that some scoffing jack / Had sent thee in the midst of all my griefs / To tell a feigned tale of happy luck” (1.3.250, 256–8). Pisaro seems to recognize, rightly, that the risky news-discourse in which he participates in Englishmen for My Money is a sustained condition. English and foreign merchants alike are mutually, corporately engaged in an economic discourse which communicates a sense of risk through the ongoing discourse of perilous news.

In the name of God Amen Be it known unto all men by their presented that A.J. of London Merchantes and Company doe make assurance and cause them selves and every of them to be assured Loste or not Loste, Knowne, or not Knowne…of the Seasmen of warre, Fier, Enemies, Pirates, Robers, Theeves, […]and] of all other perilles losses and misfortunes whatsoever
they be or however the same at any time before the date hereof have chanced or hereafter shall happen.

“An Assurance” [Insurance of cargo of fish from Newfoundland, 1604]

4.3 Assessing Uncertain News in *Merchant of Venice*

Antonio presents audiences of *The Merchant of Venice* with a figure of financial incongruity. He is fiscally improvident but also commercially successful; he is unconcerned about “misfortune to [his] ventures,” but all his actions are organized by risk. When Marc Shell addressed Antonio’s financial behavior in a founding essay of the new economic criticism, he framed this puzzling inconsistency as a problem with insurance. Given that marine insurance was widely used in England throughout much of the sixteenth century, Shell notes, “It is odd that Antonio does not insure his ships.” For a financial drama so explicitly concerned with merchants and their finances, as with other forms of contract—bonds, usury, wills—it is hard to imagine a more significant omission. Why not insurance? Critics have come up with some very clever answers. Yet by proposing a solution to the problem of *Merchant*’s missing insurance, we may

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“foreclos[e upon] the realm of risk per se,” which seems decidedly unproductive for a play in which every plot and subplot is motivated by the omnipresent risk of financial default: Bassanio’s, Antonio’s, and even Portia’s. Indeed, Antonio’s conspicuous failure to insure his ships could be described as a precondition for the risk—to his body as to his finances—that structures the play. Nonetheless, something here is odd: perhaps it is not that Shakespeare leaves insurance out of Venice, but that the play brings to bear maritime risk, financial uncertainty, and economic networks even so. How does it do this? Not insurance, but news.

The developing logic of English insurance policies shares much with the practices of Merchant’s news network. Unlike the accumulation of merchants' correspondence in Haughton’s Royal Exchange, the maritime news which circulates throughout Merchant is decentralized. There are fourteen distinct news-interactions staged throughout the play—nine of which have to do exclusively with maritime or financial issues—altogether involving twelve individuals. These interactions map a remarkably dispersed network: of the twelve individuals who deal with news, only Bassanio, Portia, and Salerio are involved in more than three exchanges (five, four, and four respectively), and while there are no messengers, four individuals encounter or deliver news only once. Even in other early works by Shakespeare, such as 3 Henry VI, news-interactions are organized more like the spokes of a wheel; there, news of the wars in France is shuttled to Warwick and Edward IV by a string of nameless messengers. In Merchant, by contrast, the exchange of maritime news occurs along many vectors: between Salerio and


47 Staged news-interactions are defined as either asking for or receiving news; if both occur in the same interaction—as they often do—I have counted it only once. References to un-staged interactions, such as Salerio’s account of a conversation with a Frenchman (2.8.28) are not counted, while his exchange with Solanio is.
Solanio; Bassanio and Portia; Antonio, his ships, Shylock, and Tubal. By dispersing news among so many figures, Shakespeare traces a precarious financial network through theatrical Venice.  

In what follows, I contend that *Merchant*'s correspondence is not just an “instrument[] of financial credit,” but—like insurance and perhaps in its place—a “technology of risk” for establishing the play’s financial network and implicating the audience in the maritime risk experienced by early modern merchants, like Antonio and Bassanio.

English marine insurance—“assurance” until around 1660—had been institutionalized in London for more than half a century by the time Shakespeare drafted *The Merchant of Venice*. The interrelationship between financial risk and insurance was unavoidable from the start, having to do in large part with the way people organize themselves by anxieties peculiar to their groups, such as fear of shipwreck—or fear of losing a pound of flesh. Although the network of financial actors in *The Merchant of Venice* is geographically and dramatically decentralized, it nevertheless constitutes a population; in the terms of François Ewald, “nothing is a risk in itself” but instead becomes one precisely by distribution among a population, along a network:

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48 On the “networked space” of European mercantile interactions, see Zwierlein, “Renaissance anthropologies of security,” 165–7.
The term [risk] designates neither [a unique] event nor a general kind of event occurring in reality (the unfortunate kind), but a specific mode of treatment of certain events capable of happening to a group of individuals—or, more exactly, to values or capitals possessed or represented by a collectivity of individuals—that is to say, a population.52

In the culminating scene of Merchant’s maritime despair, midway through the play, Bassanio and the audience are made mutually aware of ‘certain events’—that Antonio’s ships have all “all miscarried”—by just such a ‘specific mode’: a letter delivered to Belmont. This and the other maritime reports, rumors, and letters which trace Merchant’s financial network are precisely the ‘mode of treatment’ by which financial uncertainty is repeatedly communicated among Venetians and the play’s audience. Though Shakespeare’s play may lack both insurance and Englishmen’s Royal Exchange, Merchant’s circulating news of shipwreck nevertheless establishes analogic epistemologies of risk for a population on and off stage.

The play’s audience may already have been predisposed to think of news tied up with insurance in a relationship to maritime risk. By the 1580s, the London marine insurance industry was even more developed than was the industry in continental centers of finance like Venice, Antwerp, and Seville, offering not just more policies, but more types of policies. Just as the merchant Antonio sponsors Bassanio’s nuptial venture, most English underwriters of marine insurance were also merchants themselves.53 This meant that underwriting a policy did less to mitigate risk for the merchant population as a whole than shift it toward the most audacious merchant-assurers.54 In effect, insurance was its own venture—one whose organization and

management from a hub in London depended wholly upon news of maritime catastrophe.\textsuperscript{55} A brief look at a mid-century legal dispute may help show how.

