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Enter Pirates: The Role of Piracy in Late Elizabethan Drama

[I]

Introduction

Acts of English piracy increased significantly in the last two decades of Queen Elizabeth's reign. At this point in history, Protestant England was engaged in an unofficial conflict with Catholic Spain, with Spain attempting to return England to the Catholic religion. However, the strength of Spain's military in comparison with England's kept England from initiating an official war (Ungerer 61). Thus, as Hugh Ross Williamson argues, "the simplest way to embarrass Spain and enrich England, without risking the consequences of a full-scale naval war, was to waylay Spanish treasure ships on their way home from America" (57). With Spanish ships coming from American colonies, full of gold and other riches, English pirates simply may have seen a good opportunity to plunder; yet, at the same time, looting Spanish ships supported England's national interests as much as offering individual opportunity.

Another explanation for the rise in piracy in late Elizabethan England is that, for many crown subjects, piracy presented a way to escape poverty. The ocean offered the fantasy of a world of advancement, as well as easy profit (Williams 152). Such a lifestyle seemed very appealing because, as Harry Kelsey notes, most people believed "[t]he Commander of a pirate fleet traveled in style, with fine food, good clothes, a richly appointed cabin, and a band of

musicians for his entertainment” (81). The hope that one could, as a pirate, live like a king would have seemed especially appealing to those crowding England’s bustling port cities. In her study of early modern England’s workforce, Patricia Fumerton notes, “when the navy demobilized, many of the poor crewman...had no craft or trade awaiting them and little alternative” (87). With such poor opportunities awaiting working men, piracy was not only one of the few prospects, but also an attractive and seemingly profitable one. Fumerton additionally notes that even the Queen’s navy was ““for the greatest part manned with aged, impotent, vagrant, lewd and disorderly companions” (85). Even the navy did not offer an entirely reasonable opportunity, further adding to the appeal of piracy.

Royal proclamations from this time period that address pirates or piracy ranged from condemning desertion from the navy (Tudor 314) to criticizing pirates who do not register their prizes with the national treasury (344). For instance, in a proclamation dated 27 April 1569, Elizabeth condemned those who “have at length directed themselves from all lawful service of wars to live as pirates, robbing and spoiling all manner of honest merchants of every nation without difference” (314). The problem, here, is that the Queen finds pirates who have not simply deserted the English navy, but have actually begun to attack all ships--most likely including *English* merchants since Elizabeth explicitly derides the practice--indiscriminately. Along with censuring those who directly harm England’s effort against Spain, Elizabeth condemns English pirates who do not register “a true and perfect declaration under their hand of all the same goods, ships, or other things belonging to the subjects of the [Spanish] king” (344). The purpose of the registration of prizes was to collect royal tax; hence, those who refuse to record their plunder are, in the Queen’s view, stealing from England. However, one of the most striking proclamations, from 1561, concerns the recruitment of poor sailors into piracy. Elizabeth

states: “If any poor mariners have been enticed by pretenses of trade of merchandises or fishing to serve and accompany some lewd captains and masters of ships, her majesty is contented to show favor and mercy to all such persons” (171). The Queen emphasizes her sympathy with the poor, and here she is not interested in criminalizing poverty so much as the attractive “pretenses” pirates employ to “entice” the poor into joining them.

While piracy was nominally illegal, the number of proclamations that were issued against pirates indicates that these laws were not enforced to great effect or that piracy was an extremely rampant problem. As tensions with Spain increased in the 1580s, culminating in the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, Elizabeth’s proclamations were less focused on eradicating piracy and more concerned with the “Declaration of Goods Seized from Spanish Ships” (109). Pirates, then, were arguably a valuable resource to the English navy because they allowed England to damage Spanish commerce without declaring open war. And pirates did inflict a substantial amount of damage on Spanish ships; according to Neville Williams, the “maritime power of Spain was seriously challenged” (25). They even attack the Spanish mainland and colonies, something the English military had yet to accomplish (182). C.M. Senior notes that piracy in the New World “defied definition, or was at best susceptible to many differing interpretations” (45). Hence, Queen Elizabeth may not have felt she was directly supporting piracy.

At around same time that Elizabeth was issuing these proclamations, several non-fiction accounts of pirates began to circulate in England. Many of these reports detailed the capture of English subjects by pirates on the Barbary Coast of North Africa, and the captives’ subsequent experiences under foreign masters. These Islamic pirates were far different from even the Spanish pirates who harassed the coast of England (Dimmuck 84). They were an entirely foreign entity and, worse yet, incredibly ruthless. One account even mentions Barbary pirates who

traveled to England and “went on land” in order to abduct “their victims asleep in their homes or hiding in their Churches” (Matar 13). Whether or not such an event actually happened, the fear of foreign pirates is especially clear here. Whereas English pirates partially embodied England’s struggle against Spain, the Barbary pirates represented and fomented the worst anxieties about piracy. Though English pirates occasionally attack ships of their own country, the Barbary pirates were a far greater source of apprehension because of their otherness: no relationship existed between English subjects and the pirates of North Africa to explain the attacks. Moreover, in North Africa, English merchants and sailors were the victims of piracy rather than the aggressors. This reversal of roles worried the reading public about the possible dangers that piracy poses to England despite its simultaneous assistance in combating the Spanish.

It is also in this period between 1594 and 1609 that three plays featuring pirates—George Peele’s The Battle of Alcazar, the anonymous Captain Thomas Stukley, and Thomas Heywood’s Fortune by Land and Sea--were written and performed. This thesis will examine the appearance and function of pirates in these three works. Although piracy and characters associated with it appeared in plays throughout the early modern period, these particular plays warrant closer attention because they most compellingly illustrate the appeal, as well as the ambiguity, of piracy for early modern English audiences. Collectively, these three works treat piracy as powerful means of subverting traditional class structures, but also question whether piracy is an acceptable means of boosting social status; as such, they engage with and challenge Elizabethan laws against piracy. More specifically, The Battle of Alcazar and Captain Thomas Stukley—both focused on the same main character, Thomas Stukley—concentrate on the ability of piracy to help the protagonist climb from infamy to prominence and glorify England. Fortune by Land and

Sea, taking a stricter stance against piracy, portrays pirates as a civilized faction, but Heywood ultimately suggests that piracy is a ruthless and dangerous threat that must be eradicated.

Literary criticism about the appearance of pirates in drama of the early modern period has not been extensive, but it does exist. Most of these discussions examine the role pirates play as dramatic devices in shaping the action of the play. For instance, Simon Palfrey discusses the purpose of the introduction of pirates in Shakespeare's Pericles, Prince of Tyre; he argues that pirates represent a necessary force in determining the outcome of the play. Similarly, David Farley Hills proposes that the pirates in Hamlet serve as a reasonable excuse for the action that sets up the play's dramatic climax. Critics more concerned with historiography have written about the social shifts that explain the appearance of pirates in English literature and drama. One such critic, Susana Onega, argues that the historical context of England's fear of Spanish invasion informs the presence of pirates as heroes of literature and fiction because they represent active resistance to Spain's military capacity. Barbara Fuchs, on the other hand, asserts that the later vilification and fear of pirates is a reaction to James I's peace with Spain and his animosity towards pirates as a nuisance to diplomatic relations. This thesis looks to build on these critical assessments of piracy as a simultaneously heroic and despised phenomenon, while also seeking to examine playwrights' attraction to pirates as powerful dramatic figures capable of transcending typical social hierarchies and notions of power. Moreover the thesis will provide a sense of the commentary on domestic relationships, as well as the international conflicts that piracy enables or sets in motion, within these plays.

I have chosen drama as the main object of study in this essay mainly because of the accessibility the playhouse offers to all classes of society. In an age where literacy rates were quite disparate among the lower classes, plays, unlike pamphlets or poems, do not require the

ability to read. Further, plays act as a better imitation of reality than the written word precisely because of the physical staging of events. Therefore, an unfamiliar event such as piracy is made much more immediate through first-hand visual and aural experience. While “nonfiction” accounts of piracy abound in the period, I have chosen drama because a playwright has the ability to underscore important themes—the idea of social mobility, the disconnect of power between land and sea, and wealth or lineage as a determination of class—through the use of many voices, which allows for various perspectives to be articulated and weighed. This thesis will explore these themes through careful examination of the social and political—rather than only dramatic—implications of pirates these plays.

