Crossing the Mediterranean in Early Modern Drama

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In the first scene of Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, Barabas, the eponymous hero, enters the stage, counting his gold and musing about the sources of his wealth: it comes from dealings with the "Samnites" in Italy, "the men of Uz" in the Middle East, and the "Arabians"; and from trade with "Spanish oils, and wines of Greece", which are transported on "Persian ships", and ships sent "for Egypt and the bordering isles", "smoothly gliding […] through our Mediterranean sea." (1.1.2-48) Barabas has been described as both the quintessential (proto-)capitalist (cf. Bartels, 1993: 100) and the embodiment of anti-Jewish stereotypes, "a semimythical figure linked in the popular imagination with usury, sharp dealing, and ruthless cunning" (Greenblatt, 1978: 293). As such, Barabas served as a model for Shakespeare's Shylock and perhaps also offered a blueprint for Richard III (cf. Shapiro, 1988: 271). Important as these readings are, I want to read this passage neither from the perspective of character and theme, nor from that of influences and sources. Instead, my essay takes its point of departure from the observation that Barabas's speech performatively establishes, through a plethora of geographical references, a distinct *space*: the Mediterranean Sea.

The centrality of the Mediterranean in the early modern (English) imagination has already been discussed in a considerable number of studies. Whereas earlier publications studied the Italian, Latin or Greek sources of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, as well as their constructions of e.g. Italy, contributions since the early 2000s have shifted the focus to the eastern Mediterranean and English encounters with the Ottoman Empire (cf. Matar, 1998; Barbour, 2003; Vitkus, 2003; Dimmock, 2005; MacLean, 2007). Goran V. Stanivukovic describes this "growing interest in the Eastern Mediterranean" as a "remapping" of scholarly

attention, "mov[ing] forward from the vision of the Mediterranean as a socioeconomic and Eurocentric place" (Stanivukovic, 2007: 5). With frequent reference to Fernand Braudel's seminal study *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (1949), and a critique of its Western Eurocentric bias, the early modern Mediterranean has been described as a space of cultural hybridity, liminality, and transformation (cf. e.g. Vitkus, 2003, 22; Cantor, 2006: 900). Scholars have addressed the dramatic negotiations of transnational trade relations and of cultural and religious encounters; they have discussed the drama of conversion to Islam, as well as the aesthetic fascination with foreign people, commodities, and customs. My essay is indebted to this strand of research to which I have contributed elsewhere (see Schülting et al., 2012), but it is also strongly inspired by a suggestion made by Bernhard Klein and Gesa Mackenthun in their introduction to *Sea Changes: Historicizing the Ocean* (2004). Their attempt is to "recover in the history of the sea a paradigm that may accommodate various revisionary accounts – revisionary in the sense of seeing things in new ways, of seeing them differently – of the modern historical experience of transnational contact zones." (Klein and Mackenthun, 2004: 2)

There seems to be an urgent need for such a revisionary perspective on the Mediterranean Sea, which in recent years has become a lethal border zone separating Europe from North Africa and the Middle East. The UNHCR estimates that more than 2,200 refugees lost their lives or went missing in 2018 in the attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea and apply for asylum in Europe (cf. UNHCR, 2019). It is important to understand that the Mediterranean Sea does not constitute a natural border between Europe and Africa – actually, there are no natural borders, as contemporary border theorists have reminded us (see e.g. Schimanski / Wolfe, 2017). Instead, borders are symbolic acts, cultural figurations imposed on the landscape

(or seascape, as it were), and in the course of negotiations within and across border zones, borders are redrawn, extended, or transformed. This is particularly true of the sea with its constant movement and lack of stable boundaries.

In addition, borders and border zones have changed over time. Around 1600, the Mediterranean Sea was considered less a border than a contested arena of international trade and commerce for various actors: Christian, Jewish, and Muslim; Western, Southern and Eastern European as well as Northern African. In the course of the sixteenth century, trading activities in the Eastern Mediterranean dropped, not least due to the decline of the Venetian influence. This was the moment when English traders stepped in. In 1592, the Levant Company, merging the Turkey and the Venice companies, received its charter, and by 1620, English merchants had become "the undisputed leaders in the Levant trade" (McGowan, 1981: 21). Their economic supremacy followed a series of successful diplomatic missions with the Ottoman Empire, including those of William Harborne (c. 1578-88), Edward Barton (1588-97), and Henry Lello (1598/9-1607). In the "Epistle dedicatory", addressed to Sir Robert Cecil, to *The Second Volume of the Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1599), Richard Hakluyt proudly comments on this economic activity in the Mediterranean, which he describes as "the happie renuing and much increasing of our interrupted trade in all the Leuant" and "the traffike of our Nation in all the chiefe Hauens of Africa and Egypt: the searching and haunting the very bottome of the Mediterran Sea to the ports of Tripoli and Alexandretta, of the Archipelagus, by the Turkes now called The white sea, euen to the walles of Constantinople" (Hakluyt, 1599: n. p.).