\textit{Carre v. Brochoo}, a marine insurance case pled before the Chancery in 1559, exhibits the roots of the English “lost or not lost” policy, and helped codify the influence of news and its circulation for the English logic of risk as it inhered for London’s merchant-insurers. Even in the difficult logic of the 1559 case, locating uncertainty in news-practices was a way of ordering the abstraction of maritime risk. The insurers on \textit{Carre v. Brochoo}’s defense argued that they could not be held financially responsible for a shipwreck occurring May 29th under a policy signed the 14th of June (fourteen days after the wreck) on the basis that it was \textit{possible} for news of the wreck to have arrived:

\begin{quote}
Although no certen news ys or can be proved to be or come uppon land to the contry or place, wheare the same assuruance shall happen to be made, of the losse of the goodes, wares or merchandises so assured happeninge before the tyme of the said assurance, yeat if anye news thereof might have comen, althoughe none came in dede…accomptinge, entendinge and takinge the same possibility after this sorte and manner: to sye allowinge to the said messanger one hour for every three miles travayle by land or by sea, for every three myles being distant betwene the place where the said loss happenth to be and the said place wheare the assurance happeneth to be made.\textsuperscript{56}
\end{quote}

The wildly involuted syntax of this policy defers the responsibility for loss onto news recursively, almost endlessly. News is simultaneously the subject of proleptic conditionals (“Although…proved to be”) and past-tense, counterfactual hypotheticals (“yeat if any news thereof might have come although none came in dede”). As the phenomenological locus and active element in a body of legalese maritime uncertainties, news comes to absorb, even


materialize, the risk of shipwreck. The understanding of risk implied here conflates the event of shipwreck with its news, so that the former depends on the latter. A bit like the demise of Schrödinger’s cat, the shipwreck has not occurred until news of it “can be proved to [have]” arrived to London, yet once it does, that very news may exonerate insurers from financial responsibility; it may re-actuate maritime risk for the venturers themselves. Rather than holding an event and its risk to mutually inherent, English insurers located risk in the phenomenon’s medium of transmission, its “mode of treatment” a la Ewald: the shipwreck inherent only in the possibility of news.

English insurance policies were carrying this logic to its inevitable conclusion by the late 1590s, around the time *The Merchant of Venice* was onstage in Shoreditch. Having recognized that there was, in a sense, no risk but in news, later London policies incorporated evaluative practices for assessing the uncertainty implicit in maritime news itself. Such policies could be taken out, usually at astronomical rates, utterly without respect to time, the possibility of news, and *even in the face of reports which said a ship had sunk*. These policies operated on the recognition that news of shipwreck was not always accurate: some ships reported lost may have been merely laid up, or a wrecked ship may have been misidentified. In the epigraph to this section, a typical 1604 policy insuring a cod vessel from Newfoundland, the underwriters have promised indemnity “Loste or not Loste, Knowne, or not Knowne...of all other perilles losses and misfortunes whatsoever they be or however the same at any time before the date hereof have chanced or hereafter shall happen.”⁵⁷ Rather than identify news with loss, a bugaboo to be avoided, “lost or not lost” policies synthesized news and made it the subject of analysis: what

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was the likelihood that such and such a ship really hadn’t sunk; what was the chance a report was wrong? In this way, news becomes a figure of risk rendered calculable; it could be reckoned. 

Taking the events of *Merchant* as exemplary: although rumors of Antonio’s “ship of rich lading wrecked on the Narrow Seas,” circulated on the Rialto, a policy could still be drawn up to assure the vessel and its goods on Solanio’s vocalized suspicion that such reports might be “lying… gossip[s]” (3.1.4–5). By acknowledging that “the possible may be more or less probable,” as Luke Wilson puts it, this development in the market for marine insurance not only implies an alteration in the fundamental assumptions surrounding maritime risk, but calls on merchant-assurers to use their private news-networks to determine news’ degree of probability.

Economic historian Peter Spufford writes that “[f]or insurance to be practicable, underwriters…depended on a network of couriers to carry information.” As I have argued above, *Merchant of Venice* organizes merchant correspondence into just such a news network, and Antonio has at least two such couriers—Salerio and Solanio—who together map an urgent network of credit and news between Christian and Jew, Rialto and Belmont.

There is no unifying archetypical scene which establishes the network of news laid out in *Merchant*. As is the nature of a network, news is distributed throughout the play, in association with many figures and in different forms: “[Salerio’s] gossip Report” on the Rialto (3.1.6), several declamations of Antonio’s disastrous news at Belmont (3.2.313–18), Portia’s letter “chancéd on” by a “strange accident” (5.1.276–9), and still more. Although news is thus harder to pin down phenomenologically in *Merchant* than in *Englishmen*, it is even more influential for

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58 On risk as calculable see Ewald, “Insurance and risk,” 201–2.
the structure of Shakespeare’s play, as well as shaping the forms of dramatic action which address Antonio’s risky maritime ventures. I argue that Merchant uses stage-news as a dramatic technology to articulate maritime risk in two ways: first, incidentally, in the dramatizations of evaluation, uncertainty, and contradiction which accompany news of Antonio’s wrecked ships and ruinous finances, and second, systemically, as an unreliable social and financial network subject to continuous evaluation by the those bearing and receiving the play’s perilous news.61

The Merchant of Venice is structured by the constantly-accruing news of Antonio’s precarity, mortal as well as financial, of which the audience is made aware throughout. We are informed often that Antonio’s ships are being lost at sea with almost unbelievable rapidity. First he has a ship “wrecked on the narrow seas,” (3.1.3) then another “argosy cast away coming from Tripoli,” (3.1.84) and then all at once, he asserts in a letter to Bassanio that “my ships have all miscarried” (3.2.313–4). None of this news can be particularly unexpected; from almost the first line, it is made clear that Antonio is the object of maritime risk articulated by epistemological breakdown. Antonio opens by circumscribing sadness with uncertainty, establishing early that the play will deal in doubt and the process by which doubt is managed:

\[
\text{Antonio} \quad \begin{align*}
\text{In sooth I know not why I am so sad.} \\
\text{It wearies me, you say it wearies you,} \\
\text{But how I caught it, found it, or came by it,} \\
\text{What stuff ’tis made of, whereof it is born,} \\
\text{I am to learn}\end{align*}
\]

Antonio himself expresses his sadness in terms of five curious particles of uncertainty: “how I caught it, found it, or came by it, / What stuff ’tis made of, whereof it is born.” His companions

