

Salt Fish: Fishing and the Creation of Empires in *Pericles* and Contemporary Oceans

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Who of his own accord would cross such stretches of salt sea?

—Homer

When Trinculo first finds the prone form of Caliban in *The Tempest*, he mistakes the body for that of a marine creature. Trinculo muses, “What have we here, a man or a fish? Dead or alive?—A fish, he smells like a fish; a very ancient and fish-like smell; a kind of not-of-the-newest poor-john. A strange fish!” (2.2.23–26). In the lines that follow, he notes that in England the public display of such a fish/indigenous person would make a man wealthy (2.2.26–31). This fairly short speech reveals much about how early modern English people related both to their emerging empire and to the ocean and its resources. The two were fundamentally intertwined: the empire depended for its very existence on the ocean and its bounty. Trinculo assumes his natural right to the fishy body of Caliban, a hybrid native existing between sea and land, and the European possession of this colonized body brings with it a promise of material gain. Imperialism’s connection to fish, fishing, and the oceans pervades the early modern English worldview of Shakespeare’s drama, just as global oceans remain a key factor in contemporary economic imperialism.

This paper begins with the role of fishing as a material basis for early modern imperialism in *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, and then recontextualizes the play for our current ecological moment, dominated by neoliberal political economics, commercial over-fishing, and the filling of the global ocean system with human refuse. Shakespeare’s *Pericles* (co-authored with George Wilkins) premiered in 1607 or 1608, relatively late in the Bard’s career. With a premier date roughly contemporaneous with the founding of the Jamestown colony in Virginia and a plotline exploring oceanic expansion, this play presents particularly timely insights into empire and the ocean. By reading *Pericles* as relating to our own moment, we can reproduce Shakespeare’s complex

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oceanic modes of thought and come to see ourselves as situated in both a natural and cultural commons that may resist neoliberalism and capitalist imperialism.

Thinking oceanically can open new potential avenues for liberatory criticism, since most previous work on green or environmental imperialism has been marked by what Dan Brayton calls “the Terrestrial Bias,” excluding oceanic spaces from consideration. According to Brayton, land-based consciousness has pervaded ecocriticism since its conception: “its deep encoding in the terminology and conceptual categories that define ecocritical inquiry profoundly limits our object of study and keeps us from reaching beneath the surface . . . of the sea” (16). The terrestrial bias characterizing most ecocriticism seems particularly evident in studies of environmental imperialism, which often ignore blue concerns entirely. For instance, neither Alfred Crosby’s *Ecological Imperialism* nor Richard Grove’s *Green Imperialism*—two foundational texts in ecocritical colonial studies—mention words like *ocean*, *sea*, *fish*, or *fishing* in their indexes, and Crosby’s chapter on animals makes no mention of fish, crustaceans, or other sea creatures. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, quoting Val Plumwood, similarly reproduce a colonialist concern with *land* use, writing, “European justification for invasion and colonisation proceeded from . . . understanding non-European *lands* and the people and animals that inhabited them as ‘spaces,’ ‘unused, underused or empty’” (5, my emphasis) One distinct benefit of a blue ecocritical approach to imperialism is that the ocean offers models for change, models for hybridity and refiguring the self that the comparative solidity of land may not as obviously inspire. The ocean is continuously in flux, continuously moving and changing, making it an apt basis for rethinking how we see the relationships between the human and the natural, and between the ecological and the economic. My goal in this paper is to join a wave of recent ecocritics in adding shades of blue to a green critical consciousness, specifically by building toward an analysis of blue imperialism and by trying to parse what Shakespeare can tell us about modern, as well as early modern, oceanic imperialism.

To that end, my argument in this paper is unashamedly presentist, situating Shakespeare’s *Pericles* alongside late capitalist systems of consumption, waste, and environmental exploitation. This political economic framework begins with a different lens than many ecocritical studies of Shakespeare, which are concerned primarily with environmentalism, not economics. I argue, however, that thinking environmentally about Shakespeare has inherent political economic potential by offering possible sources of resistance to imperialism and neoliberal late capitalism by privileging the common.

