



TRAVEL  
&  
TRAVAIL

EARLY MODERN WOMEN,  
ENGLISH DRAMA,  
AND THE WIDER WORLD

*Edited and with an introduction*  
by Patricia Akhimie and  
Bernadette Andrea

# TRAVEL *and* TRAVAIL

Early Modern Women,  
English Drama,  
and the Wider World

*Early Modern Cultural Studies*

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*Edited and with an introduction by*

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## Precarious Travail, Gender, and Narration in Shakespeare's *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* and Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World*

DYANI JOHNS TAFF

The meaning of the word “travel” intertwined with that of “travail” in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As Daniel Vitkus observes, unlike today’s association of travel with “with leisure and pleasure,” in the early modern period “the various spellings (‘travail,’ ‘traveyle,’ ‘travel,’ etc.) signified the labor, trouble, discomfort, hardship, and pain associated with travel.”<sup>1</sup> Vitkus centers his analysis of Thomas Dekker’s *Old Fortunatus* and Shakespeare’s *Pericles* on overlaps between two primary sixteenth-century definitions of “travail”: “1) hard work or effort in general, [and] 2) the work and effort required to travel from one place to another.”<sup>2</sup> In particular, he traces an emergent capitalist reconceptualization of the hazards of travel as necessary for profitable investments.<sup>3</sup> He also notes a third definition of “travail” — “3) the pain and ‘labor’ of child-birth” — but he passes rapidly over this definition, even when discussing Thaisa’s shipboard labor in the beginning of act 3.<sup>4</sup> In what follows, I trace figures of and stories about sea travel that William Shakespeare, in *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* (ca. 1608–9), and Margaret Cavendish, in *The Blazing World* (1666), use to explore the messy, contested relationship between travel and labor, taking as my focus connections between intellectual “travail” and the “travail” of childbirth. Shakespeare repeatedly foregrounds these connections in *Pericles*, narrating Thaisa’s shipboard labor and insistently merging the language of childbirth, dramatic production, and sea travel.<sup>5</sup> Figurative and physical childbirth are almost entirely absent from *The Blazing World*, but Cavendish dwells on the precar-

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iousness of her narrator's and the Lady-cum-Empress's intellectual, imaginative labor as well as on the her subjects' physical work in manipulating the natural world — particularly the sea — in order to consolidate her power. In both *Pericles* and *The Blazing World*, Shakespeare and Cavendish represent voyages and labors — both authorial and physical — that amplify conflicting ideas about human separation from or interaction with the environment.

In *Pericles*, the maritime environment is unpredictable, violent, and effeminizing; Shakespeare depicts the sea as hazardous for his characters and also represents maritime dangers as analogous to the challenges of theatrical staging and authorship more broadly. In the play, the border between human bodies and the sea is porous, and Shakespeare often represents something like what Stacy Alaimo terms “transcorporeality”: that is, a view of the relationship of the human to the nonhuman that “insists that the human is always the very stuff of the messy, contingent, emergent mix of the material world.”<sup>6</sup> Steven Mentz reads the play with a similar concept in mind, seeing the staged ship-board storm in act 3, scene 1, as “direct[ing] the play’s attention . . . to the entanglement of human bodies with rough water.”<sup>7</sup> He also argues that Marina’s birth at sea governs her interactions with both the human and nonhuman world: “so much of Marina remains in the water. Her birth at sea and (supposed) death on the beach tie her to the unending struggle of the roiling waters encroaching on the shore.”<sup>8</sup> My focus on Thaisa’s travel and travail reveals that Shakespeare’s exploration of trans-corporeality results in a repeated staging of precarity, both in the danger of sea travel and in the danger of failed narrations and theatrical productions. Gower’s narrations in *Pericles* draw our attention to the convenience of the storms that wash characters up on just the right shores, sundering and bringing them together at the opportune narrative moments. The staged sea reminds us that those characters’ movements are *staged* and that their “entanglement . . . with rough water” serves the design of the playwright, actors, and production. The characters’ lives are endangered through their encounters with the sea, *and* staging the sea and narrating sea travel is itself precarious and unpredictable.