61 Although this reading focuses on the performative uncertainty of news, the influence of Ian MacInnes’ work on risk in Merchant of Venice will be obvious throughout: MacInnes, “Ill luck, Ill luck: Risk and Hazard in the Merchant of Venice,” Barbara Sebek and Stephen Deng, eds., Global Traffic: Discourses and Practices of Trade in English Literature and Culture (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): 39–55.
Salerio and Solanio assure him he is sad because his ships are bound to wreck, and his “mind is tossing on the ocean” with his ships; to Solanio, Antonio’s fear over shipwreck and thus financial ruin is the only possible explanation for his emotions: “Believe me sir, had I such venture forth, / The better part of my affections would / Be with my hopes abroad. … / Misfortune to my ventures, out of doubt, / Would make me sad” (1.1.15–6, 20–1). Antonio denounces this suggestion, though at a remarkable delay: “Believe me, no” (1.1.41). Salerio and Solanio’s assessment seems, despite Antonio’s contradiction, to be essentially correct. I do not quite mean that I agree with them, but that Antonio himself agrees with them, in action if not in theory: at least as he expresses it above, his sadness really does seem to originate out of the exercise of doubt. That Antonio demurs to this suggestion, as well as to the next one—“Why, then, you are in love” (1.1.46)—says less about whether Antonio is actually worried about his ships (he is) than whether he has the language other than the language of uncertainty in which to express his anxiety (he does not). Shakespeare here suggests a problem less of an accurate object—ships, Bassanio, sexual conflict, even of “heterogenous ideological cargo”62—than of rigorous process, that Antonio really is concerned with no particular thing but rather, like any good depressive, with the nature of uncertainty itself.

Antonio’s mercantile experience is animated by the economic lacuna left in the process of waiting for news, both as a narrative element (what will happen) and a dramatic one (how will it come about in the performance). Drew Daniel accounts for this lacuna as the “epistemological mystery” of melancholy, described by Robert Burton two decades later as “a kinde of dotage without a feaver, having for his ordinary companions, feare, and sadnesse, without any apparent

occasion.” Daniel frames this mystery psychoanalytically, as “an interpretive puzzle for others, within and without the play,” which seems to me to wrongly presuppose a hermeneutic of suspicion. Doubtless, there is a problem here with not-knowing, but it is less a puzzle than a matter of mercantile logistics. Antonio appears to be waiting on maritime news, the subject of which neither he nor the audience can know, in part because it never materializes. He is sad less over what the news might contain than over the practice itself: the ineluctable uncertainty of participating in a maritime news-network.

Antonio’s affairs are representatively Venetian; he is the exemplary financial citizen around which market practices are organized, and his ventures are the subject of the “news on the Rialto” that “lives unchecked” (3.1.1–2). When Bassanio lists his friend’s ventures, aghast that they could have “all miscarried,” he notes Antonio’s financial stake in ships from at least six ports: “From Tripolis, from Mexico and England / From Lisbon, Barbary, and India / And not one vessel ‘scape the dreadful touch / Of merchant-marring rocks?” (3.2.279–82, 328). It is a somewhat fanciful list, if only because the ports Bassanio brings up are so wide-spread, so comprehensive; they constitute a broad range of aspirational 16th-century European venturing

63 Robert Burton, Anatomy of Melancholy (London: 1621), 1.1.1.46.
64 Drew Daniel, “‘Let me have judgment, and the Jew his will’: Melancholy Epistemology and Masochistic Fantasy in The Merchant of Venice,” Shakespeare Quarterly (2010), 206–7.
65 That said, critics have long been happy to take it as just such a puzzle. The summer 2010 volume of Shakespeare Quarterly features a re-evaluation of “Shakespeare studies” through psychoanalytic readings of Antonio’s sadness. See Daniel, “‘Let me have judgment,’” 206–234; Graham Hammill, “Converting Cruelty and Constituting Community in Shakespeare's Venice: A Response to Drew Daniel,” 240–245; and Jaques Lezra, “‘Want-Wit Discipline,’” 240–245 all in Shakespeare Quarterly Vol. 61, No. 2. (Summer 2010). As critical antagonist to this discourse, see Henry Turner, “The Problem of the More-than-One: Friendship, Calculation, and Political Association in The Merchant of Venice” Shakespeare Quarterly Vol. 57, No. 4 (Winter, 2006): 413–442.
66 A curiosity: there is no explicit textual evidence to support this claim, and yet nearly every critic writing about Merchant describes Antonio as waiting for news. Stewart, for instance, writes that “Antonio is shown waiting on news-bearing letters that do not arrive” (Shakespeare's Letters, 172). This would imply that for many readers, the act of waiting for letters is such a fundamental part of the mercantile identity that it is difficult to imagine what else an early modern merchant might be doing while idle.
ports, and are an unlikely set for any one Venetian merchant. In other words, while these may not be the specific ports to which Antonio’s ships were bound, the list nevertheless communicates that his ventures are ideal, almost metonymic: they stand in for the ventures of the Venetian economy more broadly. In this way, Bassanio’s list of ships indexes the developing sense that Antonio is influential enough to shape the city’s financial practices. Much earlier, Shylock explicitly describes how Antonio shapes the financial terrain of the city: “He lends out money gratis / And brings down the rate of usance here with us in Venice” (1.3.44–5). Indeed, Antonio is the only point of entry into the city’s financial community; the market exists only insomuch as it is articulated by Antonio and the network of economic discourse surrounding his affairs. For this reason, the Venetian market is unavoidably “strange,” to use Marc Shell’s term—or perhaps it is simply limited. Restricted as it is to Antonio’s experience, the market consists of interest-free loans, obligatory bonds, the shadow of usury, and above all a pervading sense of the uncertainty inherent in venturing—an uncertainty for which the play offers no corrective, no financial instrument, but instead copious, near-constant news.

News of the risk to Antonio’s ventures first surfaces as a matter of gossip between the more-or-less interchangeable Salerio and Solanio, representatives of the well-connected citizenry.

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67 From among the most desirable ports of the period only Indonesia’s Moluccas are left out. On the unlikeliness of these ports for a Venetian merchant, see John Gillies, *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 65–6.