[II]

The Companie of Kings: Piracy as Power in *The Battle of Alcazar*

George Peele’s play, The Battle of Alcazar, deals with the events surrounding the eponymous skirmish fought in 1578 in what is Morocco today. The play’s main focus, though, is the unlikely English hero, Thomas Stukley. After leaving England in search of greater wealth, the play’s Stukley arrives at the court of the Sebastian King of Portugal, where he is warmly received by many of the nobles and Sebastian himself. At the same time, Sebastian is preparing to intervene in a succession crisis for the Moroccan throne. Abdelmeclec is the legal heir, but his nephew Mahamet is trying to usurp the kingdom; Sebastian, wrongly convinced that Mahamet’s claim to the throne is legitimate, offers his military resources to help defeat Abdelmeclec and plans to attack Abdelmeclec’s army at the city of Alcazar. Stukley is quick to volunteer for the mission and is seen by the Portuguese court as a potentially strong leader. Stukley’s ambition continually climbs from all the praise he receives until he eventually views himself as an equal of

the aristocrats with whom he is fighting. Once the battle begins, Stukley fights valiantly and bravely. He is eventually killed on the battlefield by Abdelmeclec's soldiers, but dies with the assurance that his name will be remembered long after the battle.

Peele's play is an interesting case because the main protagonist is an individual pirate without a national allegiance. The play is based on an actual, historical Englishman who, despite having once had ties to Queen Elizabeth, does not ally himself with the English nation. In fact, the historical Stukley does quite the opposite; he attempts to lead an attack against England with Spanish funding. Ultimately, the attack never materialized, and the historical Stukley actually ended up taking an expedition against the Spanish. As Stukley's portrayal in the play suggests, he subsequently became a romanticized figure,¹ embodying the English spirit, as well as the archetype for the ideal English pirate. At the time of the play's composition in the late sixteenth century, the threat of a Spanish invasion was looming in England. The real Stukley's participation in a raid against the Sultan of Morocco, a foreign power so near Spain, then, "seem[ed] to have struck Peele as happy subjects for a patriot: [the play] offered the opportunity to declaim nobly for England and to rowel Spain" (Yoklavich 224). With Stukley as a metaphoric bulwark against foreign powers, he—rather than Elizabeth—represents the face of England in the play. The fact that such an important position goes to Stukley, a known pirate, reveals the level of respect that certain men of his trade could attain.

There is no doubting that Stukley was indeed a pirate, as he had once been on official duty for Queen Elizabeth to plunder commercial French vessels in the Florida territories of America (Yoklavich 249). The ultimate failure of the mission eventually led to Stukley's fall from grace with the Queen, paving the way for his departure from England. Importantly, this severing of English ties led to Stukley to act more on his own desires than on official

government business. As a result, he became a solitary figure, operating without allegiance to any one country. As such, he began to embody the notion of the individual, as well as drawing attention to the problem of birth as the sole definition of social rank. Operating on the sea provided an opportunity for Stukley not only to assert his name, but to enrich himself as well in ways Elizabeth may have never provided.

At the opening of the play, we see Peele's fictional version of Stukley at the court of Diego Lopus, governor of "Lisborne." Not only has Stukley abandoned the English fleet at this point, but he has also made plans to devote himself to another country, Portugal. Despite the severing of his allegiance to England, Stukley is treated with the utmost respect by the Portuguese governor. During his welcome of various important persons to Lisbon, the governor states:

Welcome to Lisborne valiant Catholikes
 Welcome brave English-men to Portugall
 Most reverent primate of the Irish Church
 And noble Stukley famous by thy name (2.2.1-4)

The most striking part of the governor's introduction is that Stukley is given a separate acknowledgement. Though he could have been grouped with the "brave English-men," he is identified by his own name, indicating the respect with which the European mainland views Stukley. He is "famous by [his] name," instead of being identified in relation to his country of birth. Stukley's individual status is crucial because it shatters the notion that one's allegiance must be to one's country of birth. Stukley is his own master and is named here not for his heritage but for his actions. In this way, Peele suggests that Stukley is not bound to any monarch or nation; therefore, he can give greater sway to his individual ambition rather than any royal

decree. The “Irish” clergyman is also singled out in the reception, but he is not mentioned by name and his solemn introduction may simply be a religious formality. The governor’s treatment of Stukley demonstrates his status as an important figure in the play. He is actually deemed “noble Stukley,” suggesting an aristocratic bearing in his person.

The idea that Stukley can become “noble” through actions rather than birth is crucial to the play. He does not require a pedigree to accomplish heroic feats. And, because the play is a purported history, Stukley’s place as the dynamic protagonist makes all the more sense, as his importance represents a shift in how history can be recorded. There are kings and lords taking part in the Battle of Alcazar, but none of them are quite as fleshed out or as important to the play as Stukley. Far from suggesting that Stukley was bound by his birth, Alcazar provides us with the possibility that social advancement is more accessible through a strongly built reputation. Without notions of blood and aristocracy restricting how high Stukley can climb the social ladder, a “noble” name becomes a matter of what he is able to accomplish.

Throughout the play, Peele reinforces the important position Stukley is accorded in Portugal in several instances where he reveals the pirate’s fervent desire to rise in society. Early in the play, Stukley discloses his ambition to be as great as an emperor, hoping that he can conquer “at liberty [and] make choise,/ Of all the continents that bounds the world” (2.2.32-33). Stukley is careful to remember that his “liberty” is the driving factor in freeing up his ambition. As a pirate and renegade, Stukley has the independence that an English man would not. Further, a certain degree of that autonomy comes from the fact that Stukley is at sea, a result of the play’s suggestion that the open ocean provides greater autonomy. The land does not offer nearly the same possibility for advancement that a life at sea does. Stukley exploits this possibility and is, therefore, able to access the freedom “[to] make choise.”

As a pirate, Stukley does not have to face the “bounds” that, say, an officer in the English navy might. Whereas a member of the Queen’s navy would have to fight in her name and could never--besides through rebellion--hope to supersede her position, Stukley has all the freedom in the world to do so. He can conquer or plunder for personal gain and he can consider himself a king. Moreover, by saying that land “bounds the world,” Stukley is technically declaring the ocean to be the world. This reading magnifies the importance of sea to Stukley’s ambition; without the sea, he has no real chance of making a name for himself. At sea, Stukley can create a strong reputation, as well as a higher status--though the play places land and sea in opposition to some extent, here, Peele makes clear that Stukley’s success at sea enables his elevation on land. However, the sea is a much more uncertain market, and Stukley’s desire to forge his empire from the continents represents the importance of property in the play. The possession of land is especially important in defining social status, but Peele does not portray Stukley as a significant landowner. On the other hand, though, the sea does give him the chance to profit from the properties of those who do own land. Stukley stands to gain a great deal of capital by pirating goods.

In addition to his struggle to reconcile power at sea with authority on land, Stukley asserts the ease with which he feels he can carve out a dominion for himself. He confidently assumes he can “make choise” of where he wants to settle. Not only can he conquer land, he can conquer any land he wants. This signifies an even greater power that Stukley attributes to his liberty. He is not bound by any monarch, either in his duty or the extent of his profit. The position of the pirate, here, is one of complete gain without the risk of loss. At sea, Stukley does not have to risk any land or goods. Even if he fails--though he is quite certain he will not--there

is still a greater opportunity for profit than loss. Unlike a landed aristocrat, Stukley does not have to worry about putting his estate in danger.

This unique status raises the question of whether power in the play is measured by liberty or by property. From an individual perspective, like Stukley's, liberty is a far more important barometer of power. Stukley can travel wherever he desires and attack whomever he wants as well. However, Stukley never mentions holding land or becoming dependent on property; he only comments on taking his choice of land, a system that allows him to make the maximum profit. This system would certainly fit the individualistic mindset that Stukley possesses--as it is reminiscent of a mercantile system--but functions, here, on a personal level. According to Stukley, property is no longer the marker of position and status--capital is the indicator of wealth. For a pirate, such an outlook is crucial because it renders the issue of piracy's legitimacy inconsequential. If Stukley can make a substantial amount of money, he is on equal footing with anyone comparable to him on land, regardless of birth.

Stukley's ambition to change his position, interestingly, does not solely involve a concern with profit. What interests Stukley is the augmentation of power that will come along with a higher position in society. As he prepares for the upcoming battle at Alcazar, Stukley muses on what his future shall hold:

There shall no action passe my hand or sword
That cannot make a step to gaine a crowne,
No word shall passe the office of my tong,
That sounds not of affection to a crowne,
No thought have being in my lordly brest,
That works not everie waie to win a crowne,

Deeds, words and thoughts shall be as a kings" (2.2.69-75)

As this passage suggests, Stukley does not concern himself with the money that an "action" will bring him. Instead, Stukley's main objective is "to gaine a crowne." He does not simply want a noble title, he wants to be the main source of authority. Repetitions of words relating to royalty are prevalent: he mentions "crowne" three times and describes his "lordly brest." He even more directly states that his actions "shall be as a kings." Such comparisons are noteworthy because Stukley is presented as a noble figure although he is a pirate. If Stukley, a pirate and renegade figure, could compare himself to a monarch, what does the play say about the power of monarchs to the world? In this formulation, either kings are no better than pirates or pirates are just as worthy and capable of respect as kings. And because pirates can attain the same level of respect as king, there is no matter of heritage that determines power.