In my paper, I want to suggest that a reconsideration of early modern English plays from the perspective of the Mediterranean Sea may encourage us to understand "Shakespearean

negotiations" (Greenblatt, 1988) not merely, and perhaps not even primarily, as the circulation of social energy in Renaissance England but as emerging from an increasingly expanding world in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in which the Mediterranean Sea played an important role. This historicist focus is closely connected to a presentist concern: Whereas the debates in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 2001 offered the backdrop to the study of English encounters with the Islamic East, the current scenario of migration across the Mediterranean Sea invites a shift of attention from the cultural encounters and cultural hybridity in the Mediterranean area to a consideration of the Mediterranean Sea itself and its dramatic and cultural functions.

Representing the Mediterranean

The expansion of maritime travel and trade in the early modern age fundamentally changed the conception of the world's oceans "whose vast size and potential were beginning to become apparent to statesmen, navigators, and literary artists." (Brayton, 2012: 2) Daniel Brayton suggests a "thalassalogical" perspective (from Greek *thalassa*: the sea) on Shakespeare's plays, through which he seeks to gain "fresh insights about both environmental history and the environmental present" (Brayton, 2012: 4). Even though my paper moves in a different direction, Brayton's observation about what he calls the "major conceptual 'discovery' of early modern European navigators and cartographers", namely "the vastness of the global ocean" (Brayton, 2012: 2), is also relevant for my discussion. It poses the question as to how this vastness could ever be represented within the narrow confines of the early modern stage.

One obvious strategy of spatial representation on stage is verbal mapping. In the introductory quote from *The Jew of Malta*, the naming of regions and places – from Persia to

Spain, from Greece to Italy, and from Alexandria via Candy (Crete) to Malta – rhetorically delineates the Mediterranean Sea and constructs it as a space of vast dimensions. Barabas is concerned about his ships that he "sent for Egypt and the bordering isles" (1.1.42) and hopes that his "argosy from Alexandria, / Loaden with spice and silks" (44-45) is on its way back to Malta. It turns out that two of his ships, whose nearly simultaneous arrival is reported in the following lines, have missed each other although both have returned from Egypt. In his dialogue with the First Merchant, Barabas wonders: "Thou couldst not come from Egypt, or by Caire / But at the entry there into the sea, / Where Nilus pays his tribute to the main. / Thou needs must sail by Alexandria." (73-76) The Second Merchant offers an explanation for this question, suggesting that the ship may have taken a different route from Egypt to Malta past the shores of Crete: "Belike they coasted round by Candy shore / About their oils or other business." (91-92) Both reprimand Barabas for risking his wealth on the sea, on long-distance trade-routes: "But this we hear some of our seamen say, / They wondered how you durst with so much wealth / Trust such a crazed vessel, and so far." (78-80) By this moment in the play the audience would have gained a rough understanding of the spatial dimensions of the maritime trading networks interconnecting Egypt, Greece, and Malta.

The first scene of the play therefore goes beyond the characterization of Barabas as a member of the "scattered nation" (120) of the Jews, whose Mediterranean trading network helps them to accumulate great riches, as Barabas boasts: "There's Kirriah Jairim, the great Jew of Greece, / Obed in Bairseth, Nones in Portugal, / Myself in Malta, some in Italy, /Many in France, and wealthy every one (123-126). Perhaps more importantly, the scene serves to map the Mediterranean, from the Levant to Malta, and from thence to Portugal, Italy and France – the bases of the other Jewish merchants, who like Barabas "mak[e] the sea their servant" (109).