68 A financial instrument is defined by the International Accounting Standards as “any contract that gives rise to a financial asset of one entity and a financial liability or equity instrument of another entity.” In other words, almost any codified agreement regarding economic capital is a financial instrument. Examples include: obligatory bonds like Shylock’s, tontines, marine insurance, bills of exchange, or shares in a joint-stock East India Company venture. For a very thorough explanation indeed, see: “IAS 32: Financial Instruments: Disclosure and Presentation,” *International Accounting Standards* (London: IAS, 2004): 1231–1320.
of Venice. Following several scenes from the romantic plots of Portia and Jessica, the discussion between the two Venetians is awash with a variety of parlous maritime updates. Salerio describes that he has “[seen] Bassanio under sail” (2.8.1) to take his chances with Portia, and that meanwhile, Jessica and Lorenzo have escaped an irate Shylock by slipping into the canals “in a gondola” (2.8.8). Both of these snippets associate setting out onto the water with taking chances and contribute to Merchant’s developing connection between financial and maritime uncertainty, confirmed in terms of Antonio’s suddenly precarious condition: “Let good Antonio look he keep his day, / Or he shall pay for this” (2.8.25–6). The dire stakes of Antonio’s situation are set out here clearly for the first time, articulated as a possibility—“or he shall pay”—hinging on unpredictable events at sea: a financial, maritime risk. Throughout the first two acts, Merchant has emphasized ethnically-inflected anxiety regarding Christian Antonio’s obligatory bond with Jewish Shylock, but that bond has been framed by both parties as a “merry sport” without risk of default (1.3.141). Here, that anxiety figures suddenly as an epistemological problem—they cannot be sure Antonio will be able to repay his debt to Shylock on time—situated among other instances of watery uncertainty. Solanio’s mounting financial concern for Antonio is immediately exacerbated, if not validated, by an account from Salerio:

Salerio Marry well remembered.  
I reasoned with a Frenchman yesterday  
Who told me in the narrow seas that part  
The French and English there miscarriéd  
A vessel of our country richly fraught.  
I thought upon Antonio when he told me  
And wished in silence it were not his. (2.8.26–32)

69 In Q1, Antonio’s Venetian friends are called, alternatively: Salerio, Salanio, Solanio, Salarino, Salaryno, and Salario. Their names are not dramatically consistent, such as when Salerio delivers a letter to Belmont in one scene (Q1, F2v) only to appear with Antonio in Venice in the next (Q1, F4r). Although F ‘corrects’ this particular instance, it does little to distinguish the characters.
Salerio’s tantalizingly vague account marshals uncertainty in the service of dramatic prolepsis, providing a rumor around which Antonio’s risk will be organized in *Merchant’s* subsequent news. Salerio can say only that a ship has wrecked, that it is Venetian, and that the wreck was in the “narrow seas” of the English Channel; he is less sure of whose ship it may be, and is indistinct regarding the identity of his informant, “a Frenchman.” By almost any measure, Salerio’s report is not credible, and it has none of the formal variety that characterize *Merchant’s* later accounts (letters, declamation, affective performance). Their conversation is less news than a snippet of gossip, utterly bereft of the rich pastiche in East India Company correspondence or even the mercantile details of *Englishmen’s* reports and bills; rather, it provides a foundation for later news. The dialogic connection between Antonio’s sudden precarity and the Frenchman’s rumor of a wrecked ship helps to construct news in *Merchant* as a financial technology. Not only does the play build upon this snippet in substantive terms, by adding detail to the Frenchmen’s narrative of shipwreck, it uses this exchange to demonstrate the relationship of the interchangeable Venetians—themselves an audience—to perilous news. Contemplating the potential hazard to Antonio brought on by unconnected, amorous maritime ventures, Salerio is made to think of an uncertain maritime report of a ship wrecked. Although this is post-facto logic in association, the dialogic performance develops a significant connection between a financial abstraction and maritime news distinguished by indeterminacy. In the practical terms of Shakespeare’s Venice, the way to parse risk is to recall, evaluate, and

disseminate news from the sea—“to tell Antonio what you hear,” (2.9.33)—and moments later, to enact news.

*The Merchant of Venice* employs a series of discrete news exchanges in one scene on the Rialto—regarding Antonio’s ships, Shylock’s daughter, and the financial contract between the two men—to trace a social-financial network subject to failure. Like the Royal Exchange in Haughton’s *Englishmen for My Money*, Shakespeare’s Rialto is an urban clearinghouse for international news of all sorts. The scene (3.1) is partitioned into three exchanges, among which considerable tension is most directly signaled by entrances and exits, but also by distinct engagements with news: initially, Salerio and Solanio debate more dire news of Antonio’s shipwreck (3.1.1–16); the arrival of Shylock wrenches conversation decisively toward his lost daughter and revenge on the merchant (3.1.17–63); at Tubal’s entrance, Salerio and Solanio immediately depart, leaving the second Jew to recount news of an “argosy cast away coming from Tripoli” (3.1.64–108). The first of these exchanges constitutes the play’s most detailed account of Antonio’s lost ship, and it is an important structural departure from the Venetian’s previous account. Rather than coming as an afterthought to expressions of hazard (“Marry, well remembered”) extracted from a larger social conversation, this news initiates the series of exchanges which most consolidate the terms of Antonio’s risk:

*Solanio*

Now, what news on the Rialto?

*Salerio*

Why, yet it lives there unchecked that Antonio hath a ship of rich lading wrecked on the narrow seas—the Goodwins I think they call the place, a very dangerous flat, and fatal, where the carcasses of many a tall ship lie buried, as they say, if my gossip Report be an honest woman of her word. (3.1.2–6)
Salerio’s latest qualifies the gross ambiguity of the Frenchman’s earlier rumor on several points and develops news’ structural influence on the scene. It locates the wreck precisely at the Goodwin Sands, near the very mouth of the Thames, and appears to confirm what was before a paranoia: that the ship is Antonio’s. The two men are dismayed that this news may be true, yet they are also aware that it may not be; their exchange models the dialogic process by which they come to terms with their uncertainty. Solanio conjectures that Report may be “as lying a gossip in that as ever knapped ginger,” and is almost unable to articulate “without any slips of prolixity…that the good Antonio, the honest Antonio…hath lost a ship” (3.1.7–8, 9–11, 14).

When Salerio responds hopefully that the shipwreck on the Goodwins “might prove the end of his losses,” the subjunctive mood anticipates further evaluation. Their exchange demonstrates that news on the Rialto—however unchecked it may live—is not conclusive; rather, it is an element in a larger, systemic enactment of risk-evaluation.