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Of course, some of Shakespeare's plays are more concerned with maritime and imperial issues than others. In *Pericles* the imperative to build an empire is fairly obvious. The titular character moves through the eastern Mediterranean establishing political links and relationships and eventually gaining control of the entire region through a series of political marriages including his own and his daughter's. The cities under his family's control include at least Pericles' own kingdom of Tyre, his wife's kingdom of Pentapolis, the city-state of Tarsus, and Myteline (brought to the empire through Marina's marriage). Prior to Pericles's arrival, each of these city-states had been independent, but his empire brings them under one crown, presumably a positive unification rewarding Pericles and his family for their moral uprightness. As Gower, the play's choric narrator, concludes, "In Pericles, his queen, and daughter seen, / Although assailed with fortune fierce and keen, / Virtue preserved from fell destruction's blast, / Led on by heav'n, and crowned with joy at last" (22.110–13). The play thereby tacitly endorses the imperial project by identifying moral goodness with the construction of empires—though in our own postcolonial era we must not simply and uncritically accept Gower's positive evaluation of imperialism.

Like a fisherman, Pericles lays claim to his new territories, hooking allies and tributary states and reeling them into the net of his domain. This fishing metaphor might seem arbitrary if not for the fact that the play stages fishermen as a model for Pericles's behavior. *Pericles* probably has more direct reliance on fishermen and a fishing consciousness than any other play in Shakespeare's canon. The play's fishermen are common people from whom the titular character gains both wisdom and authority to rule. Apart from being a comic relief scene, the fishermen play a crucial function in Pericles's development as an imperial leader by illuminating for him the workings of social class. The scene solidifies the notion of empire for Pericles because the fishermen, in their "honest mirth [which] becomes their labour" (5.131), remind him that creatures higher up the Great Chain of Being naturally consume lower creatures. The Third Fisherman says, "Master, I marvel how the fishes live in the sea" (5.66), to which the Master replies allegorically, "Why, as men do a-land—the great ones eat up the little ones. I can compare our rich misers to nothing so fitly as to a whale; a plays and tumbles, driving the poor fry before him, and at last devours them all at a mouthful" (5.67–70). Although the scene is satirical, and probably gave the groundlings a good laugh at the image of their landlords as bloated whales, it also naturalizes the idea of conquest and domination. It is a short extension of the Master's analogy to a justification for conquest, as the best states may be justified through a reified rhetoric of "natural order" in dominating formerly open, independent

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states. Rather than presenting empire building as an ethical choice—one which Pericles could choose not to make—this allegory imagines nature (via animal relationships) based on conquest and consumption.

Beyond providing a metaphor reifying imperial dominance, the fishermen provide Pericles with actual material tools he requires to begin building an overseas empire. In a really unlikely feat—considering that the dense metal of armor would sink directly down rather than drift toward shore—the fishermen pull Pericles's armor from the ocean and return it to him following his shipwreck. Regaining his armor lets Pericles enter the tournament to win the love of Thaisa, which eventually brings him control over Pentapolis. Naturally the fishermen are quick to note the debt Pericles owes them for the return of his armor. The Second Fisherman tells him, "Ay, but hark you, my friend, 'twas we that made up this garment through the rough seams of the waters. There are certain condolences, certain vails. I hope, sir, if you thrive, you'll remember from whence you had this" (5.182–85). This is the second piece of wisdom Pericles gains in his encounter with the fishermen—a reminder that the imperial foundation is the common people upon which the throne sits. And in fact, we may say that Pericles does remember the labor of the fishermen and that he remains faithful to his vow to commemorate their role in his fortune. Although a noble throughout the play, Pericles is not afraid to work like a common sailor when storms at sea call for his action, which makes him a better ruler as he acknowledges the toil of his subjects by toiling himself. Additionally, Pericles is changed by a fishy diet. Consuming ocean fish—as Pericles must surely have done while surrounded by fishermen and sailors—would have been understood by early modern people as affecting Pericles's humors.¹ These encounters with the ocean and with fishing refigure Pericles, hybridizing him through contract with the alien worlds of the ocean and labor. The Pericles who reunites with his wife and daughter at the end of the play is ultimately not the same man as the Pericles who sets out from Tyre in the opening—he has been transformed by his encounters with the ocean.

Pericles' wife Thaisa is similarly transformed. She dies at sea but lives again. During a sea storm, Thaisa's servant reports that Thaisa died in childbirth, and the superstitious sailors demand that her body be cast overboard. In the midst of the storm, Pericles commends Thaisa's body to the waves:

nor have I time
To give thee hallowed to thy grave, but straight
Must cast thee, scarcely coffined, in the ooze,
Where, for a monument upon thy bones

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And aye-remaining lamps, the belching whale
And humming water must o'erwhelm thy corpse,
Lying with simple shells. (11.57–63)

Thaisa's grave is to be the physical geography of the ocean itself—marine life, water, and shells. It is the living waters that Pericles imagines, not as a place where Thaisa's body will be lost, but as a kind of sepulcher commemorating her. The rub, though, is that Thaisa is not actually dead but ends up cast overboard in a caulked coffin and washing up on the shores of Ephesus, where Cerimon brings her to Diana's temple. This symbolic death and rebirth at sea marks her hybridity. Thaisa is a being twice born, from the land and from the waves.

