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My Noble Passengers are Ioy in the holy Ghost & the peace of Conscience, whose *retinue* are divine graces; my *ignoble* or rather *noxious passengers* are worldly cogitations and vaine delights, which are more than a good many; besides some that are *artfull thieves* and *traitors*, namely pride, envie, prejudice. But all these I bid farewell when I come to my journeyes end, though I would but: cannot before.

Heaven is my *Country*, where I am *registred* in the Booke of life; my *King* is *Iehovah*; my *tribute* *Almesdeeds*; *they which gather it* are the *poore*;

Love is my Countries badge, my language is holy conference; my fellow companions are the Saints.

I am poore in performances, yet rich in Gods acceptance; The foundation of all my good, is Gods free Election; I became bound into the Corporation of the Church to serve him in my baptisme; I was inrolled at the time when he first called me; my freedome is Iustification, it was purchased with the blood of Christ, my evidence is the earnest of his spirit; my priviledges are his sanctifying Graces; my Crowne (reserved for me on high) is Glorification.

My *Maker* and *Owner* is God, who *builds* me by his Word which is *Christ*, of earth which was the *materiall*: he *franght* it with the effence of my soule which is the *Treasure*; and hath *fer* me to *saile* in the *sea* of this world, till I attaine to the port of death, which letteth the *terrestrial* part into the *hobow* of the grave, and the *celestiall* into the *kingdome* of heaven; in which *voyage* conuenience of estate is as *fa-vour*; good affections serve as a *tyde*, and prayer as a *profferous gale*: a *winde* to helpe forward.

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R. Y.

Steve Mentz

My Body is the Hull; the Keele my Back; my Neck the Stern; the Sides are my Ribbes; the Beames my Bones; my flesh the planks; Gristles and ligaments are the Pintells and knee-timbers; Arteries, veins and sinews the severall seames of the Ship; my blood is the ballast; my heart the principall hold; my stomack the Cooke-room; my Liver the Cesterne; my Bowels the sinke; my Lungs the Bellows; my teeth the Chopping-knives; except you divide them, and then they are the 32 points of the Sea-card both agreeing in number...¹

That manic voice insisting the human bodies and wooden ships occupy the same symbolic space is Robert Younge, from his broadsheet *The State of a Christian* (1636). I first encountered this single-page work as a preface to Henry Mainwaring's *Sea-man's Dictionary* (1644). Its mania suggests how intensely oceanic experience stimulated the early modern imagination. Younge's obsessive intermingling of body parts and nautical terms provides a conceptual frame through which to consider how shipwreck narratives reveal the dynamic meanings of the ocean in early modern English culture. Early modern shipwreck narratives were symbolic performances through which writers tested their own, and their culture's, understandings of the ocean. Narratives of maritime disaster make explicit the tremendous stress (practical and symbolic) that the transoceanic turn of European culture created in English habits of orientation. Representations of shipwreck also provide a resonant structure for ideas of cultural change.

The face of the ocean in the early modern period may have been empire, mercantile trade may have been its circulatory system, and slavery its most notorious crime, but its secret history was shipwreck. For every successful circumnavigation or voyage of exploration, every bouillon-filled *flota* or Pilgrim-carrying *Mayflower*, there were ships that never returned. During this period the familiar topos of shipwreck, already a standard in classical and Biblical narratives, became a major subject

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of artistic representation across many media.² In fact, given that disaster shadows any maritime voyage, all depictions of ships embed within them, at least implicitly, the threat of shipwreck.³ Shipwrecked ships show human labor and technology dashed to pieces against a hostile world.⁴ The symbolic force of these disasters emerges out of the ancient symbology of the ship, which Michel Foucault describes as simultaneously providing Western Europe with a "great instrument of economic development" and also its "greatest reserve of the imagination."⁵ Encounters between ships and what Simon Schama calls the "moral geography" of the sea underwrites a transoceanic cultural phenomenon, the rise of the shipwreck narratives as tools for representing humanity in the world.⁶