Cavendish’s sea is also violent and unpredictable, but in *The Blazing World* she invests in representing the sea — as well as other parts of the environment — not as enmeshed with human (or animal-men) bodies but rather as a useful, manipulable element, dominated by the Empress’s initiatives.<sup>9</sup> Amy Boesky argues that Cavendish — through the Empress’s actions and interactions with the Duchess of Newcastle — claims the imagination as a locus for power, restoration, and violence, but simultaneously recognizes the Blazing World as a “toy,” and her mental authority as trivial or fleeting.<sup>10</sup> Cavendish’s intellectual labor, while powerful in a sense, is also vulnerable to claims of impotency or smallness in that it is not a labor that matters (or that creates *matter*). Few critics have examined Cavendish’s representation of the ocean and travel as it contributes to Cavendish’s conflicted portrayal of imaginative labor.<sup>11</sup> I focus on the Lady’s hazardous journey to the Blazing World, on the Lady-cum-Empress’s staging of a performance of her power, and on the narrator’s strategic representation of these maritime events. These scenes foreground Cavendish’s anxiety about the value of imaginative intellectual labor that appears enmeshed with anxiety about the construction and destruction of boundaries between bodies and the world. Cavendish’s narrator, like Gower in Shakespeare’s play, uses the precarious relationship between humans and the sea to remind us of the precariousness of performance. In revealing to readers the operations by which the Empress and her subjects create an oceanic stage and by detailing the science and dramaturgy they use to set the Empress up as a magical, Christ-like figure, Cavendish calls attention to her character’s manipulation of nonhuman objects and environments. She recalls the nonhuman forces that enabled the Lady’s travel to the Blazing World to become the Empress and invites us to see the enmeshment of an agential environment with the Empress’s and her subjects’ bodies even as the Empress and the Duchess at times deny that connection.

Female travelers such as Thaisa and the Empress embark either as a result of or in spite of maritime hazards such as piracy, storms, and so on. Once they are on board, though, they often disrupt binaries such as male/female and human/nonhuman that writers use to structure narrative and figurative elements of their texts.<sup>12</sup> As Karen Lawrence

asserts, some “examples of women’s travel writing . . . remap (and destabilize) femininity in relation to the poles of travel/home, other/self and foreign/domestic.”<sup>13</sup> Lawrence usefully traces gender in “the journey plot” and in theorizations about travel, revealing a “certain blindness to the role of gender” even in texts — by both men and women — that overtly challenge representations of women as Penelope (at home or a figure for home itself) and men as Odysseus (abroad, transformed through contact with the foreign).<sup>14</sup> Thaisa and the Empress, traveling and traveling in the multiple senses of those words, simultaneously control and are shaped by not only the events of their voyages but also the maritime environments through which they travel. They are enmeshed in a fluctuating power relationship with their male counterparts and with the environment itself.

#### *Gender and Temperature*

It is perhaps unsurprising that, given the gender-specific dangers of sea travel, women brave enough to venture to sea and strong enough to survive those dangers might be described as possessing qualities usually coded male. Both Thaisa and the Lady (who becomes the Empress) survive harrowing sea voyages, and both are described as having unusually or unexpectedly warm bodies. In contrast to the cold, wet sea associated with humoral theories about femaleness — Thaisa and the Lady are hot and dry enough to survive the storms through which they pass, and their bodies are presented as humorally masculinized.<sup>15</sup> But both women also have an ambiguous power relationship with the environment through which they travel, underscoring Gail Kern Paster’s observation that “if the insubstantial margins of the humoral body open that body to the world, the cultural meaning of that openness remains indeterminate.”<sup>16</sup> A “porous and permeable” boundary between body and environment undermines depictions of travel that rely on crucially nonpermeable ships. Thaisa and the Lady trouble the narrative of a male hero who conquers the environment-as-obstacle in the quest for commercial or exploratory profit. Their encounters with the maritime environment destabilize both the male/female binary and notions of human authority over the nonhuman world.

Representations of Thaisa’s agency fluctuate in the play. She actively chooses to travel with Pericles, but subsequently becomes — temporarily — a dead body, and then a body figured as passive treasure that belongs to Pericles.<sup>17</sup> Gower describes Thaisa as powerful in her decision to accompany Pericles when he is recalled to Tyre: “[Pericles’s] queen, with child, makes her desire — / Which who shall cross? — along to go” (3 Chor. 40–41).<sup>18</sup> He implies that neither Pericles nor Simonides has the power to controvert Thaisa’s “desire.” The storm robs her of this strength; it induces early labor, and her subsequent seeming death prompts Pericles to imagine her decomposition at sea: she shall be “scarcely confined, in the ooze / Where . . . // the belching whale / And humming water must o’erwhelm” her body, which will end “[l]ying with simple shells” (3.1.65–69). Pericles imagines her body disintegrating and merging with the cold, wet depths of the ocean. Her body, in Pericles’s imaginative grief, becomes so feminized that it no longer maintains human form. But Thaisa’s sea burial is not final and her undersea decomposition does not come to pass. Pericles’s sailors apparently have very thoroughly “caulked and bitumed” the “chest” into which they put Thaisa (3.1.75–76). They judiciously preserve the boundary between sea and body, working against the forces of the storm, the ocean, and death itself that seek to render the body and the environment entirely unified. When her coffin, still sealed, washes up in Ephesus, Cerimon exclaims,