This kind of oceanic liminality is most directly embodied in Pericles and Thaisa's daughter, Marina, whose name evokes her oceanic nature, as her father points out (13.12–13). Born on board ship during a sea storm, Marina emerges into a chaotic ocean world, a world that seems to reject all notions of control and, therefore, imperial power. Paralleling her twice-born mother, the waves actually deliver Marina twice to Pericles, first at her birth and second at Myteline where he wanders after being told she has died. Pericles proclaims her two oceanic births: "Thou that wast born at sea, buried at Tarsus, / And found at sea again!" (21.183–84). Although she lives ashore in sea towns, Marina's fundamental identification is with the ocean. While the fortunes of Pericles and his family suffer constant sea changes, Marina exists principally in the liminal space between the sea and the land. When she and Pericles meet as strangers after over a decade apart (and after Pericles has been shown her supposed grave), Marina tells him she is not "of any shores" (21.91). Coastlines in the early modern imaginary were liminal spaces *par excellence*, literally, literarily, and metaphorically producing transgressible boundaries.² This coastal liminality is corporeally reflected in Marina's oceanic hybridity—she is both of the land and of the ocean, more radically so than perhaps any other character in Shakespeare. Steve Mentz writes, "Marina represents the most sea-drenched character in all of Shakespeare's plays . . . Neither sailor nor fish, Marina is nonetheless nearer home at sea than anywhere else" (74). Her liminality—being pulled between opposing spaces—embodies the cultural hybridity theorized by Homi Bhabha in describing postcolonial subjects who are both/neither imperial and/nor indigenous. Hybridity creates new cultural spaces of possibility. Bhabha writes, "This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (4).³ In other words, hybridity creates spaces of possible resistance to imperialism and capitalism by creating links between dif-

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ferent spheres. In Marina's case, this hybridity is neither accidental nor incidental but results from Pericles's colonial project of claiming imperial control over the waters. As a result, his daughter is reconstituted as a hybrid, both blue and green. Pericles's fishy consumption—both the literal eating of fish and the imperialist consumption of fishy spaces—hybridizes him, but Marina is born into hybridity.

We still experience oceanic hybridity today, as human beings continue to seek imperial dominance over the global ocean system. Fishing and oceanic resource extraction remain major components of blue water empires, though under the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism these empires are economic rather than political/martial. Contemporary work by marine biologists, oceanographers, and other oceanic researchers is beginning to expose the full extent of the devastation human imperialism has wrought on the world's oceans, including significantly diminished numbers of fish once thought to be an infinite resource. Patricia Yaeger coined the term *ecocriticism* to draw our attention continually back to the way our view and treatment of the ocean is mediated/inflected/refracted by capitalism and a free market ethos—the dollar sign explicitly connecting the political economic with the ecological (529). Yaeger cites a number of studies that chart decreasing catches, or tie sustained fish production to the increasing (and increasingly brutal) infrastructure of what she calls the “techno-ocean”—an oceanic industry where fishing is done largely through processes like trawling and bottom dragging, which destroy vast swathes of underwater environments where fish, crustaceans, and other marine animals once lived, sheltered, and reproduced. This destruction, along with the continuous extraction of sea resources, limits chances for marine species to reproduce and thereby regenerate their dwindling numbers. Cod, a staple of early modern English diets, is one such example: “scientists have discovered that some depleted populations have difficulty rebounding; a small school of cod is less likely to reproduce than a large school, resulting in greater depopulation, an effect known as depensation, or the Allee effect” (Yaeger 530). While resource extraction has significantly affected marine populations for centuries—Brian Fagan and Edward Test both identify overfishing as a centuries-old problem—modern neoliberal policies that push for deregulation and a culture of consumption have demanded that more and more fish be harvested with little or no consideration for the environmental impact on an ocean still culturally figured as limitless and bountiful. This dichotomy of the ocean as simultaneously unlimited and subject to human domination has roots in the early modern period.

