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Foreword: The Stage on the Shore

In 1599, the Lord Chamberlain's Men crossed the river. In so doing, they established the premier theater of its day on the banks of the Thames, close to where the Rose already stood. We no longer understand what that must have meant, because the Thames was embanked in the nineteenth century and the Thames Barrier came into operation in 1982. But the river across which audiences were rowed to performances was very different from our own: sometimes there was enough ice for frost fairs to be held upon it, sometimes whales and dolphins swam up it, and it lapped directly at the feet of passers-by; with only one bridge and many boatmen, it was in its own right a populous thoroughfare. It was also a point of arrival and departure for journeys that could sometimes be to what were for the time very exotic destinations indeed; the river was itself, but it was also a gateway to the sea. When Pocahontas died at Gravesend and Marlowe at Deptford, they were both poised on that most fluid of all edges, the cusp between the river and the sea. In one of the period's most watery-minded plays, *Pericles*, Dionyza says to Marina,

O'er the sea-margent
Walk with Leonine; the air is quick there
And it pierces and sharpens the stomach.¹

Pericles is a play of the sea, but it is also a play of the river bank in that its Chorus is John Gower, whose tomb could be reached by walking along the river from the Globe and cutting round the head of the creek in which a replica of the *Golden Hind*, the ship in which Drake circumnavigated the globe, still reminds us that the river flows ultimately to the sea.

The sea meant many things to the early modern mind. Superficially, it was a valued source of ornament; this is suggested by the Hardwick Portrait of Elizabeth I, where the Queen's dress depicts amongst other things sea monsters, a sea horse, a crab, and fish (the sea monsters may be drawn from Sebastian Munster's *Cosmographia*).² Grottoes were becoming popular, and cameos (which are made from shells), pearls, and corals were all valued as jewelry. But as the Hardwick portrait also indicates, the sea was also the home of monsters; audiences at the

¹ Shakespeare, *Pericles*, 4.1.25–27. All further quotations from the play will be taken from this edition, and references will be given in the text.

² Arnold, *Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd*, 78–79.

Globe might have read in Ovid how a monster emerges from the sea seeking to eat Andromeda,³ and would certainly have heard readings from the Bible about monsters of the deep.

For Shakespeare, though, it was also the home of the strange in another sense, for throughout his plays the sea is insistently associated with miracle. Like the association of the sea with monsters, this connection fundamentally posits it as a place of change. Shells, which were prominent items in Renaissance curiosity cabinets, could also be potent emblems of alteration and instability. So too could fossils, which even before the formulation of a theory of evolution attracted attention and generated speculation: Alessandro Scafi notes that “For Luther, the entire surface of the earth had been destroyed by the Flood and nothing remained of the ante-diluvian life, apart from a few fossils of living organisms destroyed by the Flood.”⁴ The Lincean Academy, in whose activities the Caroline playwright John Ford seems to register an interest in *The Fancies, Chaste and Noble* (1638),⁵ were certainly interested in fossils. The many drawings produced for the Academy focused particularly on local fossils and Central American plants, including a drawing of frogs in a piece of American amber.⁶ Sophia Kingshill and Jennifer Westwood note that ammonites, known as snakestones, “were thought to relieve muscular pain, as were many other fossil remains of shellfish from the primordial seas. . . . The logic behind this folk medicine is a form of sympathetic magic, the clenched pain of cramp and other ills being thought of as transferable to the stony amulet.”⁷ *The Revenger’s Tragedy*’s metaphor of Gloriana’s skull as a “shell of death” was thus particularly apt on the early modern stage.⁸

Sometimes, there is a contrast between the variable shore and the more orderly river bank. In *Pericles*, the first Lord warns Helicanus that “our griefs are risen to the top / And now at length they overflow their banks” (2.4.23–24), figuring river banks as signs of the orderly whose disruption is a dangerous sign; by contrast, the first Fisherman cheerfully acknowledges the edge of the sea as a site of inherent instability when he jokes that “Such whales have I heard on o’th’land, who never leave gaping till they swallowed the whole parish, church, steeple, bells and all” (2.1.32–34). *Pericles* itself is on the edge of the Shakespearean canon, having been co-written by George Wilkins, and so too is *Timon of Athens*, in which Thomas Middleton had a hand. In *Timon*, Alcibiades employs a similar logic to

3 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 112.