What e’er it be,

’Tis wondrous heavy. Wrench it open straight.

If the sea’s stomach be o’ercharged with gold,

’Tis a good constraint of Fortune it belches upon us.  
(3.2.61–64).

Cerimon’s speculations highlight the constellation of words — coffin, coffer, casket, chest, etc. — that blend containers for treasure with containers for dead bodies. He does discover actual treasure in Thaisa’s coffin — placed in the chest by Pericles as a “fee” (3.2.85) for anyone “Who finds her . . . [to] give her burying” (3.2.83) — but his words addi-

tionally invite the audience to compare Thaisa herself to “gold.”<sup>19</sup> He positions Thaisa as valuable property that Pericles has lost as a result of the capricious, dangerous nature of economic, political, marital, or other ventures by sea. Thaisa at this moment has become entirely inert, exhibiting no agency, and borne on the waves to those who watch the shipwreck from the beach, hoping for monetary bounty to be “belche[d] upon” the shore.

And yet, in seeming death and resurrection, Thaisa has more power over human and nonhuman elements in the play than a view of her as passive property might afford. As Pericles holds the infant Marina and mourns for Thaisa, one of his sailors shouts, “Sir, your queen must overboard. The sea works high, the wind is loud, and will not lie till the ship be cleared of the dead” (3.1.51–53). Pericles responds, “That’s your superstition” (3.1.54), calling the sailor out for a specious belief, but the sailor persists, and Pericles yields, telling him to do “[a]s [he] think[s] meet” (3.1.59). As a presumed-dead body, and indeed as a female body dead or alive, the sailors believe that Thaisa has the power to keep the storm going if she remains aboard or to abate it if they throw her into the sea. Though Pericles’s remark invites us to question the validity of the sailors’ “custom” and belief (3.1.56), the storm does in fact end when they cast Thaisa’s coffin overboard, and Pericles, Marina, and the crew survive to sail on to Iarsus. Although Thaisa is not conscious, Shakespeare suggests that her body has the power to quell the storm and save the ship. It would appear that, though the sailors effectively seal her body into the coffin, they cannot entirely control the boundary between her body and the oceanic environment. They persist in their belief, even after sealing her body in a smaller vessel, that Thaisa’s body will have an effect on the storm. Furthermore, in contrast to Pericles’s earlier immersion in the ocean and arrival on shore as “[a] man thronged up with cold” (2.1.76) — deeply wet and cold, and thereby humorally feminized — Thaisa washes up “warm”: as Cerimon examines her, he says,

This queen will live. Nature awakes a warm breath  
out of her. . . .

See how she gins to blow

Into life’s flower again. (3.2.105–8)

“Nature” here reverses humoral ideas about gender and body temperature. In comparing Thaisa to a flower (as well as to treasure), Cerimon uses metaphors often reserved for describing women.<sup>20</sup> But her “warm[th]” after exiting the cold sea bespeaks a more complicated understanding of Thaisa’s gender and of her relationship to the environment. She is female, but “warm.” She has been submerged — thrown overboard, imagined as becoming a part of the whales and corals — but has not touched the depths of the sea at all. She controls her travel and the maritime environment: she chose to sail with Pericles, and she perhaps stops the storm. But she has also lost control: the sailors and the sea dictate her travels, and the storm induces her labor and initiates the events that separate her from Marina. Her body and her actions evince qualities coded both male and female and bespeak both power and powerlessness, challenging the male/female and human/nonhuman binaries that the play itself often seeks to reinforce.