As an image of violent rupture, shipwreck replicates in a tragic key familiar conceptions of the Renaissance itself as a break from the Middle Ages. In the Hegelian reading of history made popular by Burkhardt and Michelet but also emerging from the claims of early modern writers from Petrarch to Bacon, early modernity resembles a fortunate shipwreck, in which the birth of something new destabilizes the medieval order and re-orientes the West's new cultural voyage.⁷ In proposing modernity as an analytic frame for early modern shipwreck narratives from *The Tempest* to *Robinson Crusoe*, I don't mean that these writers understood their era as "early modern" in anything like the way we use the phrase. Instead, I suggest that shipwreck's Janus-faced narrative structure – its combination of local disasters and global recoveries, and its intimate portraits of an oceanic world which is simultaneously cruel and redemptive – underlines a basic ambivalence built into early modernity itself.⁸ As Margreta de Grazia, Hugh Grady, Douglas Bruster, Richard Halpern, and others have recently emphasized, part of the charge of the term "early modern" is its two-fold articulation of a rupture with an immediate past and a connection to our own present day. Medievalists like Lee Patterson, Maria Rosa Menocal, David Wallace, and Kathleen Davis have helpfully challenged this self-serving depiction of early modernity. But even in our somewhat chastened and resistant to meta-narratives historicist and gradualist critical mode, we still engage early modernity through versions of the radical break: to invoke the broad terms we are careful to qualify now, humanism breaks with scholasticism, capitalism with feudalism, science with superstition, religion with magic. Perhaps if we can't quit old stories like the great instauration or the birth of man, we can use shipwreck to supplement them with more violent and disorienting narratives.

The formal structures of early modern shipwreck combine classical exemplars from Homer, Virgil, and Ovid with Biblical sea-voyagers like St. Paul and Jonah to

describe a break that reasserts basic continuities. The worlds into which shipwreck delivers ancient heroes – Odysseus's Phaicia, Aeneas's Carthage, Jonah's Ninevah – complete predestined journeys. In these (and other) examples, shipwreck invokes the turbulent but hospitable seascape of romance. Because shipwrecks appear catastrophic but often (at least when there are survivors) prove fortunate, they mirror the structure of romance itself, whose typical plot "wants deaths...yet brings some neere it," in John Fletcher's famous description.⁹ These narratives present moments of danger and sometimes death, but also imagine a larger continuity that bridges disaster. Taking early modern shipwreck narratives as representations of cultural change thus marries a lingering continuity to the modernist rupture. These representations emphasize both emerging modernity's insistence on breaking with its immediate past and its continuity with it. These shipwrecks are crossroads as much as endings; in Northrop Frye's happy phrase about the classical narrative tradition, shipwrecks provide a "standard means of transportation."¹⁰ They suddenly wrench mariners from one world to another.

Imagining early modern shipwreck as a master-trope can help replace the decisive once-and-for-all break with an accelerating process of cultural accumulation. In the place of timeworn understandings of modernity as displacement or disenchantment, shipwreck advances the more disorderly image of accumulation. In the modern Caribbean poet and theorist Édouard Glissant's formulation, the modern era emerges through "the accumulation of sediments."¹¹ Discourses, language, cultures, peoples: everything piles on top of everything else. Glissant's notion of cultural accumulation emerges from his distinction between the ancient Mediterranean, "an inner sea surrounded by lands, a sea the concentrates" and the postcolonial Caribbean, "a sea that explodes scattered lands into an arc" (33). This fragmented world, like the edge of the sea, combines "order and chaos," and its movement always remains to some extent "illegible" (121-2). Early modern shipwreck narratives suggest that all waters, from the icy depths off Newfoundland where Humphrey Gilbert drowned to the warmer waters off Bermuda where the *Sea-Venture* foundered, share this potential to scatter sailors and their stories.

Shipwreck narratives dash early modern European triumphalism onto the rocks.¹² Representations of these disasters often generate something like the experience of the radical present that Walter Benjamin calls "the now" or *Jetztzeit*.¹³ Plunged into salt water, human subjects encounter a hostile, alien globe. Various discourses surface as potential life buoys, including classical literary forms, Christian Providence, maritime expertise, empiricist critique, and attacks on human folly. Amid the chaos,

early modernity seems less definitive rupture than explosive fragmentation, after which spectators and survivors struggle to assemble a coherent vision from the debris that washes up on the beach. Understanding these disasters relies on a Lucretian perspective, a shipwreck-with-spectator vision of rupture that uses rupture to generate a new analytical stance.¹⁴ Watched and read from the safety of shore, shipwreck narratives reveal the tenuous place of human bodies in the world.

The singularity of shipwreck reflects the growing self-consciousness of early modern culture, but early modern representations of wrecks also share cultural space with nostalgia for premodern discourses. In these crisis-moments, all explanatory systems are up for grabs. Is the shipwreck God's inscrutable judgment or His righteous wrath? Did poor sailing or misguided hubris cause the catastrophe? Or can it be simply an accident? Can accidents happen in a Providential universe? From on board sinking ships, human beings read shipwrecks as if they were texts and in order to generate texts.¹⁵ If a vision of heaven is the promised end toward which many shipwrecks gesture, a watery grave makes a nightmarishly final detour. Shipwreck marks the price and establishes the framework of an over-assertive modernity, one that passes beyond established limits.¹⁶ Reading these stories emphasizes the fragility and multiplicity of the modern cultural order.