With the arrival of a Spanish ship bringing slaves from Corsica in Act Two (2.2.10) and that of the Turks in Act Three, driven by "the wind that bloweth all the world besides, / Desire of gold" (3.5.4-5), the play has not only brought together the three major religions of the early modern Mediterranean – Judaism, Roman Catholicism, and Islam – but also offered a geographical and cultural chart spanning the Mediterranean, from West to East and North to South. Malta appears as the centre of this large maritime network, attracting the various European and North African powers, not least because of its favourable geographical position. "And now I see the situation, / And how secure this conquered island stands", the Turkish leader Calymath describes Malta. "Environed with the Mediterranean Sea, / Strong countermured with other pretty isles; / And toward Calabria backed by Sicily" (5.3.5-9). As "the crossroads of the maritime Mediterranean, […] where Christian and Muslim powers overlapped" (Vitkus, 2006: 63), Malta, with its strategic function for military and economic ventures, is the play's centre of gravity.

Whereas Marlowe's play has only this one setting, in Shakespeare's *Pericles* the action moves across a large part of the Eastern Mediterranean, covering an area that includes modern Lebanon, Turkey, and Greece. The respective settings – Antioch, Tyre, Tarsus, Pentapolis, Mytilene, and Ephesus – are identified by the place names in the lines of the characters and of the chorus. These settings are palimpsests: An early modern audience would have been familiar with the places from Greek mythology and the Bible, but the names would also have evoked the contemporary enterprises in the Levant. For Sir Philip Sidney, such a constant shift of dramatic setting represented a massive flaw. He criticized plays "where you shall have Asia of the one side, and Afric of the other, and so many other under-kingdoms, that the player, when he comes in, must ever begin with telling where he is, or else the tale will not be conceived." (Sidney, 1967: 134) The 1616 Folio version of Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour* (1598)

subscribes to the same ideal when it begins with the Prologue's promise that the play will do without a "Chorus [that] wafts you o'er the seas" (Jonson, 2012: Prol. 15). But other early modern playwrights were apparently more interested in taking their audiences on imaginary sea-journey than in following Aristotelian precepts.

Shakespeare's *Pericles*, for instance, explicitly comments on the metadramatic analogy between "the experience of theatrical 'transportation'" (Vitkus, 2003: 40) and that of seafaring, between the stage and the ship. Gower encourages the audience: "In your imagination hold / This stage the ship, upon whose deck / The sea-tossed Pericles appears to speke." (10.58-60)[1] Tobias Döring has explored this intersection of "the notion of *theatrum mundi* […] with the notion of the *mare mundi*", suggesting that Shakespeare's plays can be read "as passages across an open sea, risky performances into an open future." (Döring, 2012: 16, 25) Theatrical performance, in turn, constructs the sea in the spectators' imagination. It takes the audience, as it were, across the Mediterranean Sea, "From bourn to bourn, region to region." (18.3-4), and "toss[ing]" them, like Pericles, "from coast to coast" (5.34).

Early modern drama then evokes, through its plot structures, the large spatial distances across the Mediterranean and the long durations of early modern sea travel. The distance between Tyre and Tarsus seems to be so great, *Pericles* suggests, that it takes years for Pericles to venture on a new journey to see his daughter Marina whom he had to leave with Cleon and Dionyza. In *The Merchant of Venice*, the possibility that Antonio lose his ships and be unable to pay back the bond is suggested from the very beginning. But it takes five acts for his "argosies" to "richly come to harbour" (5.1.276-78) and prove the fast-travelling rumours about a shipwreck off the North African coast wrong (3.1.92). In *The Tempest*, it remains unclear whether information about the shipwreck will ever make it from Naples across to Tunis.

Assuming that neither Alonso nor Ferdinand have survived, Antonio considers usurping the throne of Naples. He is convinced that the real heiress Claribel, recently married to the king of Tunis, will remain ignorant of Alonso's supposed death and therefore never claim the throne: "She that is Queen of Tunis; she that dwells / Ten leagues beyond man's life; she that from Naples / Can have no note – unless the sun were post / The man i'th'moon's too slow – till newborn chins / Be rough and razorable […]." (2.1.242-246) The distance between Naples and Tunis, Antonio's metaphor implies, can only hardly ever be covered in a man's lifetime. Geographical and cultural remoteness are conflated in this hyperbolic rendering. The actual distance between the two cities, approximately 350 miles (or 300 nautical miles), would not have created a major problem for sixteenth-century carracks and carvels, which were indeed able to cover long distances (cf. Unger, 2017: 26). In comparison, Sebastian's response is more matter-of-fact when he admits laconically that between Tunis and Naples "There is some space." (2.1.258) In contrast to Antonio, who seems to assume an insurmountable divide between Tunis and Naples, Sebastian sees the two cities as forming part of the same world, and the distance between them geographical rather than symbolic.