So long as only Salerio and Solanio articulate maritime news—however evaluative their relationship to that news, or how imbued with the precarity of venturing—the play’s news-network is quite robust. But as the rest of 3.1 demonstrates, extending that network to other individuals, and in other forms, can put it at risk. Shylock’s arrival, and then Tubal’s, partition

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71 The Goodwin Sands were and remain an English byword for shipwreck. As Serena Cant describes, “Shakespeare must surely have frequently have heard the news of vessels which had miscarried on the Goodwin Sands…[H]e may have had in mind the losses of the Red Lion of London and the Golden Lion of Middelburg, Zeeland, in late 1592, of a Dutch vessel lost in January 1594 or of the English privateer Pegasus in 1598.” Cant, England’s Shipwreck Heritage: From logboats to U-boats (Swindon: English Heritage, 2013), 16–17.

72 The robustness of a network describes the network’s capacity to withstand disruption, either as the removal of a node or as the failed transmission of a signal. In the case of the social network to which I have referred in Merchant of Venice, these signals are made up of characters’ inquiry after and articulation of news. A robust network of this sort would involve repetitions of news with few characters (exactly the relationship between Salerio and Solanio), while a fragile network—one subject to failure—refers to one which would either be hindered by the removal of a character, or for which (as is true in the Venetians’ interaction with Shylock), the transmission of news between characters fails.

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the scene and introduce systemic uncertainty by at once extending the network and showing how it can fail. The moment Shylock enters, Solanio breaks with the previous news discourse to ask again after Antonio in broad, mercantile terms—“[h]ow now, Shylock, what news among the merchants?” (3.1.19). The moneylender deliberately ignores this question, tearing instead into his daughter’s disappearance, a financial uncertainty momentarily dearer to him: “You knew, none so well, none so well as you, of my daughter’s flight” (3.1.20). Throughout their conversation, the three men repeatedly speak past each other, slinging wordplay that is more demonstrative than substantive. For Salerio and Solanio, the subject of their conversation is clear; they ask again: “But tell us: do you hear whether Antonio have had any loss at sea, or not?” (3.1.34–5) Shylock, accordingly, again ignores their question, launching instead into a screed against Antonio for his insolvency: “A bankrupt, a prodigal who dare scarce show his head on the Rialto, a beggar…[l]et him look to his bond” (3.1.36–9). This is an unremarkable exchange in the terms of stage dialogue construed generally, but an instructive interaction in the terms of Merchant’s news-network. All three characters want news, but none of them get the news they want. Not only does this exchange show the Venetians’ ongoing substantive evaluation of Antonio’s potential “loss at sea,” it emphasizes on more structural terms a discursive loss implicit in their failure to solicit news from Shylock.

The third discrete instance of stage-news in 3.1, between Shylock and Tubal, demonstrates another form of dialogic network failure. As Tubal arrives, Salerio and Solanio immediately leave, and another news-interaction is launched by Shylock: “How now, Tubal! What news from Genoa? Hast thou found my daughter?” (3.1.66–7) Although Tubal, unlike Shylock, responds topically to his friend’s inquiry, he has “no news of them [Jessica and
Lorenzo]” (3.1.75). Here, too, Merchant dramatizes the inability of a news-network organized around financial uncertainty to account for all forms of loss, or to account reliably for any such form. As though to batten down the network’s indeterminacy, it is Tubal who has the news for which Solanio and Salerio were so desperate, but from which the divisions in this scene’s multiple news-exchanges have excluded them:

_Tubal_ Yes, other men have ill luck too. Antonio, as I heard in Genoa—
_Shylock_ What, what, what? Ill luck, ill luck?
_Tubal_ —hath an argosy cast away coming from Tripoli.
_Shylock_ I thank God! I thank God! Is it true, is it true?
_Tubal_ I spoke with some of the sailors who escaped the wreck.
_Shylock_ I thank thee, good Tubal. Good news, good news.  (3.1.81–88)

Are the “argosy cast away coming from Tripoli” and the wreck on the Goodwins the same ship?

It is impossible to say for sure, although the geographical tags by which they circulate seem to imply they are not. Shakespeare stages the Rialto as a clearinghouse for maritime news: of two ships and one daughter lost and sought, news that is exchanged in the space of one scene and between four individuals. Yet we cannot say news circulates, or that it figures publicly within a financial community as in Englishmen’s Exchange; Merchant gives us nearly the opposite. However Salerio may describe news “living unchecked” on the Rialto, the dramatic structure of this scene with its entrances, exits, and dialogic failures, restricts onstage news to ineffectual, private dialogues. The one population party to the whole series of disconnected exchanges, and thus able to mark out Venice’s news-network, is the population in the yard—that is, the play’s audience.73

73 It is tempting to say that Shylock also observes each interaction and thus embodies the social position of the audience. He does participate in both conversations and appears to be aware of Antonio’s shipwrecks, or at least the rumors of them (“another bad match”). At the same time, he is the node of the network in which the failure of news is located, so it seems to stretch the network model to think of him, too, as an evaluative figure.
Merchant’s spectators are uniquely capable of evaluating the relationship between shipwrecks, or between Salerio’s ignored questions and Tubal’s unsolicited answer. Like the Venetian citizens, the London audience must come to terms with multiple iterations of maritime news which may or may not be accurate; which may or may not refer to the right ship. Merchant of Venice’s gradual sense of foreboding originates here, in this operation of reckoning. Spectators are called upon to recognize risk in the articulation of maritime news along a dramatic, dialogic network which falters before their very eyes. They, too, are forced to evaluate the potential hazard to Antonio, to come to terms with the uncertainty of venturing as articulated in the play’s iterations of questionable news.

Unlike Englishmen for My Money, Shakespeare’s financial drama does not attempt to reproduce documentary merchants’ correspondence, but to translate its maritime uncertainty into performance through other forms of stage-news. This does not mean, of course, that The Merchant of Venice wants for letters; as Alan Stewart has argued, the play is “fascinated by the ways in which letters transact commercial business,” and it contains plenty: love letters, politicking letters, legal letters.74 Among all of these, Merchant contains just two letters which explicitly concern venturing, but they are among the play’s most theatrically rich. While some other letters are nearly invisible, or explicitly secret, like Jessica’s letter to Lorenzo—“Give him this letter - do it secretly” (2.3.7)—the two letters concerning Antonio’s ships are translated into especially visible forms of stage-news. Within that translation, they are also subjected to uncommon scrutiny: characters call attention to and investigate their veracity or provenance, and agonize over their effect on Venice’s financial network.