The Elizabethan era saw the juridical contestation of maritime ownership, with lawyers, philosophers, and legal theorists divided on

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questions of ownership, freedom, and control of the seas. Competing theories of maritime law and ethics arose particularly in response to the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas, which divided the globe into a Spanish half and a Portuguese half. However, as nations like England and the Dutch Republic began expanding their maritime interests, their goals conflicted with the Iberian treaty. English and Dutch politicians, legal theorists, and merchants discussed the problem of Spanish and Portuguese claims, and whether Northern Europeans looking to build their own empires were bound to obey the Treaty. Mentz explains:

Modern maritime law is generally held to have begun with Hugo Grotius's *Mare liberum* (1609), which attacked the Portuguese monopoly of the East Indies trade. Grotius's brief articulated in legal terms the increasingly powerful cultural fantasy of oceanic liberty, but his ocean of Loose-Fish did not go unchallenged. English jurist John Seldon's *Mare Clausum* (1635), among others, forcefully argued for legal Fast-ness. The early modern ocean both invited and resisted legal control. (70)

This distinction is especially useful in trying to understand connections between fishing and imperialism because the dichotomy of ownership or freedom of the waves problematizes property in an oceanic context. These were not necessarily two co-existing systems in the early modern period. That is, unlike modern, legally defined concepts of territorial and international waters, it wasn't inherently assumed that each nation was given (or could claim) the rights to the fish in particular areas. These legal debates took place within specific colonialist and capitalist contexts—the issues were rights to resource ownership. Those who favored an open ocean supported a blue water free market, while those arguing for a closed ocean wanted to protect national property. Issues of control or freedom of the seas were crucial to England's economic and imperial future in the early modern period because a massive amount of new wealth was brought to the nation through trade in dried fish from the Canadian coast and north Atlantic.⁴ Northern European fishing exports boomed because “Mediterranean supplies of salt fish . . . by the fourteenth century were falling short of the demand, and Italian cities were beginning to import fish caught and salted in Atlantic, even in Baltic waters” (Parry 72). The import and sale of fish provided economic resources and trained the maritime/naval sailors who would form the Royal Navy and build the British Empire.

Another major legal and philosophical tradition shaping early modern debates over oceanic rights was the question of the commons.

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Throughout the medieval period, common land had been central to England's local economies, allowing the rural poor and working classes to benefit from a shared resource. However, the early modern period saw a series of legal enclosures, which fenced common land as private property for the wealthy. From the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, England suffered waves of social conflicts over enclosure as the rural dispossessed struggled to find new livelihoods, and English jurists debated the benefits, costs, and morality of various Enclosure Acts. In their book *Commonwealth*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri propose returning to a form of the common as a means of social organization in contrast to neoliberalism. They identify the common in both traditional philosophical terms, as an environmental common, but also as a cultural common. For them the common is "the common wealth of the material world" but "also and more significantly those results of social production that are necessary for social interaction and further production, such as knowledges, languages, codes, information, affects, and so forth" (viii). For Hardt and Negri, the key to resisting late capitalism is to think both in terms of an ecological commons and a social commons—to see natural resources like the oceans, air, and arable lands—as well as cultural resources like myths, language, symbols, and information—as belonging to a global community. Given the worldwide popularity of his work—both through English language readership and performance, translation, and adaptation to new media and different cultures—Shakespeare constitutes a significant force in the global cultural commonwealth. Rethinking how his plays connect with our own environmental moment can open space to bridge an eco-commons and a cultural commons. In contrast to neoliberal processes of exploitation, private ownership, and (neo)colonialism, the common provides an ethic for social organization that "does not position humanity separate from nature, as either its exploiter or its custodian, but focuses rather on the practices of interaction, care, and cohabitation in a common world" (viii). Reading the Bard's seas and seafarers as inhabiting these shared common worlds can undermine imperialist and capitalist ideologies built on ownership, domination, and exploitation.

As Shakespeare wrote plays about empires establishing control over the oceans, serious legal, economic, and philosophical debates were ongoing about how, if at all, the seas could or should be controlled by and for national interests, debates inflected by questions of enclosure and the commons. And without intending to suggest that Shakespeare came down on one side of these discussions particularly (or that he necessarily even followed them), it is worth noting how many of his plays involve either overseas empire building, naval combat to control deep water traffic, or economic control over trade and mercantile

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rights. It is also worth noting how much fish pervade the Bard's stage. Although Alexander Falconer asserts that "References to creatures of the deep and to various fishes are of a general kind" (138), Test, Brayton, and Fagan each discuss at length the pervasiveness of fish in the material culture of early modern Europe, suggesting that what may today seem like casual references to different fish in Shakespeare's plays would have had meaningful social implications to an audience for whom fish were everyday commodities and food staples, commodities where quality and taste varied widely for different social and economic classes. In an early modern context, playwright and audience shared a cultural imagery drawn from the ocean and fish.