One could argue that Sebastian's imaginary map is based on the geometrical measuring of space brought about by the Copernican revolution. Since the fifteenth century, geographical maps had replaced the medieval T-O maps, in which the circular O comprised the (known) world: the northern hemisphere. The circle was subdivided by a T formed by the Nile, the Don, and the Mediterranean, with the latter representing a spiritual and symbolic divide between Europe and Africa (see e.g. Klein, 2001: 17-19; Smith, 2008: 2). Michel de Certeau has described the triumph of geometry in European map-making of the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries as a totalizing gesture which colonized space (cf. de Certeau 1988: 121). And yet, this

gesture was one that located different parts of the earth on the same plane, related to each other through a grid of geometric coordinates rather than cosmological interpretation. It conceptualized the world as a homogeneous space.

Along with the voyages of discovery, the idea of the Mediterranean as the centre of the world, the Roman *mare nostrum*, changed. The Mediterranean in Homer's *Odyssee* does not merely function as the setting of Ulysses' travels but also demarcates the world as it is known. This world was expanding considerably in the course of the sixteenth century, at least in the European imagination – a shift that Jyotsna Singh, Daniel Vitkus, and others have described as a first phase of globalization (see Singh, 2009; Vitkus, 2009). The Globe Theatre carried the reference to a 'widening' world in its name. Around 1600, the name did no longer (exclusively) refer to the idea of man's earthly existence as a cosmic play, which was replicated on the stage. Drama and theatre "registered England's growing awareness of the foreign worlds beyond its borders" (Degenhardt 2012: 433). They communicated knowledge about these new worlds and created them on stage, with "topical references" as in my introductory quotes from *The Jew of Malta*, or 'outlandish' props and costumes (as in the Turk plays) metonymically evoking far-away lands. Even city comedies frequently alluded to English dreams of overseas riches – satirically as in George Chapman, John Marston, and Ben Jonson's *Eastward Ho!* (1605) and Frances Beaumont *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607), or affirmatively as in Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1599).

Despite this early modern 'globalisation', the Mediterranean remained one of the major arteries of international maritime trade. In *The Tempest*, all three ships arriving on Prospero's island come from a Mediterranean port: the first is from Algiers, bringing Sycorax and her child Caliban (1.2.265-70); the second is the Milanese bark with Prospero and Miranda on board

(1.2.144-71); and the third is Alonso's ship, which has been thrown off from its course from Tunis to Naples. The setting of the island remains unclear, even if it is not Mediterranean, it seems to be spatially connected with the routes across the Mediterranean – from and to both Italy and North Africa. As has been explored in numerous studies, *The Tempest* responds to journeys to and accounts of the 'New World'. And yet, it does so from the perspective of trans-Mediterranean travel and cultural encounters (see also Fuchs, 1997, Hess, 2000: 121). Between Algiers, Tunis, Naples and Milan, it seems, there are new worlds to discover. This is also true for early modern drama, which emerges from these very routes.

Marine Plots

Seafaring and the dangers of crossing the oceans have offered plots for millennia. They are at the basis of ancient myths and epics, and have provided fundamental metaphors of being in the world. Hans Blumenberg contends that despite the fact that "humans live their lives and build their institutions on dry land, […] they seek to grasp the movement of their existence above all through a metaphorics of the perilous sea voyage." (Blumenberg, 1997: 7) It is not surprising that these plots took centre stage when seaborne trade was rapidly expanding and ships were sent out on long voyages of discovery. Early modern plays show or tell stories about sea journeys and shipwrecks, about merchants shipping their wares on risky voyages and making good fortunes, about pirates and sea-battles. References to sea-journeys are even inserted in genres and plays that are far remote from the Mediterranean: In *2 Henry IV*, Pistol yearns for "Africa and golden joys" (5.3.93). In the third scene of *Macbeth*, the First Witch concocts her revenge against a sailor whose wife has refused to share her food with her: "Though his barcque cannot be lost, / Yet it shall be tempest-tossed." (1.3.23-24) And again and again, it is the

'waywardness' of the sea that seems to function as a catalyst of the plot: in *The Comedy of Errors*, where two sets of twin brothers separated by a shipwreck are reunited after many years; in *The Tempest*, where the ship carrying Prospero's enemies is brought to his island; in *Othello*, where the Turkish fleet is destroyed by a storm; in *Twelfth Night*, where Viola and Sebastian are washed to the shores of Illyria after a shipwreck. *Pericles* is indeed "soaked in Mediterranean saltwater", as Vitkus claims (2003: 40), when almost every shift of scene is motivated by another sea journey. The episodic plot of the play, which has been described as "preposterous" (Cohen, 1997: 2709), makes perfect sense if it is seen as a structural response to "the wayward seas" (18.10) of the eastern Mediterranean.