Stukley's phrasing in this speech is crucial to understanding the ambiguity of what constitutes piracy and what separates pirates from nobility. He claims that his actions in battle and at sea will be able to "gaine a crowne." Because Stukley attributes tangibility to royalty, a crown is an economic entity that can possibly be bought. There is a substantial concern with financial matters, as a crown is not won by inheritance, but by gain. Although an argument can be made that "gaine" could include a militaristic connotation, Stukley more fully embodies the spirit of piracy occupied with financial yields. But the financial and militaristic valences of Stukley's actions do intertwine--and complicate his ambition--because he previously muses on which "continents" he wants to conquer. A "crowne" is not the sole embodiment of authority, but the crown does encompass a substantial treasury. Because Stukley is suggesting that a crown can be bought or won, the play questions the very notion that nobility is based on blood and heredity. The notion that money is the prime force behind the crown, a prospect that trivializes

divine right and social hierarchy based on pedigree, is even more radical than the idea of a pirate taking the throne. The prestige of a crown can still be assumed by a pirate--in spite of the traditional separation of the nobility and commoners--due to monetary value Stukley attributes to the fulfillment of his ambition. Ultimately, money is the driving force behind the monarchy that Stukley wishes to assume.

In addition to images of sovereignty, Stukley uses a rhetorical construction with anaphora to illustrate the strength of his ability to become like a king. He repeats the word “no,” saying “no action,” “no word,” and “no thought” will prevent his rise from a renegade to king. He is very concerned with avoiding what he feels would not be worthy of a monarch. The repetition of “no” further represents the absolute certainty with which Stukley guarantees his actions. The “no” implies that every “action” and every “worde” are to be associated with royalty rather than piracy. There is greater emphasis if “no” is used in place of “every,” however. There is a bluntness in using the word “no,” as there are very few alternatives for Stukley: he is bound to make whatever he proclaims a reality. Had he stated that “every action” he undertook would be kingly, he would seem boastful and arrogant. By using the negative construction, an element of adversity is introduced that combats Stukley’s rise to the top, which makes him a more endearing figure than someone who is handed everything.

There are strong implications in reading Stukley’s comments in such a way. If a pirate can gain more than just money, what limit is there on his power? If Stukley has his sights on royalty, the balance of power is severely upset. As a renegade and a pirate, Stukley should likely be on the fringes of the play’s society. Stukley’s exploits at sea play an important role in determining the fluidity he sees in social position, although royalty is an almost entirely separate and elevated position that cannot arbitrarily be sought. The play, therefore, presents a strong

conviction that piracy was not as disreputable as many felt it was, and that pirates were not a band of thieves; instead, as they appear in *Stukley*, they are worthy of the same respect as the upper classes on land. This conviction is controversial not only because of the possible shift in what pirates can accomplish, but also because of the effects on the general class structure.

Although *Stukley* himself was formerly of noble bearing, he, at the moment of the play's action, is no longer officially associated with England. Hence, any relationship he might have had with the nobility is dissolved by his renegade status. *Stukley's* aims, then, are comparable to any other pirate's. Pirates, being a group on the outer edges of society, have a remarkable amount to gain if high posts in society are based on money alone. The entire venture of piracy is based on profit, and if a crown is added to the spoils, pirates move from being a fringe element to an elite class in society. Importantly, this radical shift does not appear as possible on land as it does at sea.

Stukley has made his name at sea as a pirate captain. As we will see in this thesis's final selection on Heywood's *Fortune by Land and Sea*, the tumultuous social environment on the ocean enables greater shifts in power for men not born of a landed class.

By the time he reaches Alcazar, *Stukley* has spent a great deal of time in the play at sea, and he possibly forgets the difference in power structure. As a result, this disparity of power between land and sea causes *Stukley* to feel that notions of royalty will conform to his standards of piracy. In fact, even in the company of kings, *Stukley's* ambition does not take a subordinate role to hierarchy. As he and the Portuguese nobles prepare to attack Alcazar, *Stukley* muses: "For my part Lordes, I cannot sell [m]y blood/ Deerer than in the companie of Kings" (4.2.69-70). From a renegade mercenary such as *Stukley*, such a bold declaration seems hyperbolic. He asserts that his blood is just as noble as any lord fighting in the battle. *Stukley's* phrasing here—of "sell[ing] [m]y blood"—again compares nobility to a commodity available for purchase. This

attitude toward the mutability of social class speaks further to the play's comment on piracy: whereas a noble or monarch is bound by the amount of gentrified "blood" to determine their station, a renegade like Stukley can simply acquire a royal bearing through piracy. The economic value attributed to monarchy expands the play's concern with merit over privilege. Surrounded by an elite group of nobles--who are certainly powerful landowners--Stukley does not appear all intimidated or out of place. Instead, he relishes the "companie" of aristocrats as a way of bettering himself because he feels he can surpass their actions in battle. Not only can he change his reputation through his actions, but he can change his pedigree as well. Power and aristocracy, then, become merit-based according to the language of the play: nobility must be earned rather than simply given by birth. Such a notion places the entire attacking party at Alcazar on equal footing; whoever wins the most glory will gain the most power. Stukley says he knows of no "Deerer [success] than in the companie of kings," reinforcing the equal opportunity of each of the participants in the Alcazar campaign. Again, actions are the great equalizer and Stukley's actions, as his speeches suggest, are worthy of praise.

In some ways, Stukley's constant self praise can paint him as a hyperbolic figure, but such a portrait is not wholly accurate because he does not simply rely on fate to hand him success. As the play suggests, Stukley's actions are the main foundation of the power and air of nobility he assumes. And though Stukley feels his actions have made him a peer of kings, he eventually admits that a quest for glory is not what led him to piracy or to Alcazar. As he lays dying from mortal wounds sustained during the battle, Stukley reminisces on his past, citing the

Golden dayes, my yonger carelesse yeeres...
 And liv'd affluence of wealth and ease,
 Thus in my Countrie carried long aloft,

A discontented humor drove me thence

To crosse the seas... (5.1.45-48)

Here, the play finally furnishes us with a glimpse of Stukley's background in England. From his own admission, Stukley was a happy youth, with privilege and financial security. He calls his childhood his "golden dayes," and "carelesse yeeres" which both suggest idleness as much as they recall a life without worry. Stukley has a remarkably fortunate upbringing according to his final words--though one may wonder whether or not the ideal picture of his youth is merely nostalgia in the face of death--he even mentions the benevolence of his birth country, England, in shaping his good standing in society. He speaks of being "in my Countrie carried long aloft," as he dies—perhaps by device of the play—finally reconciling with England. But England is active here, according to Stukley, because it "carrie[s]" him. By juxtaposing England and Stukley in a type of mother-child relationship, the play suggests that Stukley remains defined by his relationship to England, no matter how far he strays. The relationship is not totally symbiotic because Stukley benefits far more than England because it is he that is hoisted "aloft." Nevertheless, the play's portrayal of Stukley's embrace of England as "[his] Countrie" at its conclusion allows England and its playgoers to claim a strong leader as an emblem of national pride.

And yet, with such an idyllic lifestyle presented to, and enjoyed by, Stukley, it also raises the question of what motivated Stukley to abandon such prosperity. According to Stukley, a "discontented humor" is to blame for pushing him to abandon England as a youth and to enter the realm of piracy. Most likely, the discontent stemmed from frustration with the traditional and rigid social structure in England. Although Stukley is allowed to live in "wealth and ease," he does not see an opportunity to gain more power in England under the current system. At sea,

Stukley espies a more merit-based hierarchy that is seemingly absent on land. Stukley is the only non-noble and non-religious figure that plays a noticeable role in the entire play. But Stukley's "discontented humor" is all the more fascinating considering what he forfeits to acquire a measure of autonomy. As a pirate, Stukley's main objective is to obtain wealth, although he has a great deal of "affluence" before he leaves England. Hence, Stukley is a pirate in search of fame and title rather than simple financial gain. What seems like a strange way to obtain more power actually reveals the play's comment on Stukley's purpose in the play: the ideal English pirate is not solely concerned with enriching himself monetarily or living with ease. Therefore, England benefits greatly from association with Stukley because the heroic nature of Stukley's actions not only gives him a right to claim honor, but his deeds also further glorify the English nation as a respectable world power.