74 Stewart, Shakespeare’s Letters, 164.
Salerio arrives at Belmont carrying a letter with dire news of Antonio’s ventures, but rather than speak for itself, the letter initiates a more complex interaction. More than any other moment in Merchant, this exchange shows how staging mercantile correspondence can make it formally diverse. Bassanio welcomes “his old Venetian friend Salerio” and asks him for an initial oral report, “Ere I ope [Antonio’s] letter / I pray you tell me how my good friend doth” (3.2.230–1). To this Salerio replies forebodingly and apparently quite openly: “Not sick, my lord, unless it be in mind; / Nor well, unless in mind: his letter there will show you his estate” (3.2.230). The network diversifies: while Bassanio opens and reads Antonio’s letter-news, other forms of news spring up. Although Graziano almost certainly hears Salerio’s response to Bassanio, and has just watched Bassanio accept a letter, he nevertheless engages Salerio in another exchange of news, explicitly and separately: “Your hand, Salerio; what’s the news from Venice? / How doth that royal merchant, good Antonio?” (3.2.236–7) Graziano even has news to offer preemptively, of which he seems certain Antonio will be interested: “I know he will be glad of our success / We are the Jasons: we have won the fleece” (3.2.238–9). The separate interaction of Graziano and Salerio implies a distinct connection within Venice’s network of financial news, not to be clumped with Bassanio and Antonio’s. Their conversation of the two “old Venetian friend[s]” is juxtaposed with Portia’s response to Antonio’s letter, which recognizes yet another form of news. She has by this point seen Salerio asked separately for news by two different men and heard his dire answers, but her attention is trained on Bassanio, the letter, and his physical reaction. By demanding that Bassanio explain his physical performance, Portia articulates an affective ‘what news?’:

*Portia* There are some shrewd contents in yond same paper
That steals the color from Bassanio’s cheek—
…What, worse and worse?
With leave, Bassanio—I am half yourself,
And I must freely have the half of anything
That this same paper brings to you. (3.2.241–8)

The division between these exchanges is odd. Why should Graziano, a member of Bassanio’s household—and Portia, Bassanio’s wife-to-be—twice reiterate Bassanio’s request for news, particularly in the context of a letter delivered directly from Antonio? The reason, I would suggest, is not that either Graziano or Portia expects different or better news than what is contained in the letter, but that they are responding to the evaluative model Merchant has already laid out. The interactions on the Rialto have demonstrated that venturing news is imbued with uncertainty, and that the network by which news is distributed is fragile. At Belmont, within a household attempting to shore up socioeconomic relations, the reiteration of exchanges recognizes and reinforces the form of a financial network near collapse.

The news at Belmont seems simultaneously to reinforce a network with discrete connections, and also, read aloud from Antonio’s letter, to emphasize the developing financial relationship of Bassanio’s household as a group. The news is not good, as Bassanio’s desperate response to Portia shows, and their finances will suffer directly with Antonio’s ventures. Bassanio’s reaction to the letter is as much an admission of bankruptcy to his household as it is an oration on maritime ruin: “When I told you / My state was nothing, I should then have told you / That I was worse than nothing… / But is it true, Salerio? / Hath all his ventures failed?” (3.2.256–8, 264–5). Antonio’s letter has a direct, immediate impact on Bassanio’s credit, and according to Merchant’s precedent, the parties most at risk ought to be most interested in evaluation; Portia, suddenly implicated in Bassanio’s debt, demands to hear the news precisely:
Portia Since you are dear bought, I will love you dear.
But let me hear the letter of your friend.

Bassanio “Sweet Bassanio, my ships have all miscarried; my creditors grow cruel;
my estate is very low; my bond to the Jew is forfeit; and since in paying it,
it is impossible I should live, all debts are cleared between you and I if I
might but see you at my death. Notwithstanding, use your pleasure; if your
love do not persuade you to come, let not my letter.” (3.2.313–8)

The intent of this letter is less to inform than to enforce; never has a love letter been so difficult
to distinguish from an invoice. Functioning as a financial document, Antonio’s letter calls in
Bassanio’s debt and demands payment in the form of attendance. Portia ought to be hesitant to
accept this risk—supporting Bassanio’s financial and social debt to Antonio, when by his own
account he is likely to die—but on the contrary, she is enthusiastic: “O love, dispatch all business
and be gone!” (3.2.319). Merchant has repeatedly emphasized how the evaluation of news
constitutes an evaluation of risk; Portia, by a shrewd analysis of Antonio’s letter, recognizes
uncertainty as potential for financial gain and acts on it.

By taking advantage of Bassanio’s financial insolvency in this emotionally precarious
moment, Portia does what an ambitious merchant-insurer might have done, effectively buying
the risk inherent in Antonio’s letter. Just as Antonio sponsored Bassanio’s venture, Portia
declares that she is prepared to underwrite Antonio’s, even after news that his ships are
reportedly sunk—“lost or not lost, knowne or not knowne”: “before a friend of this description /
Shall lose a hair through Bassanio’s fault…[y]ou shall have gold / To pay the petty debt twenty

75 See Lars Engle, “Money and Moral Luck in The Merchant of Venice,” Shakespearean Pragmatism:
Market of His Time (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 77–106. See also Karen Newman’s
reading of Portia’s engagement in masculine, sociopolitical debt. Newman, “Portia’s Ring: Unruly
19–33.

76 This discussion is indebted to Ian MacInnes reading of the same moment. As he describes, “[Portia]
succeeds in wresting ownership of Antonio’s potential loss from him…Bassanio’s original debt
representing the casualty or risk of loss is thus transferred from Antonio to Portia.” MacInnes, “Ill luck, ill
luck,” 44–51.
times over” (3.2.314–20). In a “lost or not lost” policy, this sort of indemnity would come at a high rate indeed, and although Portia’s rate goes unspecified, her encouragement is not without menace. Like any merchant-insurer prone to the audacious risk of “lost or not lost” indemnity, Portia is either exceptionally foolish or correspondently well-informed; by the end of the play, she will demonstrate that she has been the latter. Even here, it is hard to shake the sense that she has something up her sleeve regarding Antonio’s vessels. Earlier in 3.2, she demonstrated her facility with privileged information in another moment of “hazard” by directing Antonio’s choice of caskets (3.2.2). If “the value of risk itself is at the mercy of chance and information,” as Ian MacInnes notes of *Merchant*, the events at Belmont illustrate the way stage-news brings to bear the assessment of that value.77 *Merchant*'s recurrent evaluation of stage-news, transformed from static correspondence, marks out the economic implications behind Portia’s final, disorienting manipulation of maritime risk.