Pericles in particular explores the dynamics of overseas empires, through a rhetoric of fishing, the depiction of fishermen, and through Pericles, Thaisa, and Marina's hybridizing encounters with the ocean. Shakespeare wrote at the birth of the British Empire, but his depictions of imperial dynamics remain relevant and revelatory in today's culture of economic globalization. Although in 2017 the British Empire is largely a thing of the past, Western colonial dominance still continues, largely in the form of neoliberal economic imperialism. The imperialism of the Global North is maintained partly through deep sea/corporate fishing and oceanic waste dumping, which rely on the neoliberal principles of competition and the free market to justify the ecological and economic impacts of exploitative and damaging practices. This is an empire over people in the Global South, but also an empire casting dominion over fish, crustaceans, other kinds of sea life, and the common spaces of the ocean itself. However, by reading Shakespeare as both engaging with an environmental commons and as central to a cultural commonwealth, we can disrupt the ideological emphases on individual ownership and consumption that underpin late capitalist economic and oceanic imperialism. Through the lens of the common—both the ecological common and the Shakespearean cultural and scholarly common—we may find images of and inspiration for the struggle against contemporary environmental and political economic exploitation and destruction.

Since the 1980s, neoliberalism has become the dominant ideological force in Western culture, encouraging unrestrained consumerism and a free market ethic obscuring international exploitation. One result of this neoliberalism has been a globalized economy relying on resource and tribute extraction from the Global South and an environmental commonwealth for the financial benefit of the Global North. These patterns of resource removal include corporate (over)fishing at the expense of local fishing communities, marine ecosystems, and marine animal populations. Neoliberal decentralization, de-regulation,

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(sometimes coerced) free-markets, and a spirit of competition have led to drastic environmental and economic problems, particularly in the Global South, because neoliberalism conceptualizes all resources as available to corporations rather than legitimately protected through public (or common) ownership. The quest for profit has led to a ruthless exploitation of natural resources to meet a late capitalist cultural imperative to consume.

Todd McGowan combines Lacanian psychoanalysis with Marxist political economics to diagnose the impact of a culture of consumption. He writes, "Whereas formerly society has required subjects to renounce their private enjoyment in the name of social duty, today the only duty seems to consist in enjoying oneself as much as possible" (2). The logic of capitalism requires the consumption of resources to justify continuing economic cycles of production, distribution, and sale. And without regulatory frameworks or concerns for sustainability—in a greed-is-good economy where profit trumps ethical and sometimes legal considerations—shared global resources are extracted by private corporations that see no reason to expend the time, effort, and money required to replenish those resources. The crisis of late capitalism is one of the most pressing global threats we face today. However, reading Shakespeare's plays, like *Pericles*, as evoking an ecological commons may provide a basis for resisting neoliberalism and its ethic of private ownership and thoughtless consumption.

One might object that the extraction of oceanic resources, as devastating as it may be for marine environments and biodiversity, hardly constitutes colonialism. In a traditional and limited sense of colonialism, this objection may be quite correct, but as we have seen in *Pericles*, fishing cultures can provide both a metaphorical and material basis for imperial power, and that remains as true today as it was in the early modern period. English explorers in the early modern period sought areas with large supplies of the fish consumed by religious and legal statute in European culture, and these searches for fish inadvertently brought Europeans into contact with lands they would later colonize. The early modern notion of *mare liberum*, which prompted Northern European exploration and colonization, mirrors contemporary globalized economics run via neoliberal policies of free trade and deregulated competition. Today the Global North maintains dominance over the Global South, not by means of bayonets and bullets, but through ostensibly neutral/mutually beneficial trade arrangements that in fact benefit the stable, industrialized economies of the Global North. Through coerced or imposed policies, the Global North has created a political economy commodifying everything, crippling public/national ownership, and exploiting an environmental commonwealth

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perceived as belonging to no one. Under an international neoliberal regime, “The escalating depletion of the global environmental commons (land, air, water) and proliferating habitat degradations that preclude anything but capital-intensive modes of agricultural production have likewise resulted from the wholesale commodification of nature in all its forms” (Harvey 160). Unfortunately, fish and coastal spaces are material resources that the Global North has been able to exploit at the expense of local communities that traditionally rely on fishing for both food and finance.