While Stukley does die in the battle, his death does not serve as a condemnation of piracy; rather, Stukley's death serves an affirmation of piracy's legitimacy. Stukley is born into a wealthy family, but, from what he says, his wealth is all he has. After turning to piracy, Stukley loses his "careless" lifestyle, but he ends up ultimately dying as significant hero. Stukley's heroic death as a pirate reveals the play's ultimate sympathy with piracy, as well as an embrace of Stukley's piracy as an embodiment of English national spirit. In The Battle of Alcazar, piracy is more than accepted; it is an important means of subverting traditional social structures. While the conventional social hierarchy is nevertheless turned upside down at sea, the chance to climb socially is still a welcome prospect. More importantly, however, Stukley asserts that piracy is about more than looting, which makes him such an ideal candidate to represent English piracy. Stukley places himself on the plane of kings with his actions, mirroring what England hopes to

do through a piracy that is not so much legitimate as it is a means to become a greater world power.

[III]

Redemption through Piracy in *Captain Thomas Stukley*

The anonymously written Captain Thomas Stukley was printed in 1605, in the beginning of a transitory period in English relations with Spain. At the time of the play's publication, James I had been in power in England for only a short time and was very keen on maintaining peace with Spain (Loomie 11), a nation with whom England had been at war for the past decade of Elizabeth's reign. However, James's firm desire to preserve good diplomatic relations with Spain would have significant consequences for England and its maritime enterprises. With attacks on Spanish ships no longer officially sanctioned or overlooked by the English monarchy, a considerable amount of privateers were left without an acceptable means of work. As raiding Spanish shipping had been a major enterprise and a main source of income, many privateers turned to piracy-- attacking English ships as well as continuing to loot Spanish cargoes. In her study of piracy of the Jacobean period, Barbara Fuchs notes that "James I issued repeated proclamations against pirates" and argues that "their very repetition suggests how difficult it was to contain the unruly agents that the state had once employed" (48). Once a powerful, though unofficial, wing of the English navy, pirates were starting to become a nuisance by 1605.

The anonymous play printed that year, like George Peele's The Battle of Alcazar, focuses on the real-life figure Thomas Stukley, who benefits therein from a similarly heroic characterization. Here, however, we see a much greater focus on Stukley's relation to England and the urban class structure. Further, in the anonymously-authored play, Stukley's connection

with piracy is couched more negatively than it is in Alcazar, as Stukley is explicitly accused therein of committing acts of piracy. The stricter discipline that the anonymous playwright's Stukley experiences is crucial because, if the play had been printed ten years before, the conflict between piracy and the government would have been remarkably different. Since we are dealing with the early years of James's reign in England, the somewhat negative attitudes toward piracy found in the play may have been reflective of a changing outlook on piracy. And yet, the ultimate portrait we get of Stukley is nonetheless positive, as he is lauded as a hero and noble in actions.

As the play opens in London, Stukley is the object of many conversations because of his controversial behavior. He is in trouble with creditors because of what appears to be a reckless lifestyle. These debts are the source of a significant conflict with the alderman Thomas Curteis, the father of Stukley's fiancée. Curteis, the aspiring London alderman, is concerned that Stukley will be a bad influence on his daughter. He reports: "I heard last day/ He'es very wilde, a quarreller, a fighter,/ I, and I doubt a spend good too" (4). Although Curteis admits his information on Stukley is based on hearsay, he is very willing to believe that Stukley is guilty of all that he is accused. That Curteis readily believes in this account of "wilde" behavior suggests that Stukley likely cultivates some kind of reputation for such actions. However, Stukley's main vices, according to Curteis's report, stem from his belligerent nature rather than any philandering. Stukley's apparent aggressive demeanor is not an acceptable means of acting as long as he is in London. Although being a "quarrelor [and] a fighter" would possibly be acceptable in a military situation, Stukley's behavior will not be tolerated in an urban, domestic setting. And yet, Curteis also adds his own personal opinion of Stukley, branding him as a "spend good," who is very careless with money (OED). He does not regard Stukley highly at all,

“doubt[ing]” his ability to be a responsible son-in-law. With such a lowly opinion and doubt plaguing his reputation, Stukley must combat a powerful obstacle to rising in the social hierarchy.

Stukley’s own father is as concerned as Curteis with his son’s reputation and position in London society. Old Stukley, a barrister, certainly has a great deal of interest in his son’s behavior because any disreputable activities on Stukley’s part reflect poorly on his father. As such, Old Stukley complains that Stukley’s behavior incorrectly reveals the nature of his upbringing. Old Stukley explains that he worked hard to provide a good moral and social foundation for his son, lamenting “yet I had ment to have made my/ Sonne a Barester not a Baratter” (6). Here, Old Stukley puns on the word barrister, meaning a common-law advocate, and barrater, which the Oxford English Dictionary defines as one who deals fraudulently in business. Old Stukley feels he had given his son ample choice to become a respectable member of society and that Stukley has thrown away a good chance of success; Stukley’s failure to become a “Barester” is all the more ironic considering he repeatedly fails to follow laws in the play. Old Stukley states that he wanted to “ma[k]e” his son into a successful person, suggesting that he needed to be molded rather than allowed to develop independently.

The authority of the paternal relationship between Stukley and his father speaks to the play’s concern with the traditional social structure in London. Stukley is expected to follow the will of his father and accept a position as a lawyer and automatically shed his wild nature. He does not seem to have much of a choice when it comes to determining his future; rather, he is bound to follow prescribed notions that his father has already set out for him. This stifling of individual ambition becomes a major theme in the play, as the conflict between Stukley’s desire and his father’s wishes represent a greater change in the world of the play. Stukley is no longer

defined by his heritage or the goals of his father if he makes his own decisions. Whether he wants to be a “Baratter,” Stukley is free to choose and has done so, which his father admits. But Stukley’s choice to participate in idle activities, as much as it bothers his father, is not a complete source of embarrassment to the family name. Old Stukley says he “ment” to make Stukley an upstanding citizen, thereby relieving the father of some of the blame that could have fallen upon him. Yet the use of the word “ment” nevertheless signals the strength of Stukley’s individual desires and his unwillingness to fall into long-established patterns.

Even more compelling is the fact that when we first meet Stukley in the play, he does not fully resemble the portrait that Curteis and Old Stukley have painted. Rather, Stukley seems intent to redeem himself from the dark reputation that circulates in the conversations of others. When confronted about his debts, Stukley affirms: “Ile prove an honest man at the chauncerie” (11). Far from the unrestrained “quarreller” that Curteis complains about, Stukley seems very concerned about the way he is perceived by others. He claims to be an “honest” man, honest having moral and economic connotations. Not only does Stukley seem himself as morally upright, but he also asserts that he is a reliable person to pay back his loans.

Stukley’s opinion and the reputation he has gained might actually be explained by his own words. Looking closely, Stukley does seem to acknowledge the low ebb of his reputation. He admits that he has to “prove” that he is worthy of respect, suggesting there is some truth to what Curteis and Old Stukley say. Further, the need for proof speaks to the lack of credibility that Stukley possesses; he cannot rely on the strength of his word to carry his reputation as much as he needs actions. The importance of actions is crucial, as Stukley will later learn that actions can propel him to great heights away from home. But here, action, rather than inaction, is a

means of redeeming his poor standing in society. Only when he actually goes to the chancellery is Stukley finally given a chance to offer testimony that he is not a reckless squanderer.

Despite Stukley's statement that he will be an honest man, Curteis still has trouble believing Stukley will really follow through on his promise. He comments that Stukley has "Little law[,] I feare and lesser Conscience" (11). Here, Curteis doubts Stukley's ability to contribute on two important levels; ethically and legally, Stukley constitutes a liability toward society. Apparently, Stukley's promise holds no weight with Curteis, indicating the distrust Stukley's behavior has incurred. Curteis's suspicion of Stukley's "honest[y]" parallels Stukley's own promise of establishing his honesty and paying his debts, ethical and legal obligations. Curteis most strongly feels the legal portion of Stukley's commitment is the most important. Curteis is wary of the lack of respect Stukley shows toward law, precisely because law separates a quarreler and a respectable member of society. His concern, then, is not whether Stukley will redeem his name, but whether he will follow the laws that bind society.

Stukley, as a potential barrister, already represents a unique threat to the foundation of the "law" Curteis mentions. At the beginning of the play, Stukley is an alleged spendthrift and brawler, but he has potential to become a well-ranking member in the social hierarchy. If Stukley can rise from a wastrel to just below the nobility, what is to stop a series of similar transformations? There is a dangerous subversion of traditional social structure that Curteis identifies in Stukley's promise to become an "honest man." Hence, Curteis attempts to implicate Stukley in a crime of "Conscience." Whether or not he legally repays his debts, Curteis implies, Stukley will be perceived as a morally compromised person.