It is emblematic of the play’s decentralized, uncertain network that Antonio himself receives maritime news just once, and and that when he does, it contradicts everything which has preceded it. In a flourish more appropriate to a “comicall history” than a financial drama, Portia resolves the venturing and love plots simultaneously by producing two revelatory letters.78 As Ariel in *The Tempest* will later “flame[] amazement” during that play’s shipwreck, Portia too declares that “you are all amazed”—that the uncertainties of maritime news have taken in Antonio and Bassanio, and placed every quality in doubt:

77 MacInnes, “Ill luck, Ill luck?,” 51.
78 Early quarto editions (1600, 1619, 1637) consistently have the variant or running title, *The comicall history of the merchant of Venice*. Folger Q1 copy, A2r. Again, one thinks inevitably of Engle’s insightful conflation of “bills and love letters,” as Portia offers documents which seem to merge several genres. Engle, *Shakespearean Pragmatism*, 77.
Here is a letter; read it at your leisure.
It comes from Padua from Bellario.
There you shall find that Portia was the doctor,
Nerissa there her clerk. Lorenzo here
Shall witness I set forth as soon as you
An even but now returned. I have not yet
Entered my house. Antonio, you are welcome,
And I have better news in store for you
Than you expect. Unseal this letter soon.
There you shall find three of your argosies
Are richly come to harbor suddenly.
You shall not know by what strange accident
I chancéd on this letter. (5.1.266–279)

Despite every preceding report to the contrary, Portia claims to have private news that three of Antonio’s ships are safe. Unlike the play’s other exchanges of stage-news, Portia’s letters—presented as endpoints, not correspondence—foreclose upon evaluation. Critics have repeatedly remarked upon the strangeness of these letters, explaining them alternatively as “generic insurance,” critiques of documentary credibility, or merely as a “beautiful example of Shakespeare’s dramatic impudence.” I would like to reinforce that strangeness, by suggesting that Portia’s letter for Antonio in particular is deliberately bizarre, a fabulation susceptible to the evaluative logic of risk reproduced by stage-news throughout the play.

Portia’s letter, the logic of Merchant’s venturing news would suggest, is risk that cannot be evaluated. Unlike the public news of Belmont, or even the fractured rumor on the Rialto, Portia’s letter is markedly untraceable, “chancéd on” by “strange accident,” a disrupting addition to Venice’s already fragile network of news. But the play’s more attentive spectators have been trained—by Salerio, Solanio, the Rialto, and the events at Belmont—for just such a moment. The

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sudden arrival of “three of [Antonio’s] argosies,” ought to stir up in an audience precisely the skepticism it has provoked in critics. Portia has already demonstrated her shrewdness not only in assessing risk in news meant for others, but in leveraging her own privileged knowledge. We might ask: how long has Portia known Antonio’s ships were safe? Could she have known, when offering to back Antonio’s loss in 3.2, at an incredible emotional rate, that his ships were already safe? Like a savvy merchant-assurer in early modern London, Portia seems to have recognized the risk inherent in materializing news; by underwriting Bassanio and Antonio’s “lost or not lost” policy and holding privately the instrument of their financial salvation, she profits more than either of them.

The Merchant of Venice repeatedly stages uncertain maritime news in a network subject to failure, but it matches that uncertainty with the capacity of Venetian citizens to evaluate the provenance and nature of that news, and thus to come to terms with maritime risk. Antonio, incapable of reckoning his uncertainty at the play’s outset, is equally unprepared to evaluate Portia’s performance of maritime news at the play’s close, but Merchant’s spectators should not be so easily blinded by what appears to be a miraculous maritime delivery. One might imagine, in the audience, a wily London merchant asking of this somewhat too-chancéd letter: “what news?”
Newes from Ostend Wherein is declared such accidents...since the former Edition (1601)

Newes...Concerning the Fighte of Five Dutche shippes in the East Indies (1603)

Lamentable Newes...contayning... fearefull accidents of the great overflowing of waters (1607)

The Lost Flocke...the maner of their distresse in the Iland of Devils (...Bermoothawes) (1610)

Selection of news pamphlets (1600–1610)

4.4 Coda. Commodifying Risk in The Staple of News

While not all of London’s news was maritime and not all maritime news came in the form of merchants’ correspondence, a remarkable amount of onstage news was both until well into the seventeenth century. To a limited extent, the prevalence of staged maritime news was a practical reflection of the developing English news industry.80 Beginning in the early 1590s, London’s market for international news grew swiftly, first alongside that decade’s foreign conflicts with France and Spain, and subsequently alongside England’s mercantile and colonial expansions into Asia and the Americas. As historians of English news have long been aware, the growth of ‘the news’ in the English imagination was not discrete from these events, but rather depended explicitly upon them. As Stephen Wittek and others have demonstrated, “the popularity of these documents [news pamphlets] corresponds to the period of England’s involvement in the conflict [with France],”81 and news of that continental conflict held a near-monopoly on English attention from 1589–1592.82

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80 Between 1591 and 1610, about one quarter of the entries into the Stationer’s Register were news pamphlets. Jackie Harrison, News (London: Routledge, 2006), 285.

81 Wittek, Media Players, 2.

Historians of news have been less attentive to the gradual increase in news concerning maritime conflicts and overseas trade after 1593, as the action in France came to a close. Pamphlets communicated maritime chops through titles that conjured up their exotic origin: *Newes from the Levan[t] Seas* (1594), *An Houre-Glasse of Indian Newes* (1607) and *News from Mamora OR A Summary Relation sent to the King of Spain of the good success of a voyage...in taking, and surprising, of Mamora, a port in Barbary / By the Armado and Host Royall of the Ocean Sea* (1614). As part of a pitch for their unmediated maritime truth, all three of these pamphlets claim to be transcriptions of merchants' correspondence, either written by the merchant in question or intercepted. The author of *News from Mamora*, William Squire, situates the pamphlet’s authority in its origin as a Spanish merchant’s letter to the King of Spain which by chance “of late...came unto my hands.” And yet despite the relationship between merchants' correspondence and the rise of maritime news pamphlets, these accounts of actual events are not the sort of news that appears onstage. As Alan Stewart has noted of the news from France, “surviving plays of the period do not dramatize contemporary events in a literal fashion;” with very few exceptions, the same can be said of venturing news. As I have argued, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Englishmen for My Money* are interested in establishing a phenomenology of venturing news: the near-constant epistemological uncertainty of the venturer’s position, as

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83 The increase is especially marked when thought of in relative terms; almost immediately in 1594, maritime news as a percentage of news listed in the Stationer’s Register saw a stark increase; in absolute terms, the increase modest until the 1600s, when news from Virginia becomes commercially popular.