The Lady in the beginning of Cavendish’s *The Blazing World* exhibits, like Thaisa, extraordinary body heat that saves her from a nearly fatal sea voyage. After she is abducted by a “Merchant” who had fallen “extreamly in Love” with her, the Lady survives the “double cold” at the joined poles of her “Native world” and the Blazing World “by the light of her Beauty, the heat of her Youth, and Protection of the Gods,” while the Merchant and his crew of fellow abductors freeze to death.<sup>21</sup> Line Cottegnies reads this episode as “[g]iving the lie to the Galenic view of woman as colder than man” because “the heroine does not freeze, and survives the whole crew.”<sup>22</sup> But Cavendish’s presentation of the Lady’s physiology as partially responsible for her survival — along with her beauty and the favor of the “Gods” — does more than cheekily negate contemporary medical theories. It also describes a mobile sharing of power among male, female, and supernatural agents and a fluid conception of gender. The Lady’s boat moves “as if it had been guided by some Experienced Pilot, and skillful Mariner,” pushed by the “violent motions of the wind” (154). The Lady has the “favor of the Gods” (154), but that divine influence shares control over the vessel with the power of the wind, the lightness of the boat, and perhaps the flowing of the water’s currents. Cavendish, like Shakespeare, employs the convenient

romance trope of the ship blown off course in order to move her main character into the other “World” that will be her narrative’s main focus. She takes the opportunity of the trope not to confirm ultimate divine control over the natural world but instead to ruminate on the multiple and conflicting natural powers that appear capable of joining with or moving against divine impulsion and human initiative. Though the Lady certainly avoids freezing or being shipwrecked because of divine “favor” and the “Protection of the Gods,” Cavendish first remarks on “the light of her Beauty” and “the heat of her Youth,” allowing readers, at least momentarily, to consider the Lady’s bodily fortitude — the “heat” that makes her humorally manly and therefore strong enough to survive temperatures that freeze lesser men — independent of divine intervention.

When she enters the Blazing World, the Lady becomes a traveler, a colonizer, and a romance hero, gleefully shattering English cultural norms that — as Lawrence has shown — often assigned these roles to men.<sup>23</sup> At least partially because of her “heat” and “beauty,” she handily becomes Empress and converts all of the inhabitants of the Blazing World to Christianity “without inforcement or blood-shed,” but rather “by gentle persuasions” (193). In part 2, returning to the world from which she was abducted, the Empress uses power that, in contrast, requires violent “inforcement” and “blood-shed” to subdue those who threaten her country’s monarch. She fluctuates between displaying qualities coded female, such as her inspiring chastity and “beauty,” and qualities coded male, such as her sometimes violent, strategic maneuvers for power and her ability to control all “Trade and Traffick” in the world and “force” any people she encounters “to submit as well as the rest of the World had done” (241).<sup>24</sup> The Empress’s power also, crucially, comes from her investigations of the Blazing World’s geology and biology, and of the animal-men’s technological innovations. The Worm-men locate and mine “a great quantity of the fire-stone, whose property . . . is, that it burns so long as it is wet” to bring as ammunition for the Empress’s war (234). The Giants create proto-submarines that convey the Empress and her subjects to her native world. The Fish-men tow the submarines that convey the fire-stones to the enemy’s ships and set fire to them. Although the Empress does reject some scientific

instruments — such as telescopes, which she “Command[s] her Bear-men] to break” after they produce debate about the nature of the heavens (170) — Anne Thell contends that Cavendish endorses the scientific power of imagination.<sup>25</sup> Thell argues that, alongside her portrayal of the animal-men’s explorations and inventions, “the concept of travel allows Cavendish to dramatize the propulsion and the reach of imaginative thought.”<sup>26</sup> And yet, despite this “reach,” Cavendish’s narrator, the Empress, and the Duchess gloss over the painful labor of physical, not imaginative, travel. Their manipulations of the sea, of the “fire-stones” that her animal-men locate, and of other environments and objects enable the Empress to easily obtain absolute power, eliding the labor of the Empress’s subjects as well as the hardships of travel and war.