Dissatisfied with his reputation as a spendthrift, he volunteers to lead a company of

soldiers in an attack on Spain. Stukley's place as a responsible leader in the play is almost immediately affirmed once word travels that he has accepted command. A lieutenant in the expedition says of Stukley: "He'es liberall, and goes not to the wars/ to make a gaine of his poore Souldiers spoile,/ but Spoile the foe to make his Souldiers gaine" (13)². To have such a warm reception from a member of the regular army--an officer, but nevertheless a foot soldier--speaks to the play's view of Stukley as an extremely popular figure who is all the more alluring for his lack of reverence for customary methods. The lieutenant calls Stukley "liberall," while also commending him for his skill in providing for his men, suggesting that Stukley represents a new kind of leader. He is not concerned with profiting off his subordinates, which might have arguably helped him pay off his creditors and redeem his former status. Instead, Stukley puts his soldier's needs--and hence England's as well--ahead of his own, marking him as a selfless figure.

In providing for his soldiers, Stukley lays a reliable foundation for his rise. He has allied himself essentially, according to the lieutenant, with the poor and allowed them to gain, not only wealth, but a more secure position in society as well. However, Stukley also profits from his policy of letting soldier's keep what they plunder because he gains their loyalty. The lieutenant implies there are many commanders who seek to profit off their own men; Stukley, though, provides for his men while simultaneously damaging the finances of England's enemies. By plundering "the foe," Stukley ensures the success of England's mission because he keeps his men willing to fight valiantly. But more important than Stukley's generous provisions for his men is that he treats his men with a kind of equality. Although Stukley is undoubtedly of higher rank and class, he nevertheless shares his fortunes with the soldiers. This notion of equality based on action harkens back to Curteis's complaint that Stukley was guilty of bad behavior and, therefore, no better than a quarreler, regardless of his birth. The "Spoile," here, is

based on merit rather than inaction or inheritance. The lieutenant's chiasmic construction, then, of "Spoile" illustrates just how much he feels the spoils of victory belong to both Stukley and his men. The surprising thing, to the lieutenant, is that Stukley accepts such an idea as true.

Although the lieutenant speaks of "the wars," Stukley's mission is not clearly defined militarily. Instead, his mission against the Spanish, according to the play, seems more piratical than anything. When asked about his ambition in the war, Stukley comments: "I ment not to come empty home,/ But bring some booty to enrich my men" (20). Stukley does not mention at all defeating the Spanish, suggesting his motivations for going on the mission may be purely financial. However, Stukley's concern for his men does complicate the claim that he is simply going to war for personal gain. He does not want his personal treasury to run dry, but he also wants to reward those men who serve him loyally. For Stukley, then, war is not a means to defeat the Spanish so much as it is a way to earn a profit. Hence, Stukley's rationale falls more in line with piracy than formal military action. The lieutenant mentions nothing pertaining to Stukley's military ability. He only actually speaks about Stukley's ability to provide spoil for his men, which describes a pirate captain more than a military leader.

But where Stukley seems to avoid profiting off his men, he appears more piratical when placed in traditional institutions. After Stukley has married Thomas Curteis's daughter--much to her father's dismay--an officer in his company asks the burning question: how much did he profit from his bride's family? Stukley happily and dryly replies:

Ile tell ye captaine how much I have made.
I have made away her portion and her plate,
Her borders, bracelets, chaines and all her kings,
And all the clothes belonging to her back." (18)

The marriage has none of the benefits of happiness, but the way Stukley hopes to profit from his marriage reveals his interest in piracy. His language is almost as offensive as it is surprising, as he treats his wife like a victim of piracy. Curteis' daughter is not a companion, or even an acquaintance: to Stukley, she is simply cargo to be looted. His only concern is taking away "her portion." He has no compassion whatsoever, even remorselessly stating that he will not hesitate to leave her naked if he can profit from her clothes. There is a certain thrill that Stukley experiences from taking his wife's inheritances somewhat forcefully. He states he "made away [with]" all her possessions, suggesting the adventure of piracy is just as, if not more, important as the economic benefit.

Moreover, the domestic setting of Stukley's marital piracy lends further weight to the play's portrayal of Stukley as a pirate. His desire to steal his wife's goods seems rather excessive, seeing as her humiliation has very little financial benefit. The sheer lack of necessity to take his wife's riches--as the wealth would have soon been his regardless--suggests that piracy is equally about power as it is about profit. The violence and excitement of "mak[ing] away" with loot gives Stukley the fantasy of the unlimited power at sea in a rigidly traditional domestic setting. Hence, Stukley's devotion to piracy is not simple-minded pursuit of plunder, but a more complicated search for power in an almost conniving sense.

The search for power--achieved, to a great extent, through piracy--continues to figure as an important means of advancing and redeeming Stukley in society as he prepares to embark for Spain with his men. As he addresses the soldiers who will be accompanying him, Stukley asserts that he "must have honour, honour is the thing/ Stukley doth thirst for, and to clime the Mount/ Where...gold shall be my footstool" (13). The repetition of "honour" speaks to the importance Stukley places on his reputation, which makes his choice of piracy all the more confusing.

However, Stukley may actually equate the power he creates through piracy with honor. As piracy allows Stukley to garner power essentially through robbery, he may associate the notion of reputation solely with the accumulation of wealth. At the same time, “honour” may simply be another valuable that Stukley can take by force. He states that he “thirst[s]” for honor, giving it a tangible quality that will allow Stukley to literally consume honor. By equating honor with thirst, he does not concentrate on merely receiving honor, but actually being able to take it as he pleases. Moreover, because he envisions himself claiming it by way of a golden footstool, we see the extent to which he is bound by the pursuit of power through money. However, the golden footstool also acts simultaneously as a symbol of aristocratic comfort and practicality. Stukley is not pursuing wealth ultimately; opulence is only a means of acquiring power. Therefore, honor is not dependent on gold, but actually on the perception of Stukley’s actions.

In allowing its hero pursue honor in this way, Captain Thomas Stukley raises the question of whether Stukley’s raid against Spain constitutes an actual military venture or an act of piracy. When Stukley’s company of soldiers is captured by Spanish ships, the Spanish governor, who interrogates him, exclaims: “Go to, thou art a base pirate” (23). The play makes a very solid distinction, here, between perceived Spanish and English views of piracy. As we saw before, the English lieutenant sang the praises of Stukley because he enriched his men, but the Spanish governor has no patience for what he deems a “base” operation. Although the governor complains about Stukley, a Spanish nobleman is impressed with Stukley’s bearing in the face of the enemy. He hypothesizes “[Stukley’s] blood is either great or noble,/ Or that his fortunes at his owne commaund” (23). He is certainly impressed by Stukley’s autonomy, which is perhaps the most attractive aspect of piracy. Because he sees Stukley is “at his owne commaund,” the Spanish noble does not seem to associate Stukley with England. However, the noble does make a

distinction between “great” and “noble” that places a cap on just how high he feels a pirate like Stukley can reach. His greatness does not make him noble and his autonomy does not mean he is a respectable figure.

The fact that the noble gives any sign of respect toward Stukley is remarkable enough, considering how adamant the Spanish governor is that Stukley is a lawless thief. He continues his reprimand of Stukley, telling the noble: “I hold him rather to be some desprat pirat/ That thinks to domanyer upon the Land” (23). Again, the governor is scathingly critical of Stukley’s piracy, calling him a “desprat pirat”--a stark contrast to the nobleman’s assessment of “great or noble.” Most striking is the governor’s concern that Stukley will try to assert his power “upon the Land.” Stukley’s piracy is mostly confined to the sea, but when he comes on land, he threatens to upset the foundation of the law on land. Because Stukley relies on merit, he is a menace to those who have found power by birth if he brings his practices to the land. The two polar views of Stukley illustrate the power that the play’s author attributes to piracy. Stukley is able to inspire awe and loathing simultaneously in the play’s Spanish characters, persons who should be completely unreceptive of piracy. And yet, Stukley is able to impress a respected nobleman. Here, then, piracy is a means of advancing English power, as Stukley’s courage is enough to win over the enemy.