While overfishing in general has been detrimental to local economies and marine ecosystems, some of the most expansive contemporary economic and environmental damage occurs through what Naomi Klein calls “disaster capitalism.” In *The Shock Doctrine*, Klein theorizes a three-phase process of disaster capitalism, which she defines as “orchestrated raids on the public sphere in the wake of catastrophic events, combined with the treatment of disasters as exciting market opportunities” (6). Catastrophic events like the Somali civil war or the 2004 tsunami that devastated Sri Lanka are turned into commercial profit for the wealthy industries of the Global North at the expense of the lives and livelihoods of ecosystems, people, and communities in the Global South. The rise of the Somali pirates—who have made commercial shipping and travel through the Gulf of Aden extremely dangerous since the 1990s—can be traced directly to neoliberal exploitation of fishing territory off the coast of Somalia. Military correspondent David Axe explains that many Somali pirates view themselves as defenders of their traditional fishing rights: “After the government in Mogadishu collapsed in 1991, neighboring countries began illegally fishing in Somali waters. The first pirates were simply angry fishermen who boarded these foreign vessels and demanded a ‘fee.’ But as the illegal fishing persisted, some early pirates banded together and called themselves ‘coast guards’” (31). In assigning blame to neighboring countries, Axe obscures the role of western corporate fishing along Africa’s coasts. In fact, many of the worst offenders—both for overfishing and for dumping waste illegally—were European- and US-based companies exploiting the lawlessness of civil-war-era Somalia. Similar exploitation came to Sri Lanka immediately after the tsunami hit, when the Sri Lankan government—seeking cash inflow from the Global North—banished fishing communities from the beaches to “temporary” shantytowns in order to make way for ultra-wealthy ecotourists and commercial hotels. Klein writes, “Millions of people would have to leave traditional villages to free up the beaches for tourists and the land for resorts and highways. What fishing remained would be dominated by large industrial trawlers operating out of deep ports—

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not wooden boats that launch from the beaches” (497). Capitalizing on these disasters represents another wave of disaster for the people and ecosystems suddenly thrown open to dispossession and exploitation by international capital.

The predominance of late capitalist exploitation marks a major shift in human socio-economic relations, and the new practices represent an existential threat to the oceans. Plastics and other waste products become pervasive, hybridizing oceanic spaces. At the same time, eating seafood continues to corporeally hybridize human beings—as it does with Pericles and the fishermen—but fish caught in the techno-ocean are already distorted by human imperialism. The destructive hybridity of neoliberalism draws attention to the danger inherent in liminal contact—precisely that hybridity remains dependent on assumptions of difference, that it relies on the existence of borders. Bhabha explains that colonialism relies on essentialist notions of difference to justify exploitation and domination: “Fixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy, and daemonic repetition” (66). In other words, the ethical foundation of empire relies on a recognizable distinction between the colonizer and the colonized, a distinction that liminality and hybridity often contest. However, hybrid subjects can also reproduce this difference in fraught ways. In discussing colonial mimicry, Bhabha writes, “mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference . . . mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal” (86). This means that hybridity has a complex relationship with imperial power, and the hybrid subject may embrace and enact the very imperialistic forces that created the hybridity. As we shall see, hybridity can take on multiple forms, with greater or lesser degrees of resistance to exploitation.

Refuse from the Global North increasingly fills the global ocean system, dumped and largely ignored. Myra Hird describes landfills as, “ubiquitous places of forgetting, the presumed end point to the garbage we diligently put on sidewalks to be taken away” (107). The same can surely be said of the consumer and industrial waste dumped *en masse* into the world’s oceans. Dumping waste materials into the coastal waters of the Global South, or even in international waters, is a traditional form of dominance over the Global South’s people and nations. However, I suggest we consider this issue in broader terms: as colonization of the global ocean system. The trash-result of our (Western) consumption—pushed to new heights under a neoliberal ethic of ingestion—intensifies human attempts to establish control over the ocean itself as a space of economic dominance. David Harvey identifies con-

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nections between market failure and unregulated waste dumping; he says that market failure “arises when individuals and firms avoid paying the full costs attributable to them by shedding their liabilities outside the market . . . The classic case is that of pollution, where individuals and firms avoid costs by dumping noxious wastes free of charge in the environment” (67). As is the case with exploitative or illegal resource extraction, Western corporations find it easier to dump industrial and chemical waste, garbage, and other refuse into the waters of Global South nations, which lack both the resources to adequately patrol their coastal waters and the international political/economic clout to successfully protest illegal dumping or resource extraction.