Pericles, like the Empress, is a “colonizer” who through “protracted travels . . . attempts to expand his sway,”<sup>27</sup> and Shakespeare portrays him as “an elite, masculine adventurer.”<sup>28</sup> As Michelle Dowd argues, the play uses the “adventurer narrative as a formal means of reestablishing male control and imposing order on the text’s wide ranging effects.”<sup>29</sup> At the same time, according to Dowd, the narrative “resolution” in the play is “a process of struggle” that “makes visible alternative narratives of lineage and gendered authority.”<sup>30</sup> Pericles is both the strong, male romance hero and the character through whom we see fissures in the play’s “conservative” emphasis on Pericles’s successful restoration of his patrilineal line.<sup>31</sup> Because Shakespeare repeatedly foregrounds the connection between travel and travail — physical labor and childbirth — Pericles’s adventures destabilize the very masculinity that his “elite” travels confirm or bolster. In act 5, for example, when Pericles speaks with Marina, attempting to recognize her and to discuss his painful maritime adventures, he exclaims, “I am great with woe, and shall deliver weeping” (5.1.120). He, like Thaisa, “delivers” in a cold, wet, salty environment, and his metaphorical — and perhaps also physical — tears blur the boundary between his body and the ocean.<sup>32</sup> He insulates himself from the sea in his ship and survives his encounter with the waves, his role as adventurer pits him against the hazardous sea, and he prevails. But salt water within his body undermines the antagonistic relationship between adventurer and environment that often characterizes romance



narratives. Examining the link between portrayals of incest in *Pericles* and the complex relationship between Mary and Christ, Ruben Espinosa contends that in this scene Pericles's "self-description is anchored in a maternal identity. . . . Pericles aligns himself with a feminine source of compassion; he wants to feel [Marina's] pain, and perhaps this is a way for him to cope with his own suffering."<sup>33</sup> Espinosa sees Pericles as "re-fashion[ing] his gendered identity" here, his articulation of a "Marian" relationship with Marina as rendering "the difference between 'man' and 'girl' immaterial."<sup>34</sup> Pericles figures his body as feminine and his suffering as a form of childbirth. In doing so, he not only troubles gender binaries but also emphasizes the porous boundary between his skin (or his maritime vessel) and the sea.

#### *Stage as Sea, Sea as Stage*

Travel in *Pericles* and *The Blazing World* is sometimes abortive, always difficult (even when described as easy), and often associated with fluid conceptions of gender and with figurative and physical birth. When these texts turn self-reflexively to consider performance and literary production, both Cavendish and Shakespeare use the language of precarious sea travel to do so, perhaps finding the associations with difficulty and fluidity apt for revealing anxieties about what an author or actor is capable of creating within an audience's mind. The staged sea and the sea used as a stage make this anxiety central and glaring. As the Chorus in Thomas Heywood's *A Fair Maid of the West, Part One*, remarks, "Our stage can so lamely express a sea," for such an expression requires the imaginative help and good will of the audience, never a surety.<sup>35</sup> Many companies, Shakespeare's included, chose to convey shipwreck and maritime adventures through choruses or by having characters relate what they saw or experienced off stage. The sea itself was also often figured in plays, prose fictions, and sea manuals as a stage. Dan Brayton remarks that "the frontispiece from *The Mariners Mirror*, a compendium of essential technical information for navigators [in its] composition . . . suggests the metaphor of the sea as a stage, with mariners as actors in a *naumachia*, or nautical drama, and a group of cartographers assembled around a blank globe as playwrights of a sort."<sup>36</sup> Shakespeare and Cav-

endish are interested in the imaginative rewards of representing the stage as a sea and the sea as a stage, but they also commit to revealing the failings of that representation, failings that reveal the sea's fluidity, unpredictability, and porousness as troublingly analogous to the stages on which actors and characters perform.

As we have seen, critics often pass over Thaisa's labor and childbirth at sea relatively quickly. Vitkus, for example, focuses on the way that Cerimon's "careful labor and skill" in reviving Thaisa illuminate the "play[s] combin[ation of] romantic, fateful wandering with real-world scenes of lower-class labor on the sea-shore and in the brothel" (240).<sup>37</sup> But Thaisa, as much as Cerimon, is a traveler and traveler, enduring fear and danger in order to travel and also working hard to birth a child. When Gower describes Thaisa's travel and labor at sea, he solicits the audience's participation. For Dowd, "Gower's [narrative] interventions . . . illuminate the dramaturgical strategies through which patrilineal order gets restored in the play, a process of consolidation and control that resituates the text's disjointed episodes within a larger narrative of teleological momentum" (185).<sup>38</sup> Gower's appeals to the audience's imagination certainly present the play's bids for patrilineal control, but they also reveal the ever-present possibility that the audience will not participate, that the gaps between scenes will not be effectively filled, and that the performance will fail. Gower briefly describes Pericles and Thaisa's marriage and Marina's conception, and then addresses the audience:

Be attent,

And time that is so briefly spent

with your fine fancies quaintly eche. (3 Chor. 11–13)