In fact, Stukley’s case is important enough to allow him to have an audience with Philip, the King of Spain. Once in the royal court, Stukley is remarkably well received. Philip is so receptive that he actually allows Stukley to air his grievances against the governor who captured him. Stukley, the cunning strategist, embellishes his story for Philip to garner his sympathy. Stukley recounts that while he was

Shipping myselfe with other private goods...
 ...One Don Herando there your governor
 attacketh both my ship and all therein,
 and though I tell them that the hobbies were
 a present for your grace and for that cause. (27)

Stukley completely reverses the situation for his own benefit and catches the King of Spain off-guard. He manages to convince Philip that not only is he not a pirate, but that he is actually the victim of piracy. He claims that he was “Shipping myselfe with other private good,” suggesting that he had really been a victim of a pirate. He appeals to Philip’s pride, pretending he had “a present for your grace,” to make himself look better and the governor look worse. Moreover, Stukley blames the governor for aggression, complaining that he attacked, rather than stopped, his ship. Stukley’s accusation of the governor being a pirate serves an important purpose here, as it shifts the focus away from Stukley’s piracy. And, because Stukley’s complaint is respectfully received by Philip, it seems plausible that piracy was a common problem on both English and Spanish sides. But, whether or not Stukley’s testimony is true--and it certainly is not--he commands enough respect from Philip, even though he is an English pirate, to be relieved of all charges of piracy.

Thus he is able to shed, the play suggests, the burden of his previous crimes and talk his way out of being jailed. The fluidity of identity that piracy engenders in Stukley helps him to dispel suspicions of criminal activity, but he is nevertheless captured with a group of soldiers. Despite Stukley’s charm, describing a group of English soldiers as “for [Philip’s] cause” is decidedly difficult to believe. Ultimately, though, Stukley’s flattery and skillful embellishment are successful, perhaps commenting on the weakness of the Spanish king in comparison with an

English hero.

Not surprisingly, the Spanish governor is hardly thrilled with the favor that Stukley finds in Philip's court. Although he begrudgingly accepts the decree that Stukley will be released, he does not trust the Englishman in the least and is ready to catch him in his first mistake. He states:

I am content he shall have liberty,
and he, his ship, and own be so discharg'd.
But otherwise, ile cause his ship be sunke,
and he and his as pyrates suffer death. (28)

The "otherwise" that the governor speaks of refers to a revelation of Stukley's true intentions. The governor seems to be unaware of the actual military expedition that Stukley was commanding, but is still gravely concerned that Stukley is a pirate. This apprehension suggests that piracy was a much greater problem for Spain than an official attack. Accordingly so, the penalty for piracy is far more serious than a military crew would receive, the governor surmising that pirates shall "suffer death." On the surface, the governor seems to be a plot device to antagonize Stukley, but such an antagonist only magnifies the play's ideology about Stukley. He is not afraid of death; rather, he has even cheated death, in a way, thanks to his deception of Philip. Stukley's ability to feign humility saves him and his men for the moment, which allows him to continue glorifying England through his action.

Stukley's humility, however, is not what keeps his reputation on the rise as he leaves Spain for Alcazar. A Spanish lord who accompanies Stukley to Alcazar remarks on Stukley's grandiose demeanor: "What a high Spirit hath this Englishman./ He tunes his speaches to a kingly key,/ conquers the world, and cast it at his heels" (35). Such high praise is noteworthy coming from a nobleman, but there is also a hidden element of disbelief coming from his

statement. He claims that Stukley “tunes” his words to sound like a monarch’s suggesting that Stukley is not as completely noble as he seems. Stukley, of course, looks and acts the part of a heroic leader, but he is not genuinely that breed of character. Further, even though he can win battles and gain glory, the lord suggests Stukley cannot continue or appreciate the nature of his conquests. He claims Stukley will “cast” his victories to his feet instead of nurturing or relishing in his own deeds. Hence, the lord sees Stukley as a man who can merely act the part of a king but never truly assume or value such a position. The lord’s comments speak to the notion of a class divide within the play. According to the lord, there is no ceiling for how high Stukley can set his ambition, but there is a limit to how much respect he will be given by those born higher than him.

Yet, Stukley is oblivious to--or disregards--such distinctions, especially on the battlefield. As the Battle of Alcazar rages on, the prospects of victory seem bleak to Stukley, but the possibility for glory remains open. He tells the noblemen who are fighting with him: “this blood of ours[,] the blood of kings,/ shall be commixt, and with their fame our fame/ Shal be eternizde in the mouthes of men” (44). Stukley sees no separation between himself and the nobles. He creates a notion of intimacy by referring to the blood as “ours,” placing them all in the same standing. But Stukley goes even further, suggesting that his blood “shall be commixt” with that of the nobles, a symbolic gesture of equality. By suggesting that the blood that is shed during the battle will be compounded, Stukley shatters the idea that blood is a crucial requisite for power. To Stukley, blood is not nearly as important as “fame,” which is essentially the pedestal upon which Stukley stands. Glory is what is eternalized and etched in popular memory.

In the universe of the play, then, piracy serves an important purpose by allowing Stukley to subvert the sources of traditional authority of the land; fame replaces blood as a sign of

nobility, or rather, blood is only accorded significance when it is spilled in brave action. Accordingly, the anonymous playwright suggests Stukley's voice deserves to be passed on because he is just as worthy as, say, a king of a place in history. Serving the play's purpose, Stukley helps to solidify England's image along with his heroics at Alcazar. Stukley is able to-- or so he says--equate himself with European gentry, thereby uplifting England's status in global affairs within the world of Captain Thomas Stukley while also redeeming the reputation that had been in grave danger of plummeting to infamy.

[IV]

The Problem of Piracy and Identity in *Fortune by Land and Sea*

The ambivalence of the place of pirates in Elizabethan literature is no better exemplified than in Thomas Heywood's *Fortune by Land and Sea*. Heywood's play--printed in 1655 but likely written at the beginning of the seventeenth century-- concerns the economic conflict between two families, The Forrests and The Hardings. The Forrests, a formerly wealthy and landowning family, suffer a series of economic setbacks at the beginning of the play, as well as the death of the eldest son in a duel. Soon afterward, the younger son, Young Forrest, challenges the man who killed his brother, kills him, and flees from his home for fear of punishment. Young Forrest finds protection from an English merchant, who allows him to captain one of his ships. During his voyage, however, the merchant is attacked by two English pirates, Purser and Clinton, and his ship is plundered. Young Forrest, who has in the meantime plundered a Spanish ship, hears of the merchant's predicament and resolves to capture the pirates. Young Forrest and his crew easily capture Purser and Clinton in a sea battle. The pirates are brought to trial and are

sentenced to hang. Young Forrest is greeted as a hero when he arrives home and the merchant's salvaged venture ultimately draws a substantial profit.

Purser provides a unique insight into a particular view of Elizabethan era pirates, as Heywood was likely writing after piracy's zenith in the war with Spain. When confronted by the merchant about the barbarity and sheer lawlessness of pirates, Purser retorts:

But by custom of the sea may challenge
According to his place, rights in the spoyl:
Though Out-laws, we keep laws amongst ourselves,
Else we could have no certain government (4.1.5-8)

Here, we witness a unique apology for piracy. Purser sees his business as perfectly legitimate. He speaks of a "custom of the sea" as if he were an ordinary merchant or sailor. Hence, there is a formality to Purser's piracy, which is in contrast with the popular perception of pirates as lawless thieves. Purser's ship is not dominated by free-for-all looting of prizes; instead each crew member has "rights in the spoyl" and can only take "According to his place," suggesting they not only have laws, but also social hierarchy. Such formal language nearly prevents the name of pirate from being given to Purser.

However, Purser does note that he is, in actuality, a pirate. Interestingly, though, Purser asserts the autonomy that pirates have as opposed to merchants, who are bound by governmental trade regulations. Purser proudly claims: "we keep laws amongst ourselves." The importance of having laws is supplanted by the importance of creating a separate set of laws for pirates. Perhaps the "laws amongst ourselves" is a way of subverting Elizabethan proclamations. After all, raids on shipping were to be registered with the Queen; the creation of a new law,

superseding the official one, likely meant more profits for pirates such as Purser and Clinton. However, this economic motivation may not entirely explain the desire for autonomy. Purser follows his comment on the law by concluding that with it, “Else we could have no certain government.” Despite the apparent severance from official order, Purser highlights the need for, and the presence of, an organized system--and not just any system, but a government. But Purser’s system is “certain” and idiosyncratic. He cannot be, then, considered anarchic by the Crown. He is simply following another code of laws, which may be seen as an attempt by Purser to solidify pirates as a legitimate enterprise. As a result, what separates pirates from merchants--according to Purser--is the following of laws, specifically government-enacted laws. If Purser and his fellow pirates can create their own laws, they are logically taking a step in the right direction towards legitimate economic activity; in doing so, Purser frees himself from the bonds of royal control. What makes Purser such an attractive character, then, is the creative way he subverts the forces that control him. Rather than using sheer force or thoughtless violence, Purser cleverly circumvents the Queen’s authority using reason and creativity--qualities one would not normally expect of a pirate. And yet, Purser’s argument seems almost perfectly legitimate. He does not want to be held accountable to others; what better way to break laws than by actually using them to free himself from royal control?