4 Scafi, *Mapping Paradise*, 271.

5 See: Ford, *The Fancies, Chaste and Noble*.

6 Freedberg, *The Eye of the Lynx*, 18, 27, 36, and 60.

7 Kingshill and Westwood, *The Fabled Coast*, 16.

8 Middleton, *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, 1.1.15.

that of *Pericles*'s first Lord when he reassures the Senators that "not a man / Shall pass his quarter, or offend the stream / Of regular justice in your city's bounds," but Timon himself chooses to associate himself with the edge of the sea, which he chooses as his burial place:

Timon hath made his everlasting mansion
Upon the beachèd verge of the salt flood,
Who once a day with his embossèd froth
The turbulent surge shall cover.⁹

Later, a soldier confirms that "Timon is dead, / Entombed upon the very hem o'th'sea" (5.4.65–66). Sir Richard Barckley, writing in 1631, supposed that

when *Tymon* perceived that death approached, he tooke order for his buriall to bee at the low water marke, in the very brinke of the Sea, that the waves might not suffer any man to come neere him to see his bones or ashes,¹⁰

but it might also be possible to relate Timon's choice to the idea that the low water mark was an appropriate place of execution (and sometimes of burial) for certain sorts of criminals: Holinshed mentions pirates being condemned to be hanged at low water mark,¹¹ and Stow calls Wapping "the usuall place of Execution for the hanging of Pyrates and sea Rovers, at the lowe water marke, and there to remaine, till three Tydes had overflowed them."¹²

The tide and the changes it brought provided potent images in other respects too. Pericles tells the infant Marina, "Even at the first thy loss is more than can / Thy portage quit" (3.1.35–36). In her gloss on these lines, Suzanne Gossett calls this a "major interpretative crux," but while the precise meaning of the passage may be difficult to pin down, it is unquestionably evocative. The materiality which freights that heavy word "portage," the only disyllable among eighteen monosyllables, brings a sudden sense of the clumsy physicality of what might otherwise have seemed the essentially spiritual entry of a new soul into the world. Also implicit in the idea of portage is the sense of a link between the human soul and the movement of water. This is perhaps most evocatively captured in the recurrent idea that birth and death were linked to the turning of the tide. Sophia Kingshill and Jennifer Westwood note that

⁹ Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens*, 5.4.59–61 and 5.1.213–16. Further quotations from the play will be taken from this edition, and references will be given in the text.

¹⁰ Barckley, *The Felicitie of Man*, 374.

¹¹ Holinshed, *The Third Volume of Chronicles*, 811.

¹² Stow, *A Survey of London*, 347.

Sixteenth-century parish registers of Heslidon (now Hesleden) sometimes noted the state of tide at the time of death, so we learn that on 11 May 1595, at six in the morning, “being ful water,” Henrie Mitford of Hoolam died, and that on 17 May of the same year, at noon, “being lowe water,” Mrs Barbarie Metford died,¹³

which they compare with Mistress Quickly’s observation in *Henry V* that Falstaff “parted even just between twelve and one, even at the turning o’th’tide.”¹⁴ Something of the same idea is perhaps visible in *Pericles* when Dionyza says of Marina “She died at night. I’ll say so. Who can cross it?” (4.3.16), and the idea of a connection between the human and the tidal can also be detected in *The Tempest*, where it seems to underlie Prospero’s remark that

Their understanding
Begins to swell, and the approaching tide
Will shortly fill the reasonable shore
That now lies foul and muddy.¹⁵

It is suggestive that *Julius Caesar*’s metaphor of “a tide in the affairs of men” should coincide with the company’s first season on the south bank.¹⁶ Henry Ireland, cited here in Laurie Johnson’s chapter, may have been a forger and a rogue, but he was spot on when he referred to the Globe as “by the Thames.”