Gower suggests that we might "eche" — fill or increase — the narrative gap between conception and Thaisa's swollen belly in the dumb show with our "fine fancies" in parallel to the way that the "loss of maidenhead" (3 Chor. 10), and presumably Pericles's seed, has "A babe . . . molded" (3 Chor. 11) in Thaisa's womb. When Pericles and Thaisa's ship is assailed by a storm, Gower again asks the audience to augment his narration:

In your imagination hold

This stage the ship, upon whose deck

The sea-tossed Pericles appears to speake. (3 Chor. 58–60)

Gower asks us not only to fill in the details of the scene that Shakespeare—in this play—has decided not to represent on stage, but also to “hold” a stage as ship within our minds. His words, and subsequently those of the other actors, populate or fill our minds as Thaisa’s child filled her belly. Gower constructs the fantasy of the sea voyage, but he also calls our attention to that construction and to the potential failure of his plea for us to use our “imagination[s].” It remains entirely possible, despite the playwright’s and actors’ best efforts, that the stage will, in fact, “lame[ly] express a sea.” Early modern understandings of pregnancy and the doubts surrounding conception are important to this representation of failure; as a woman’s body was supposed to be a vessel for the man’s seed, so the performance relies on the audience’s ability to be a vessel for the playwright’s, the actors’, and the characters’ creative production. How much agency the woman or audience as vessel has in the creative venture is disputed. Gower’s narration highlights the theatrical, narrative labor of representing maritime travel. He reveals conflicted motivations: on the one hand, he shores up the control of the human over the maritime environment, of the powerful over the powerless, and of the artistic creator over the audience. On the other, he explores fissures in those hierarchies and systems of control.

Cavendish’s narrator, like Gower, engages in revealing the precariousness of the relationship of the actor or author to the audience, but where Gower focuses on metaphors of pregnancy and travel, Cavendish’s narrator by turns glosses over and reveals the labor and destruction involved in consolidating absolute authority, even of the imaginative variety. As Boesky asserts, “It is true that women in the Blazing-world are able to borrow the role of monarch. But monarchy is a contested institution for Cavendish, a performance at times powerful, at others a mere toy.”<sup>39</sup> Cavendish’s conflicted portrayal of the Empress’s power, as Boesky argues, defines imaginative, intellectual labor as both powerful and powerless. In Cavendish’s representation of the Empress’s interac-

tions with the natural world, she moves to paint the environment as a tool or as material that is malleable and available to human initiatives.

But Cavendish’s narrator also shows the Empress hiding the scientific, practical sources of her power and staging an elaborate performance on the backs of her Fish-men designed to inspire terror and awe.<sup>40</sup> Her carefully staged public appearance in her own world reminds her in-text audience of “the time of judgment, or the Last Day was come” because of the flaming fire-stones that she uses on her clothing and her stage (236). In order to inform her countrymen of her plans for action, she appears before them “with Garments made of the Star-stone, and was born or supported above the Water, upon the Fish-mens heads and backs, so that she seemed to walk upon the face of the Water” (237). To her audience, the Empress is miraculously supported by the water’s surface, and they later remark with awe that she has “so great a power . . . to walk upon the waters” (242). The Empress recalls Christ and derives “power” from her apparent ability to keep her body above the waves; that is, her separation of her body from the sea enables her to manipulate her audience. During this performance, the Empress also remains, importantly, apart from the audience, “at such a distance where her voice might be generally heard, by reason she would not have that of her Accoustrements any thing else should be perceived, but the splendor thereof” (237). It is imperative that her countrymen not see the device by which she appears in Christ-like “splendor” and thereby discover the trick or—to use Boesky’s language, “toy”—she uses to control them. She relies on theatrical techniques both to get their attention and to cement her religious, political, and economic power over her native world and the maritime environment.