The merchant, however, has a very different view of what he considers to be a criminal act of piracy on a fellow countryman. He complains:

I [did not] think the providence of Heaven
 Would so have favored men of base condition,
 Such as profess wrong, pyracie and theft,
 Have spoyled my men, and ransackt every corner... (4.1.17-20)

Far from the law-abiding economic hierarchy that Purser asserts exists in piracy, the merchant firmly charges the pirates with “theft”. There is no ambivalence to the merchant here; piracy is grouped with “wrong,” indicating the moral flaws of piracy as well. Whereas Purser claims there are laws that govern spoil, the merchant is infuriated with what he views as the pirates’ anarchic behavior. He protests that Purser’s men “ransackt every corner,” which colors the pirates as rabid thieves with no integrity or order.

In this exchange, the scene illuminates the spectrum of attitudes, between acceptance and annoyance, that piracy engenders and also raises an important question: what does the merchant’s argument reveal about England’s priorities at sea? The merchant claims the pirates “have spoyled my men.” Not only have the pirates “ransackt” the ship’s cargo, they have made sure no loot has been left untouched, going so far as to rob individual sailors. Yet, the merchant is not singly concerned with pirates robbing his men. The notion of “spoyled” suggests contamination and the fear, which Elizabeth’s 1561 proclamation against pirates concerns, that Purser could turn the merchant’s sailors into pirates. Consequently, these actions help solidify the connection of Purser and his pirates with the “other,” and sever their ties with England.

Far from the business-like and organized picture that Purser paints of pirates, the merchant accords them with a minimal amount of respect. But, more importantly, the merchant is concerned with the “base condition” of the pirates, and the possible shame he feels being overtaken by them. The “base condition,” in addition to referring to their raggedy attire, alludes to the pirates’--in this instance, pirates who attack English ships--poor standing on land. They are not wanted, not appreciated, and definitely not respected. The “wrong” the merchant associates with Purser further speaks to a moral problem in piracy. Not only do the pirates carry themselves poorly, but they also revel in dissolute behavior. There are not many redeeming qualities that the

merchant sees in “pyracie.” With economic risk likely at stake in his ship, the merchant looks down upon Purser the most: his countryman should be the last person who is stealing from him.

The merchant further complains about the damage that the pirates are doing to the land economy of England. He laments that Purser has “Shook the estate of all my creditors” (4.1.25). The merchant’s mention of “estate,” rather than, say, “coffers” or “accounts” is important because there is a great deal at stake in the merchant’s voyage that is not instantly recognizable, including land. Of course, the merchant’s physical property on the ship is the immediate loss, but the cost is more complex. The plundering of his ship will have serious financial consequences for the merchant; in addition, the finances of several others will be damaged. After Purser and his crew steal all the goods, any persons to whom the merchant owes loans will not be reimbursed; if there were any investors, they too will suffer a substantial loss³. Finally, the merchant likely realizes he will be--unless Purser is brought to justice--held accountable for the pirates’ actions. What initially seems like a random, spontaneous attack actually has lasting ramifications, and this is why the merchant is so critical of Purser. Being a pirate, Purser ignores the custom, and welfare, of those following established mercantile law in order to enrich himself.

However, Purser answers the merchant’s grievance with a seemingly reasonable argument: “We left our Consciences upon the land/ When we began to rob upon the sea” (4.1.28-29). Purser makes the distinction between laws made and enforced on the land and those at sea. Purser’s sea laws, in his opinion, supersede the proclamations of the monarchy, thus making any obligation to a fellow countryman obsolete. Further, moral and religious arguments are baseless at sea as well. The land, according to Purser, is symbolic of law and order, but the sea is chaotic and uncontrollable. Therefore, Purser sees weight in his argument. A “Conscience” has no bearing on the sea; it is a custom of the land. The merchant even more directly confronts

Purser's actions, bluntly asking why he could not spare a fellow countryman. Purser chillingly responds: "Nay since our country have proclaim'd us pyrats,/ And cut us off from any claim in England,/ We'l no longer now call'd English men" (4.1.40-42). Here, the divide between the Crown and pirates comes directly to the forefront. Purser firmly renounces his claim to English identity, but nevertheless refers to England in the possessive form: "our country." Such wording highlights the intimacy Purser must still feel with England, but it also magnifies the feeling of betrayal he feels as well. Purser is supposed to be part of England and, yet, he is officially not so. He is not simply insulted, though; he is "proclaim'd" a thief, giving an official weight to the accusation. This raises the question, then, of whether England is defined by a single monarch or instead comprised of many different parts. Purser seems to regret that a monarch still holds a great deal of influence because he blames the Crown as the reason he's "no longer now call'd English [man]."

But what exactly are the ramifications of being "proclaim'd as pyrats"? Not surprisingly, Purser has economic interests at stake that are jeopardized by accusations of piracy. He complains of being "cut...off from any claim in England." The label of pirate would surely put a strain on the amount of money Purser is allowed to make, which clearly troubles him. But what had Purser done to deserve such a title? Likely, Purser, as he does with the merchant, has placed individual profit ahead of collective gain, thereby harming the English nation. The very self-concerned Purser cannot grasp this concept of state before the self. In a way, he is an attractive figure for this very reason: he does not let the doctrine of nationhood stifle his ambition or personal drives. At the same time, Purser is obviously a menace to his actual contemporaries. The merchant especially, who obeys laws passed by the government and is aware of his mercantile obligations, sees Purser as a selfish renegade who is slowly bleeding the state to feed

himself. If Purser was actually to register his “claims” with the government, it would be nearly impossible to justify his plundering of an English ship. England would basically be robbing itself to pay itself. For such reasons, Purser is pushed to the fringe by the play until he no longer possesses his identity as an Englishman.

Purser’s loss of an English identity as a pirate is fascinating because it underscores the historical fact that the place of pirates was not clearly defined in late Elizabethan England. What is Purser if he is not an Englishman? Pirates become stateless wanderers, not protected by any country, but not bound by any country either. The startling amount of personal freedom offers an alluring contrast to the prospect of dutifully following all the prescribed laws of England. But the most important valence of Purser’s claim is that nationality is not absolute: it can be shed or it can be taken away. If Purser does not have a born identity that is permanent, he has assumed a remarkable amount of power and control over his destiny. This autonomy all creates a unique identity for pirates who do not operate under the support of the English crown. There is a significant opportunity for advancement (4.1.5) under the individual system, which is far more appealing than having to renounce “claims” under the royal system.

However, the play allows for the possibility that Purser’s quickness and ability in shedding his national identity are simply the result of his selfishness. Just as he is quick to declare he is “no longer now call’d English [man],” Purser is quick to plunder an English merchant. Ultimately, ties of loyalty stand in the way of profit. In order to make decent “claims,” Purser cannot afford to allow the notion of nationality to influence his decisions. Acting on an individual level, Purser’s attack on the merchant ship is merely business. Accordingly, no further national or moral concern exists; Purser leaves his “consciences upon the land” (4.1.28). The best possible way to turn a profit, then, is to attack all ships indiscriminately. Again, the concern

with individual profit over national economic success can be traced to Purser's individualistic--rather than nationalistic--identity. Because England "cut [him] off" Purser is on his own and consequently has to fend for himself.

Purser's crew and Clinton do not seem to talk much, but we do hear an interesting counterbalance to Purser's views from the hero of the play, Young Forrest. Determined to help the merchant recover his losses, he seeks out Purser on the open ocean. Far from Purser's self-revolving philosophy of economy, Forrest sees limits of just how much plunder a man may take. He declares: "we seek for purchase, but we tak't from foes,/ And such is held amongst us lawful spoyl" (4.1.134-135). Intriguingly, Young Forrest does not condemn piracy outright; rather, he actually admits to practicing some form of piracy himself. Young Forrest, like Purser, attempts to give a sense of legitimacy and order to his piracy. He claims what he takes is "lawful spoyl." Further, he does not plunder; he "purchase[s]." The legal and mercantile language separate Young Forrest from Purser not simply because of the sense of law--because Purser, in a sense, follows his own set of laws--but because Young Forrest follows the royal law. England's law is the most important and Purser's self-proclaimed laws are nevertheless illegitimate under England's law.