Non-biodegradable plastics infesting the oceans are as dangerous as industrial, chemical, and hospital wastes. Masses of floating garbage disrupt ocean currents as well as the movements and behaviors of marine animals. Solid masses or individual plastic products constitute a major threat to aquatic life, but perhaps more insidious are the micro-plastics that are “as ordinary as plankton” in the techno-ocean (Yaeger 528). Salt water, sunlight, sands, and swirling currents combine to break down large plastic items, which fragment into micro-plastics rather than biodegrading. As Charles James Moore of the Algalita Marine Research Foundation writes, “The physical characteristics of most plastics show high resistance to aging and minimal biological degradation. When exposed to the UVB radiation in sunlight, the oxidative properties of the atmosphere and the hydrolytic properties of seawater, these polymers become embrittled, and break into smaller and smaller pieces, eventually becoming individual polymer molecules” (131–32). One of the major problems with these non-biodegradable polymer molecules is that they spread throughout the oceans, going even to places with limited or no plastic production/consumption.

Because plastics and micro-plastics spread throughout the oceans, polymers mix in with the food sources for marine animals, who consume plastic molecules in increasing quantities. Moore cites a study by L. Bern in which observed crustaceans did not differentiate between equally sized polystyrene beads and algae, but ate them indiscriminately (134). The same is true of creatures like sea turtles, which consume plastic shopping bags that resemble jellyfish. Moore notes, “It is probable that the infinite ways in which the mega-tons of multi-colored plastic debris break down in the marine environment create mimics for virtually every natural food source” (134). This claim seems borne out by studies finding rising amounts of plastics in the stomachs of marine creatures. The pervasiveness of oceanic imperialism extends inside the bodies of the ocean’s creatures, more and more filled with

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human-produced plastics. Polymer bits permeate ocean spaces and ocean creatures: “In the vasty deeps, in fishes’ bellies, in the craws of dead albatrosses, plastic keeps cropping up. It is impossible to find a seabird without a little product inside or a square foot of ocean without debris” (Yaeger 528). The plastic products of the land enter oceanic spaces, enter the bodies of marine animals, and establish a hard plastic core of the human world within those oceanic spaces.

However, even as we extend colonial dominance over the ocean, the hybridized waters resist our imperialist impulse. One way the seas undermine colonialism is by returning to us, in distorted form, the plastic and chemical wastes we empty into the waves. By simultaneously dumping waste into the oceans and extracting fish from them, we re-encounter chemicals and plastics in the bodies of sea creatures we harvest for consumption. There are rising concerns about mercury and other heavy metals in fish, as well as the pervasive presence of microplastics. In that most neoliberal process of consumption we actually ingest the wastes we’ve attempted to rid ourselves of by casting them into the sea. Hird explains that leachate from landfills spreads throughout the ecosystem, being absorbed into plants, animals, the air, and the water (113–14). In the ebbs and flows of the ocean, these interconnected processes are even more pronounced, as both chemicals and solid waste enters into oceanic ecosystems. Eating fish—and therefore

the plastics, chemicals, and heavy metals they have ingested—transcorporeally recomposes us as seafood-eating subjects.

Renaissance art and literature demonstrates an awareness of the kind of material hybridity prompted by the human encounter with nature. In his 1566 painting *Water*, Giuseppe Arcimboldo presents this transcorporeality visually, depicting a human face literally composed of sea creatures (see fig. 1). Arcimboldo’s painting attempts to represent in oils the kind of complex material hybridity we see on



Fig. 1. Giuseppe Arcimboldo’s *Water*, 1566.

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Shakespeare's stage in characters, like Marina or Caliban, strongly associated with the ocean. Apart from these "natural" hybrid characters, however, Shakespeare's plays demonstrate how oceanic experience transcorporeally refigures the human. In *Pericles*, we see this link between fishy consumption and oceanic hybridity in Pericles, Thaisa, and perhaps even in the fishermen. Early modern people were preoccupied with diet, because they believed that balancing one's humors was the key to good health, and one balanced humors by eating particular kinds of foods. Specific foods raised or lowered different humors, so diet was one of the main ways to control a dominant humor. In *Pericles*, a priest of Diana's temple named Cerimon makes explicit the connection between health and natural elements, plants, and minerals, explaining that he had for years studied medicine to learn "of the disturbances / That nature works, and of her cures" (12.34-35). What one consumed was directly a matter of life or death for early modern people because balancing the humors was the key to health.