Notes

¹ Richard Younge, "The State of a Christian, lively set forth by an Allegorie of a Shippe under Sayle," appears as an introduction to Henry Mainwaring, *The Sea-Man's Dictionary*, (London: John Bellamy, 1644), sigs. A3 – A3v. The passage is included in some copies of Younge's *The Victory of Patience* (London: M. Allot, 1636). It was also published in a single sheet broadside as *The State of a Christian* (London, 1636).

² On the early modern pictorial tradition of shipwreck, which emerges out of the emblem tradition, see Lawrence Otto Goede, *Tempest and Shipwreck in Dutch and Flemish Art: Convention, Rhetoric, and Interpretation*, (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1989), and M. Russell, *Visions of the Sea: Hendrick C. Vroom and the Origins of Dutch Maritime Painting*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill / Leiden University Press, 1983). Russell notes that "the shipwreck paintings frequently listed in inventories of Dutch poorhouses of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries may have been intended to remind the inmates of their failure in life which must have been due to sins for which they should now repent" (78).

³ Josiah Blackmore emphasizes the parallels between books and ships: "There is even a similarity between the raw materials of books and ships: each is made of boards and cords, iron (bosses and nails); there is paper and writing in each" (*Manifest Perdition: Shipwreck Narrative and the Disruption of Empire*, [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002] 103).

⁴ While incidents of shipwreck peaked in the nineteenth century, which Hans Blumenberg has called the "epoch of shipwrecks" (*Shipwreck with Spectator*, Steven Rendall, trans., [Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997] 67), a huge maritime expansion began with the development of square-rigged sails in the fifteenth century. On the early modern maritime, see, among others, Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, Siân Reynolds, trans., Two volumes, (New York: Harper & Row, 1972); Lionel Casson, *Ships and Seafaring in Ancient Times*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994); and Daniel Finamore, ed., *Maritime History as World History: New Perspectives on Maritime History and Nautical Archeology*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004).

⁵ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16 (1986): 22-7; 27. Foucault's description of the boat-as-heterotopia is suggestive: "the boat is a floating piece of space, a space without place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea and that, from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel, it goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures" (27).

⁶ Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, (London: William Collins, 1987): 15-50.

⁷ Margreta de Grazia makes this point when she claims that Shakespeare has come to define modernity for English scholars: "Shakespeare thus comes to mark the passage into the modern age, often serving as a transitional figure between Medieval and Modern, his chronology itself often seen to display the break in the historical continuum, his shift from comedy to tragedy coinciding with the break from old to new (coinciding too with the turn of the century), from feudal collectivity to

bourgeois individuality, from manor production to market commodification" ("The ideology of superfluous things: *King Lear* as period piece," *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, Margreta de Grazia and Peter Stallybrass, eds., [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996]: 17-42, 19.

⁸ On modernity's ambivalence, see Michael Saler, "Modernity and Enchantment: A Historiographic Review," *AHR* (June 2006): 692-716. For comparable depictions of modernity as a form of "multitemporality" or as a "timeknot," see Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets, and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) 8, and Dipesh Chakrabaty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007) 243.

⁹ John Fletcher, *The Faithful Shepherdess* (1609).

¹⁰ Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976) 4. Staging a wreck all but guarantees that the ship's passengers won't drown (or there would be no second act), but opening shipwrecks are also standards in early modern narrative romance, familiar from Sidney's *Arcadia* (1590), Greene's *Menaphon* (1589), and their common source, Heliodorus's *Aethiopian History* (Eng. trans. 1569).

¹¹ Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*. On Glissant, see also Ian Baucom, *Spectres of the Atlantic*.

¹² Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, 103.

¹³ "History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now (Jetztzeit)," "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, Hannah Arendt, ed., Henry Zohn, trans., (New York: Schocken, 1969) 261. On Benjamin's "now-time" as an image of the modernist break, see Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, Frederick Lawrence, trans., Thomas McCarthy, intro., (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987) 11-16.

¹⁴ On Lucretius in the context of the early modern episteme, see Jacques Lezra, *Unspeakable Subjects: The Genealogy of the Event in Early Modern Europe*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) esp. 1-34.

¹⁵ See Blackmore's suggestive comments on shipwrecks as text-producing historical moments: "Out of shipwreck, the poet tells us, come texts" (*Manifest Perdition*, 27). See also 29, 102-4.

Thank you.

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