Connoting risk, transformation, and alterity, the ocean provided early modern dramatists with plots about social, political, and individual crises whose solution is suspended for a while. With the 'fluidity' of the sea, identities, political order, economic power, gender and cultural hierarchies all become precariously unstable. Ariel's song in 1.2 refers to the "sea-change" of the human body under water, into "coral" and "pearls", "into something rich and strange" (1.2.401-402). "The song", Mentz writes, "suggests that, to match the sea, humans and poetic forms must open themselves to disorder. […] A new marine logic replaces the landbound world." (Mentz, 2009: 9) This 'marine logic' defies social rank, names, and individual ownership, not only in *The Tempest*. Shipwrecked on the coast of Illyria, both Viola and Antonio fear for their safety and think it wise to hide their identities. Pericles is "tossed" "from coast to coast" (5.34-35) and loses everything: his ship and possessions, his wife and daughter, as well as his status as a prince. When he arrives at Pentapolis, he admits that "What I have been, I have forgot to know" (5.106). He cannot even lay claim to his rusty armour, when it is salvaged out of the sea. The fishermen hand it over to him so that he can participate in the

tournament at king Simonides's court but they remind him that it is now theirs – "'twas we that made up this garment through the rough seams of the waters" (5.182-83) – and that they expect some kind of monetary compensation from him.

The characters who accept the risks of seafaring, are often rewarded at the end of Shakespearean drama. In the last act of *The Merchant of Venice*, Antonio learns that "three of [his] argosies / Are richly come to harbour suddenly." (5.1.275-276) In *Twelfth Night*, *The Tempest*, *Pericles*, and *The Comedy of Errors*, the castaways are reunited with their families and many of them find romantic love. Indeed, these plots seem to be endorsing Hugo Grotius's notion of the universal right of free travel, barter, and communication across the sea as developed in *Mare Liberum* (1609) (see Muldoon 2016: 18). However, the wish to cross the sea is not met with unconditional approval. In *Merchant*, for example, Antonio's laudable adventures are contrasted with the desire of another character crossing the Mediterranean: Morocco. He is sent back, without the wealth of Belmont, and Portia wishes that "all of his complexion choose […] so" (2.7.79). In *Merchant*, then, this unsuited suitor represents the dangers coming with the idea a *mare liberum*: foreign ownership, which is both sexualized and racialized. Then as today, crossing the Mediterranean is easier (and more permissible) for some than for others: Viola and Sebastian are welcomed in Illyria and are allowed to settle and to marry – a right that Morocco is denied and that Othello can only briefly enjoy. The Turkish fleet in *Othello* is destroyed in a storm; the play thus has the elements thwart the Ottoman plans to conquer the island of Cyprus and control the Eastern Levant.

Shipwrecks with Spectators

"Shipwreck symbolizes loss, deprivation, separation – the condition towards which tragedies work, and from which comedies start" (Edwards, 1997: 147). In early modernity, the allegory of seafaring as the *conditio humana* together with the well-known topos of shipwreck functioned as "a powerful symbol of mortality adrift in a hostile universe" (Mentz, 2008: 166). However, I would insist that seafaring in early modern drama oscillates between metaphorical and referential meanings. Theatre audiences would also have connected these marine plots to actual voyages in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and have been reminded "of the dangers faced by English sailors in the contemporary Mediterranean" (Vitkus, 2003: 40).