The Empress takes great pains to avoid revealing the theatrical staging of her performance to her audience, engaging in a concerted effort to police the boundary between her body and the sea. Yet Cavendish’s narrator makes the reader privy to the details of that staging, drawing attention to the constructed, precarious nature of the body/sea and performer/audience boundaries and to the collective labor necessary to set up and maintain the Empress’s absolute power. Cottergnies asserts that this “episode . . . deconstructs a ‘miracle’ by showing it is an illusion

contrived through artificial means.”<sup>41</sup> But by inviting us backstage, Cavendish’s narrator highlights both the hard labor of the Fish-men that subverts — physically and figuratively — the Empress’s conquest of her world and also the labor of the narrator herself in masking and negating the dangers of the maritime environment — storms, currents, winds, etc. — that could easily destroy the performance and the Empress’s power. By performing the role of a divine Angel of God’s “Judgment” or of Christ himself (236), the Empress can implicitly claim that her scorched-earth tactics are divinely justified and necessary to root out the “enemies” of her countrymen (in effect, *her* chosen people). Yet because we see the Empress and her subjects constructing this performance, the text also invites us to question the validity of divine justifications for violence. Cavendish’s narrator, in the epilogue to the reader, strategically forgets the violence of part 2. The narrator boasts that her creation of the Blazing World “was more easily and suddenly effected, then the Conquests of the two famous Monarchs of the World, *Alexander* and *Caesar*: Neither have I made such disturbances, and caused so many dissolutions of particulars, otherwise named deaths, as they did; for I have destroyed but some few men in a little Boat” (251). Her creation and ascent to absolute control of the “*Blazing-world*, a Peaceable World” is indeed effected “easily” and without violence (251). But, as Boesky argues, “[w]hity as [the narrator’s] disclaimer is meant to be, she reminds her readers in this way that the imagination can be as harmful a place as any . . . Cavendish in her utopia starts a fire and then denies it.”<sup>42</sup> The narrator’s assertion pointedly ignores the massive, destructive violence that the Empress inflicts on her native world in part 2. The deconstruction of the “miracle” — to return to Corregnie’s language — of walking on water and the narrator’s disavowal of the violence of conquest underscore the idea that the dream of conquering or converting people to Christianity “without inforcement or blood-shed” but rather “by gentle persuasions” is just that: a naive dream (193).

Both Cavendish and Shakespeare construct and deconstruct boundaries between purportedly masculine and feminine bodies and behaviors and between the human and the nonhuman world. The Empress, Thaisa, and Pericles travel and travail, laboring to physically and imaginatively

produce new beings and new worlds, but the narrators in these texts pull back the curtain that obscures the work of travel and performance. That work often depends on a firm boundary between humans and the world: the vessel, whether ship or audience member, must be seaworthy to survive. Yet these texts reveal that boundary to be tenuous at best. They prompt us to see the labor of a narrator as precarious travail that depends on the work of agents beyond the authors’ and actors’ control, and they invite us to view gender and human/nonhuman binaries as constructed, not given. These binaries, my reading of maritime voyages suggests, are necessitated or called into play by discourses seeking to define human gender and the human relationship to the environment through patriarchal, hierarchical structures. Human and nonhuman agents in Shakespeare’s and Cavendish’s texts upend these schemas of control, revealing anxiety both about gendered definitions of the human and about the role of texts in reifying those definitions.

#### Notes

1. Vitkus, “Labor and Travel,” 229–30.
2. Vitkus, “Labor and Travel,” 229. Vitkus cites *The Oxford English Dictionary*, “travail,” n. 1. 1–4, and “travail,” v., 1. 1–2, as his source for all three definitions of “travail.”
3. Vitkus, “Labor and Travel,” 228–31.
4. Vitkus, “Labor and Travel,” 229. Many critics refer to Thaisa’s childbirth only in passing or in the service of an argument about Marina or Pericles if they refer to her at all: for example, Brayton, *Shakespeare’s Ocean*; Dowd, *Dynamics of Inheritance*; Espinosa, *Masculinity*; and Hall, “[B]orn at Sea.”
5. For an excellent discussion of the *Pericles* authorship debate, see Mowat and Werstine’s introduction and notes to the *Folger Shakespeare Library* edition. I refer to William Shakespeare as the author of the play throughout for the sake of simplicity but wish to acknowledge George Wilkins and indeed the rest of Shakespeare’s acting company as possible collaborators.
6. Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, 11.
7. Mentz, *At the Bottom*, 81.
8. Mentz, *At the Bottom*, 77.
9. Cavendish’s utopia begins with the abduction and dangerous maritime journey of the Lady to a “new world”; there, the Lady marries the Emperor — becoming the Empress — and conducts scientific and philosoph-