Elizabethans knew, though, that shores could move. The antiquarian Reginald Bainbrigg observed of Bowness-on-Solway that “The fundacions of the pictis wall may be sene, upon the west skar at a lowe water, covered with sand, a mile or more within the sea,”¹⁷ while John Wilson in *The English Martyrology* declared that St. Felix “was ordayned Bishop of an old Citty called Dunmocke (otherwise Dunwich) which at this day is more then halfe consumed by the sea.”¹⁸ Kingshill and Westwood note that the sandbar Scroby Sands, opposite Great Yarmouth, emerged above the surface in 1578 and was claimed by the local inhabitants, who christened it “Yarmouth Island.” Sir Edward Clere, lord of the manor, was about to go to law over its ownership when a storm in 1582 washed it away completely,¹⁹ and Robert Callis in *The Reading of That Famous and Learned Gentleman, Robert Callis . . . upon the Statute of 23 H.8, Cap. 5, of Sewers, as It Was Delivered by Him at Grays-Inn in August, 1622* discusses the thorny problem

¹³ Kingshill and Westwood, *The Fabled Coast*, 163.

¹⁴ Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, 2.3.12–13.

¹⁵ Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, 5.1.79–82.

¹⁶ Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, 4.3.216.

¹⁷ Whitworth, *Hadrian’s Wall*, 46.

¹⁸ Wilson, *The English Martyrology*, 64.

¹⁹ Kingshill and Westwood, *The Fabled Coast*, 140.

of whether “lands between the high-water mark and low-water mark the bounds thereof may be prescribed to belong to, or to be parcel of the Mannor.”²⁰

The essays in this collection all probe the edges, spaces, and intersections that formed or were created in and around the early modern stage. Paul Brown recovers the life of Richard Bradshaw, a neglected man of the theater. Chloe Owen uses two plays for the Children of St. Paul’s to take us to the edge of consciousness in her discussion of sleep paralysis, probing the edge of the discipline as recent scientific work is applied to early modern texts. Adam Hembree explores both the edge between magic and nature, and the ways in which different meanings of words bleed into each other, and Mark Houlahan examines James Shirley’s use of the liminal location of Hyde Park, which Houlahan smartly terms “a boutiqued form of countryside.”

In the second part, Aidan Norrie tracks Elizabeth I to two edges of her kingdom, the port of Bristol and the coast of East Anglia, the farthest she ever traveled from London; in the latter case the fact that the (unusually female) child performers were actually knitting and spinning on stage further probes the edge between work and play. For Sophie Emma Battell, Massinger’s *The Renegado* depicts spaces where languages and different cultures interacted in dangerously alluring ways, with a particular emphasis on the vulnerability of the mouth as a point of entry. Jeffrey McCambridge offers a rich analysis of the ways Marlowe’s plays navigate both geopolitical and temporal thresholds, and Laurie Johnson looks to the edge of sixteenth-century theaterland to remind us of the history of a neglected playing-space.

Finally, Jennifer E. Nicholson puts *Hamlet* and Montaigne in dialogue to explore the intersections between French and English (and implicitly between life and death). Both John R. Severn and Gabriella Edelstein reverse the normal critical trajectory by seeing Shakespeare as being on the edge of Fletcher, and Edelstein also argues that Fletcher explores the edge of sanity by making the staging of madness his calling-card. In contrast, Christopher Orchard’s essay on Henry Killigrew’s *Pallantus and Eudora* (1653) proposes to move Killigrew from the edge of the canon to the center, and probes the edge of the discipline in its wholehearted commitment to historicism. As concepts, edges, spaces, and intersections are productive ideas because they simultaneously assert difference and insinuate likeness. Collectively, these essays help us to see that early modern plays are able to do very different things in very different places, but all challenge the imagination of their audiences and take them to the edge of what was known and thought.

20 Callis, *The Reading of that Famous and Learned Gentleman, Robert Callis*, 26.

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