More importantly, however, Young Forrest makes sure to note the boundaries of what constitutes "lawful spoyl." A responsible privateer, in contrast to Purser, only takes plunder "from foes." This is the crucial distinction between lawful piracy and illegitimate ventures. By plundering "from foes," privateers do a double service for England. Firstly, pirates working under the state weaken a country's enemies by hampering their commercial profit. Secondly, these pirates benefit England politically and economically, with a weakened enemy and a bolstered treasury. Thus, whereas Purser spends a good amount of time attempting to justify the

reasons why he is a stateless pirate, Young Forrest succinctly outlines what state-sponsored piracy requires. There are no gray areas, no “certain government” (4.1.8)--there is simply the requirement to attack enemy ships. In this way, pirates can fill an important role and serve as a supplementary force to the English navy. Importantly, Young Forrest notes that the motivations for legal and illegal piracy are the same: “We seek for purchase” (4.1.134). However, there is the very important condition of from whom the goods are being “purchase[d].” Purser fails to meet this criterion for lawful behavior and is therefore declared an “Out-law” by his former country. Conversely, Young Forrest becomes a model for the ideal privateer when posed against the less respectable Purser.

Young Forrest’s declaration, “We seek to purchase,” is especially important to note because it indicates that there was a likely profit in legally privateering for England. Young Forrest and his crew are not bound to enter into piracy according to what we hear. If the crew voluntarily decides to proceed with privateering, there must have been a substantial chance for a decent reward. Because Young Forrest is concerned with “lawful spoyl” without being reminded of duties on pirated goods, there is reason to believe that it was possible to make a profit. Further, the play emphasizes the added benefit of nationalism that makes state-sponsored piracy so appealing: any subject could, like Young Forrest, make a profit while simultaneously buoying England’s stock in world affairs. Here, the notion of “purchase” is very important, but it is superseded by “lawful spoyl.” Purser only refers to spoil as “spoyl.” Forrest’s inclusion of the word “lawful” indicates a different priority. The purpose of piracy is to serve the state, and the play reveals that piracy operates as a kind of contradiction. In order to be legitimate, law must come before profit in an illegal activity.

While Young Forrest, as an ideal privateer, is easily able to sacrifice personal gain to benefit the state, Purser is wholly unable to relinquish the significant personal freedom he has. After his capture by Young Forrest, Purser, along with Clinton, awaits their executions. While Clinton is more remorseful and pensive, Purser has a striking shift of character and reminisces about the power he once had as a rogue pirate: “But was’t not better, when we raign’d as Lords,/ Nay Kings at Sea, the Ocean was our realme” (5.1.3-4). Where previously he was primarily concerned with maximum profit, here Purser is more explicit in his desire for power. Purser, likely a commoner on land, finds unimaginable--or perhaps imagined--power at sea. He revels in the idea that he “raign’d as Lords,/ Nay Kings at Sea” (5.1.3-4). What is unattainable on land and under law becomes a reality for Purser on the open ocean. The possibilities for social advancement are much more fluid at sea, especially under Purser’s “certain government,” where a pirate can not only advance, but actually gain royal power. Purser discovers a profitable means of subverting England’s power while, at the same time, increasing his own authority. By concluding that “the Ocean was our realme,” Purser realizes the limitless possibilities that await a stateless pirate.

However appealing Purser might appear in the play, he is nevertheless a doomed figure. Along with Clinton, Purser is successfully defeated by Young Forrest, who acts as an allegory of the power of land, and duly hanged. This outcome speaks volumes about piracy in the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean age. Though Heywood may sympathize with the pirates to a certain extent, he ultimately condemns the practice of piracy. Despite the autonomy and personal freedom that stateless piracy entails, it will not be tolerated by, or be victorious over, the emerging English nation. Privateering for the good of the nation is the only acceptable piracy. And, while Purser may represent the individual’s struggle against the collective power of the

state, his selfishness and greed make him more of an antihero rather than a straightforward protagonist. Especially considering that Purser is hanged, the quest to make history is not afforded a very hopeful outlook. Indeed, the hanging of Purser represents England's firm statement that it will not accept piracy against English ships. Purser's lack of nationality also has practical consequences because his piracy will be pursued and punished with greater effort; Purser attacking an English ship is not different from an enemy attacking an English ship.

Despite his ultimate execution at the hands of the country from which he discarded his allegiance, Purser still presents a very exciting and enticing view of the places where piracy might lead. Although born an Englishman, Purser does not exist to function for England, but actually for himself. This freedom of power allows Purser to climb to heights he likely would never have reached had he remained loyal to the Crown. And Purser's technical treason does not seem so egregious when one considers that his behavior and outlook anticipate the notion that an individual defines a nation rather than a nation defining an individual. Purser actually embodies the spirit of respected pirates, although his actions tend to define him otherwise. He is driven by an urge to better himself in order to find new ways to climb a historically closed social ladder.

[V]

Conclusions

Far from being portrayed as a complete nuisance, piracy appears in these three plays as a very attractive alternative to the conventional social hierarchies. Pirates, who are not noble or affluent, can be heroes and gain a substantial amount of autonomy to do as they please. The character of Thomas Stukley in both The Battle of Alcazar and Captain Thomas Stukley illustrates the ability of a pirate to ignore law and still cultivate an enviable reputation. Yet

piracy, despite its benefits, has limits. In each of these three plays, the main pirate character is killed at the end, suggesting that, although pirates can obtain power, they cannot maintain it. Regardless of piracy's pleasant appearance, confusion and anxiety about pirates abound within these plays, from both English and foreign voices. Stukley, because he brings glory to England, is embraced by English characters as a hero, but is derided by Spanish characters as a thief. Even within the two Stukley plays, however, there are exceptions to these distinctions, making a uniform definition and ultimate assessment of piracy extremely difficult to formulate.

The case of Purser in Fortune by Land and Sea more directly reveals the problem of the ambiguity of pirates. He is an English pirate, but he is ultimately hanged by his own countrymen because he does not practice an acceptable form of piracy. What this punishment seems to suggest is that piracy in this period is only tolerable against a national enemy like Spain. Even then, Stukley, who intends to attack Spain, dies on the battlefield, reinforcing the notion that piracy is not a wholly legitimate way to climb socially.

Throughout these plays, pirates are set in opposition to the aspiring lower gentry in the play, which speaks to a historical shift in social structure in early modern England. Lawrence Stone contends that "Exceptionally large numbers of new families were forcing their way to the top, [and] large numbers of old families were falling on evil days and sinking into obscurity" (38). The non-noble classes began to gain power, and we see this especially in Captain Thomas Stukley. Although the Spanish aristocracy is his main antagonist, Stukley also has to combat the alderman, Thomas Curteis. Here, we see the playwright's concern with the amount of power being given to the non-landed class. Stone also notes that with "the massive tide of wealth flowing into the hands of yeomen, lawyers, City merchants, top-ranking administrators, and successful politicians, [people from these classes] were all successfully absorbed, at different

levels, into the ranks of the landed gentry” (39). Therefore, Curteis’s opposition to Stukley represents a change in England’s power structure, within the play, because the aristocracy is no longer policing violations of law. We see the upper-middle class has gained a--perhaps self-inflated--sense of superiority over others, as Curteis condescends to Stukley just as several of the Spanish nobles do.

However, from Fortune by Land and Sea, we see a different conclusion about power structures of the period. Young Forrest represents the landed class, acting as the main hero of the play who brings the lawless pirate, Purser, to justice. The landowner is much more powerful in Heywood’s play than in either of the Stukley plays. This authority is partly explained by the fact that, historically, “land ownership was...the necessary qualification for a seat in the House of Commons and a share in local government” (41). Hence, Heywood places a greater weight on Young Forrest’s ability to capture Purser and the ability of the aristocracy to control English subjects. Young Forrest’s power, however, is magnified by the lack of control that he has over a rogue figure like Purser. Keith Wrightson argues that “the commercial culture of the time did not endorse an ethic of ruthless competitive individualism” (300). Purser’s notion of piracy is concerned with maximum profit at the expense of others, which likely represents anxieties about the consequences of uncontrolled economic growth. Yet, however much plunder Purser--whose name likely is a reference to his activity--can accumulate, money was “not the essence” of social status” (Stone 50). And though Heywood, like Peele and the anonymous playwright, anticipates changes in social hierarchy within the play, he makes clear, by Young Forrest’s defeat of Purser, that such transformations will not materialize in English society for some time.

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¹ See Christopher Marlowe's eponymous hero from Tamburlaine for a comparison with Thomas Stukley

² See Shakespeare's Falstaff in 1Henry V

³ Shylock in Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice seems to understand this chain of loss when he warns Bassanio: "there be land-rats and water-rats, water-thieves and land-thieves, I mean pirates" (1.3. 344-346).