- ical explorations of the Blazing World. In her explorations, she converses with spirits, eventually asking them to send her the soul of a writer to be her scribe and to aid her in writing a "Cabbala" (208). The spirits send her the soul of the Duchess of Newcastle, who is a representation of the historical Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, in the style of Thomas More's depiction of himself in *Utopia*. The soul of the Duchess invites the Empress's soul to her own world to meet the Duke and go to the theater, among other adventures. The Duchess's soul also serves the Empress in an advisory capacity in the end of book 1 and throughout book 2.
10. Boesky, *Founding Fictions*, 117, 121, 127.
11. Scholarship on *The Blazing World* has primarily focused on Cavendish's relationship to the Royal Society and her engagement with contemporary scientific debates, her use of the utopian genre, and her royalist leanings as a shaping force in her fiction: for example, Cottegnies, "Utopia"; Fletcher, "Irregular Aesthetic"; Gallagher, "Embracing the Absolute"; and Holmesland, *Utopian Negotiation*.
12. On gender and violence in early modern voyages, see Tucker, "She Would Rather Perish."
13. Lawrence, *Penelope Voyages*, xiii.
14. Lawrence, *Penelope Voyages*, 1, 11.
15. On gender and temperature in humoral and Galenic theory, see Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 66–93.
16. Paster, *Body Embarrassed*, 13.
17. Dowd in *Dynamics of Inheritance* argues that, "[a]lthough the lineage at Pentapolis is eventually redeemed by the play's romance structure and its ultimate privileging of reunion over loss, Thaisa's temporary disappearance [to Ephesus] stages a compensatory turn to physical seclusion as one response to the socioeconomic mutability that the heiress represents" (179). Hall, "[B]orn at Sea" gives a suggestive reading of Marina's and Pericles's giving and withholding of Thaisa's name in 5.1 as crucial to these characters' reunion and the resolution of the play (12–13).
18. Further references to the play will appear in text using act, scene, and line numbers from the Folger Shakespeare Library's *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, edited by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine.
19. See Espinosa, *Masculinity*, especially 163–66, for a discussion of Thaisa as likened in this scene to a Marian icon.
20. For just one of many early modern examples, see Spenser, *Amoretti*, 15.
21. Cavendish, *Blazing World*, 154. Further references to the narrative will appear in text using page numbers from this edition, edited by Sylvia Bowerbank and Sara Mendelson.

22. Cottegnies, "Utopia," 74.
23. Lawrence makes a related point about another of Cavendish's texts, "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity," which features the adventures of the aptly named Travalia (*Penelope Voyages*, 49).
24. See Cottegnies, "Utopia," 77–79, 83–87, for a discussion of religion in *The Blazing World*.
25. Thell, "[A]s Lightly," 21.
26. Thell, "[A]s Lightly," 22. See also Cottegnies, "Utopia," 88–91, on the smashing of scientific instruments in *The Blazing World* and on Cavendish's attention to Bacon's *New Atlantis* in her critique of experimentalism and the Royal Society. On Cavendish and Hooke's *Micrographia*, see Pearl, *Utopian Geographies*, 50–51.
27. Mentz, *At the Bottom*, 71.
28. Dowd, *Dynamics of Inheritance*, 192.
29. Dowd, *Dynamics of Inheritance*, 193.
30. Dowd, *Dynamics of Inheritance*, 208.
31. Dowd, *Dynamics of Inheritance*, 206.
32. For a reading of Othello's tears as "unman[ing]" him and of the maritime resonances of weeping, see Mentz, *At the Bottom*, especially 19–33.
33. Espinosa, *Masculinity*, 164. See also Espinosa's chapter in this volume, "Marian Mobility, Black Madonnas, and the Cleopatra Complex."
34. Espinosa, *Masculinity*, 166. Espinosa references Pericles's claim (5.1.154–57) that Marina's suffering, like his own, can alter or complicate her gender.
35. Heywood, *Fair Maid*, 4–5.1. This remark from the Chorus — perhaps a joke at *The Tempest*'s expense — is in tension with the many scenes in *Fair Maid* that do represent action on board ships at sea. For a further discussion of Heywood's play, see Gaywyn Moore's chapter in this volume, "English Women, Romance, and Global Travel."
36. Brayton, *Shakespeare's Ocean*, 2.
37. Vitkus, "Labor and Travel," 240.
38. Dowd, *Dynamics of Inheritance*, 185.
39. Boesky, *Founding Fictions*, 127.
40. On staging in *The Blazing World*, see Cottegnies, "Utopia," 86, 163, and Tomlinson, "My Brain the Stage."
41. Cottegnies, "Utopia," 86.
42. Boesky, *Founding Fictions*, 140.

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