84 William Squire, *News from Mamora*, (London: [Nicholas Okes], 1614), A3r.

85 The connection of Shakespeare’s *Tempest* (1611) to two contemporary pamphlets—Strachey’s *True Repertory* and Jourdain’s *Discovery of the Barmudas*—remains somewhat in question. See most recently Alden T. Vaughan, “William Strachey’s ‘True Reporitory’ and Shakespeare: A Closer Look at the Evidence,” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 3 (Fall, 2008): 245–273. Other plays are much clearer about their contemporary topicality, but there are even fewer of that sort. The prime example is Day, Rowely, and Wilkins’ *Travels of the Three English Brothers* (1607); Chapman, Jonson, Marston’s *Eastward Ho* (1605) satirizes Virginia Company publications.
figured in evaluative financial discourse. Thus, with one important exception, staged maritime
news has less to do with the evolution of London’s news industry than with the alterations and
adaptations of mercantile logic: uncertainty and risk amid the discourse of an emerging financial
community.

The only contemporary play that deals with contemporary maritime pamphlets is Ben
Jonson’s *Staple of News* (1626). The satirically exhaustive detail of news pamphlets in *The
Staple of News* serves as a wry critique of the medium’s commodification. As other critics have
noted, Jonson saw the development of a news industry during the 1620s as a degradation of
social discourse. He not only critiques news’ commodification but also its “exploitation and
abuse of specialized terminologies,” staging technical, dire maritime news as a toothless public
curiosity. Jonson’s *Staple* focuses on the news industry’s potential for commodifying maritime
knowledge—isolating it not only from the oceanic context of its origin, but erasing its
implications for merchants, alienating rather than implicating spectators in venturers’ sense of
maritime risk.

The news industry in Jonson’s play is helmed by a Nathaniel Butter caricature who
explains news in the form of a crazed index: there is “authentical” news and “apocryphal” news;
“news o’ the faction / As the Reforméd news, Protestant news;” “news of doubtful credit, as
barber’s news / And tailors’ news, porters’ and watermen’s news” (1.5.8–10, 13–14). When

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86 In addition to Wittek, 87–114, see Julie Sanders, “Print, Popular Culture, Consumption and
Commodification in *The Staple of News*,” ed. Julie Sanders, *Refashioning Ben Jonson : gender, politics,
and the Jonsonian canon* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 183–207. I am also grateful to Nicole
Edge for sharing her paper, “‘Give light to the business’ in Jonson’s *Staple of News*,” in the SAA seminar
“New Shakespearean Economies” (SAA Atlanta, 2017).
subsequent reference to *Staple of News* is quoted parenthetically by act, scene and line number.
particular news items are read aloud in detail, they are far from the commodious narratives of earlier, letter-mimicking news pamphlets like the *News from Mamora*. As one might complain in 2018 of click-bait headlines or listicles, Jonson’s *Staple* critiques a commodified version of maritime geopolitics stripped down to its most incidental, sensational elements:

*Fitton*  
And from Florence—

*Thomas*  
They write, was found in Galileo’s study  
A burning glass (which they have sent him too)  
To fire any fleet that’s out to sea.

*Cymbal*  
By moonshine, is’t not so?  

*Thomas*  
Yes sir, by the water.  

*Nathaniel*  
They write here, one Cornelius-Son  
Hath made the Hollanders an invisible eel  
To swim the haven at Dunkirk and sink all  
The shipping there.  

(3.2.53–62)

The comparatively staid maritime news delivered to the Rialto in *Merchant* or to *Englishmen’s* Royal Exchange has no substantive relation to contemporary events, but *Staple*’s two news items, unlikely as they sound, are at least versions of specific events and so could have been ‘real’ news to audiences. The development of a solar laser and a submarine were in fact ongoing—and the subjects of some debate—throughout the 1620s. Moreover, the news of a potential naval attack on Dunkirk was only a few weeks old for *Staple*’s first performance in February 1626. On January 18th, a London newsbook printed by Nathaniel Butter described that “*Duynkerkers* are againe at Sea, and doe great hurt to the *English* and our Nation: And it is here rumored that both the King of *Great Britaine* and the state of these United Provinces shall send

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89 Both news items are references to contemporary events and conversations (noted by Anthony Parr, 3.2.54n, 59n). John Napier described a burning glass in a 1596 manuscript entitled “Secrett inventionis… for defense of this Iland,” and Hollander Cornelius Drebbel famously constructed several versions of a submarine, displayed for James in the early 1620s, perhaps referred to in a 1626 letter to Joseph Mead. British Library, Harley MS 383 fol. 39.
again diverse men of Warre both before Duynkerke and Ostend.”

Onto this recent report Jonson grafts the infamous efforts of Cornelius Drebbel, a Hollander employed by James throughout the 1620s, to fashion a submersible capable of nautical combat. In this way, Jonson’s parodic characters make a point of reinforcing just how sensationaly oceanic this news is: Galileo’s “burning glass” functions not just by “moonshine,” but from reflections “by the water,” and the threat to the shipping at Dunkirk is not just a marine force, but a submarine one. One might imagine that such sensational, public maritime news might occasion discussion over the impact of these events on London investors, as do the comparatively private dispatches in Merchant or Englishmen, of bonds due or ships lost. But here, in Jonson’s Staple, news of the Hollanders’ invisible eel is merely reflexive; it serves only to distinguish the “Pontifical” and the Protestant sides of the news market, both of which the staple’s monopoly hopes to capture (3.2.63). The financial uncertainty alluded to by this news is mapped exclusively onto the commercialization of industry itself.

Although it may be “real,” the Staple’s news is also emblematic, dramatically unreactive. Jonson’s parody reduces the maritime news to populist snippets. While these snippets are precise about the details of contemporary maritime events, their exploitation of news as a commodity renders risk isolated, incidental. Jonson’s late play highlights the problems of substance and process which, in the intervening decades, he saw accompanying the transition from private correspondence between merchant, factor, and Company to a public—and so, commodified—news culture. By transforming the inclusive indices of early 17th-century merchants' correspondence into nautical curiosities, Staple forecloses on the procedures by which stage-

news, in *Englishmen* and *Merchant*, implicates audiences in early modern merchants’ inchoate and growing sense of maritime risk.
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