Pericles, and to a lesser extent other characters, ingest fish and directly—or indirectly, in the case of the fishermen—build an empire over the waters, which changes their land-based bodies via a complex coastal liminality. Pericles even acknowledges the interpenetration of the human and the elemental after suffering his first sea storm: "Wind, rain, and thunder, remember earthly man / Is but a substance that must yield to you, / And I, as fits my nature, do obey you" (5.42-44). The hybridity of Pericles, Thaisa, and Marina shows the material human body deeply situated in the physical world and shaped by transcorporeal engagements with nature. Brayton argues that Shakespeare conceptualizes human beings as constituted by the fish we eat, and he traces this line of oceanic anti-imperialism through the Bard:

fish is not *merely* a metaphorical presence in the writings of Shakespeare; it is a floating signifier for materiality. Far from producing the kind of oneness with place, landscape, and creation that [Wendell] Berry and many ecocritics pursue, the insight that the human body is materially *of* this world (including the sea in all its strangeness) and not hovering above destabilizes traditional conceptions of nature and human nature. (150, original emphasis)

This chain of reasoning—that the human is materially constituted of and through the physical world—suggests a loop by which we today produce a trash-ocean and that trash-ocean in turn comes to compose us as we consume the creatures that have been (re)composed of our trash. The duality or circularity or flux of these relations disrupts a co-

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lonialist mindset because the results of human imperialism are reflected back and re-constituted in a hybridized human.

Robert Watson identifies nature itself as an epistemological problem in early modern literature, because it represented both the imagined space of epistemological certainty (Eden, perhaps, or Utopia) and simultaneously the limit of that hope. He argues that the crisis of modernity is fundamentally an epistemological one, and that nature or the pastoral represents an idealized, pre-lapsarian space, but this idealization demonstrates the very utopic impossibility of a cultural space unmarked by epistemological uncertainty. However, we can find spaces of connection by embracing the sea-change inherent in oceanic hybridity, inherent in liminal existences between land and sea, between cultures, and between stable identities. Contact between the terrestrial and the oceanic across the liminal boundary of coastlines is inherently hybridizing, both for Pericles and his family, and for modern subjects. And while this hybridity can reinforce reified differences, it also opens spaces to challenge those differences and the imperialist exploitation difference ostensibly justifies. Through a shared acceptance of epistemological uncertainties and the productive possibilities those uncertainties open up, we can strengthen a common world. Rather than figuring the ocean as an empty space to be occupied, it becomes possible to see how the ocean is already human and the human is already oceanic—and when we see the world in terms of connections, shared experiences, and shared spaces, the ideologies of ownership and domination that give meaning to neoliberalism and imperialism begin to unravel. In this way, the possibilities of the common become a means of resisting late capitalist economic imperialism.

Through an environmentally conscious reading of Shakespeare's plays we can find inspiration to resist continuing imperialism and the exploitation of global oceans. This ecologically/economically engaged reading supplements other readings of the Bard, expanding the intellectual and cultural commonwealth. Reading, discussing, and teaching Shakespeare environmentally engages scholars and students within an intellectual common—as Hardt and Negri say, "If you use that idea productively, I can use it too, at the very same time. In fact the more of us that work with an idea and communicate about it, the more productive it becomes" (381). Further, as contemporary fish/seafood-eating subjects, we are affected transcorporeally by the devastation of the oceans—we are hybridized just as Pericles, Thaisa, and Marina are hybridized. Our hybridity may mean ingesting micro-plastics, heavy metals, and industrial and chemical wastes that have made their way through the oceans and into the fish and other sea creatures we harvest for food. Continuing exploitation and colonization of oceanic spaces

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is a significant problem, but turning to environmental and cultural commonwealths to resist neoliberalism provides one method to begin undoing the ideological hegemony of late capitalism. And the works of Shakespeare form an important part of our cultural commonwealth, because of the Bard's massive global influence. By rereading and re-teaching Shakespeare's plays as environmentally engaged and relevant commentary for contemporary fishing practices, we can locate ourselves in both a cultural and environmental common.

Notes

1. The issue of humors, eating, and hybridity will be discussed in more detail below.
2. See Elizabeth Jane Bellamy, *Dire Straits: The Perils of Writing the Early Modern English Coastline from Leland to Milton* (Toronto: U Toronto P, 2013).
3. Although Bhabha doesn't specifically address coastlines as liminal, epistemological borders, his work on hybridity is deeply conscious of the importance of boundaries as context zones: "the problem of cultural interaction emerges only at the signficatory boundaries of cultures, where meanings and values are (mis)read or signs are misappropriated" (34). It is these liminal points of contact between worlds that create hybridity. As Bhabha puts it, "the boundary becomes the place from which *something begins its presencing*" (5, original emphasis). The coastlines with which Marina are associated create these liminal zones of contact, thereby contributing to her hybridity.
4. See Edward M. Test, "The *Tempest* and the Newfoundland Cod Fishery," in *Global Traffic: Discourses and Practices of Trade in English Literature and Culture from 1550 to 1700*, ed. Barbara Sebek and Stephen Deng (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

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