In this context, it is crucial to note the transformation of the classical constellation of "shipwreck with spectator", which Blumenberg explores in his essay. For Lucretius, he argues, the role of the uninvolved spectator was particularly interesting since it marked the position of the philosopher and the ideal of "an inviolable, solid ground for one's view of the world." (Blumenberg, 1997: 26) Seafaring, in contrast, functioned as a metaphor of the vanity of human struggle (cf. 29). These ideas also informed Renaissance writing. Montaigne, in his essay "Of Profit and Honesty", quotes Lucretius to argue that witnessing the suffering of others evokes both compassion and pleasure: "for in the midst of compassion, we inwardly feele a kinde of bitter-sweete-pricking of malicious delight, to see other suffer; and children feele it also:

> *Suaue mari magno, turbantibus aquora ventis,*
> *E terra magnum alterius spectare laborem.*
> Tis sweet on graund seas, when windes waues turmoyle,
> From land to see an others greeuous toyle. (Montaigne, 1603: 475)

For Blumenberg this passage conceptualizes the problem of the "shipwreck with spectator" through the constellation of the theatre (Blumenberg, 1997: 16), thus merging "shipwreck metaphorics and theater metaphorics" (46).

Shakespearean drama, however, diverges from both the Stoic ideal of distanced observation and Montaigne's insistence on the cruel pleasures of spectatorship. The first scene of *The Tempest* turns the audience into doubles of Miranda witnessing the shipwreck. The mariners cry "We split, we split, we split!" (1.1.36) and Gonzalo yearns for a "dry death" (60). But here, as well as in other plays, the reaction shown by the spectator in the world on stage is neither detached reflection nor pleasurable enjoyment of the scene. Instead, Miranda expresses her affective involvement and compassion: "O, I have suffered / With those that I saw suffer!" (*Tem*, 1.2.5-6) In *The Winter's Tale*, the Clown reports of "the most piteous cry of the poor soules" (3.3.84-85) that were shipwrecked off the shore of Bohemia. The tragedy on sea is mirrored by a tragedy on land where Antigonus is devoured by a bear, and the Clown's comparison between the two reduces the pathos of the narrative and turns it into a farce. Yet, the question remains whether his lament or the audience's potential laughter is the more appropriate response to the two catastrophes. Pericles's shipwreck is observed by the Fishermen, who mourn the death "of the poor men that were cast away before" them and express their grief about the "pitiful cries" of those who were perishing (5.58-62) In contrast to them, Pericles remains stoical; although he will later mourn the loss of his wife and daughter in a storm, he ignores the death of his own sailors. Such an emotional distance is complemented, and challenged, through other voices, albeit those of the lower orders, a young woman, and a clown, who do show compassion for the victims and sympathize with them. Their affective reaction sharply contrasts with the evil pleasure of the three witches in *Macbeth*, who truly enjoy the sight of the sailor "dwindle[ing], peak[ing], and pin[ing]" (1.3.22). "Show me, show me" (25), demands the Second Witch greedily, thus offering a figuration of the "malicious delight" Montaigne mentions.

In *Pericles* and *The Tempest*, the constellation of "shipwreck with spectator" is performed on stage and duplicated when the audience see themselves mirrored in the compassionate spectators of the shipwreck. As Evelyn Tribble has argued, both anti-theatricalists and "early modern playwrights and players were keenly aware of the susceptibility of audiences to the affective states of others." (Tribble, 2017: 195) By contrasting strong affective responses to the suffering of others with disinterestedness (or even cruel pleasure), the plays contributed to the early modern debate on the contagious affects of the stage, challenging the ideal of stoicism and suggesting an ethics of active compassion that still resonates today.

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To summarise: I have argued that early modern Mediterranean plays – and the references to the Mediterranean Sea in other plays – responded to a world that around 1600 was expanding through seaborne journeys. Plays as different as *The Jew of Malta*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Pericles* do not merely map the Mediterranean, but they also construct plots around maritime networks and the risks of seafaring. The Mediterranean Sea represented in these plays is characterized by its openness to encounter, trade, and communication on the one hand, and insecurity and danger on the other. I do not want to suggest a naïve presentist endorsement of this idea – and indeed, it would seem more than cynical to celebrate the risks of sea journeys at a time when several thousand men, women, and children die annually in their attempt to cross the Mediterranean. And yet, a rereading of early modern Mediterranean plays may offer ways of approaching the pressing ethical and political challenges posed by migration across and shipwreck on the Mediterranean Sea – approaches beyond nationalism, nativism, and the logic of borders. Such

a revision may also help Shakespeare scholarship push beyond its national frameworks and

develop ways of conceptualizing early modern literature and culture as emerging from and

across the contact zone that the Mediterranean established.

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[1] All Shakespeare quotes are from *The Norton Shakespeare* (Shakespeare, 1997).