CONFLATED CLASSES: EARLY MODERN PIRACY, NATIONAL IDENTITY, AND THE ‘CRISIS OF THE ARISTOCRACY’

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts in English

By

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Washington, DC
April 29, 2010
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The present study situates three popular adventure dramas written by Thomas Heywood *Fair Maid of the West Parts I and II* (1631) and *Fortune by Land and Sea* (1607-1609), coauthored by William Rowley, alongside early modern discourses on piracy and class structure in order to expose the ways in which Heywood’s drama seeks to assert the superiority of the emergent Protestant/Capitalist ethic over the traditional aristocratic one as a key component to English social identity. At the heart of these plays is a complex discourse regarding the legitimacy and efficacy of the existing social hierarchy, and within the dramas, well-established dangers, such as the fluidity and mimicry associated with mercantile groups at sea are replicated in the dual plot structure on land in order to expose a similar destabilization of the hierarchical structure caused by burgeoning social mobility. To this end, Heywood establishes a quasi-class structure of legitimacy among the various seafaring groups and aligns it with the official one on land. Although the traditional structure is ostensibly reinforced, Heywood employs the increased license of the dramatic space in order to call into question the very existence of discrete categories, to challenge the superiority of the aristocracy, and to promote a model of gentility that can incorporate the features of the emerging Capitalist/Protestant ethic. The resulting view of society suggests that “piracy” is not confined to ventures at sea, but is also at work in the looting of the gentility’s claim to superiority by the
“middling” groups. Further, for their complacency and collaboration, Heywood establishes the aristocracy itself as the primary agent in its own demise.
For the successful completion of this thesis, I am deeply indebted to my advisor, Professor Lindsay Kaplan, without whose patience, guidance, and rigorous academic standards this project would not have been possible. I am also grateful to Professor Lena Cowen Orlin for her service on my exam committee and for her invaluable insights on early modern English society. Thank you to Professor Anita Gilman Sherman for turning me on to the brilliance of Thomas Heywood and for her always-friendly support. To my mother, Kathryn Rollins and her husband, Ken Webb for their food and drink, the use of their home, and their cheerful willingness to play taxi cab and super-grandparents whenever the need arose. To my father, whose love for history and general intellectual curiosity have inspired me to become a student of life and of the world. To my grandmother, Sandy Morris-Flynn for...well, everything she does, but more importantly everything she is. To my many friends and colleagues who have provided me with a laugh, an ear, or a kind word of encouragement. And finally, to my beautiful, sweet, intelligent, compassionate child, Madison Elisabeth Turpin, for always believing in “tomorrow” no matter how many times it came. You have given my life purpose and meaning in a way I might never have imagined and no amount of accomplishment will ever mean as much to me as knowing that you are proud of your mommy. I love you.

Lauren Rollins, Alexandria 2010
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Introduction

The present study situates three popular adventure dramas written by Thomas Heywood *Fair Maid of the West Parts I and II* (1631) and *Fortune by Land and Sea* (1607-1609), coauthored by William Rowley, alongside early modern discourses on piracy and class structure in order to expose the ways in which Heywood’s drama seeks to assert the superiority of the emergent Protestant/Capitalist ethic over the traditional aristocratic one as a key component to English social identity. At the heart of these plays is a complex discourse regarding the legitimacy and efficacy of the existing social hierarchy, and within the dramas, well-established dangers, such as the fluidity and mimicry associated with mercantile groups at sea are replicated in the dual plot structure on land in order to expose a similar destabilization of the hierarchical structure caused by burgeoning social mobility. To this end, Heywood establishes a quasi-class structure of legitimacy among the various seafaring groups and aligns it with the official one on land. Although the traditional structure is ostensibly reinforced, Heywood employs the increased license of the dramatic space in order to call into question the very existence of discrete categories, to challenge the superiority of the aristocracy, and to promote of model of gentility that can incorporate the features of the emerging Capitalist/Protestant ethic. The resulting view of society suggests that “piracy” is not confined to ventures at sea, but is also at work in the looting of the gentility’s claim to superiority by the “middling” groups. Further, for their complacency and collaboration, Heywood establishes the aristocracy itself as the primary agent in its own demise.
National Identity, Hierarchy and Social Mobility

In keeping with the concept of the great chain of being, all members of early modern English society were prescribed certain predetermined roles that had traditionally been viewed as static and immutable. In his study *English Society: 1580-1680* Keith Wrightson extrapolates:

The reality of inequality was displayed everywhere. Massive and very visible distinctions of wealth and living standards impressed themselves on the casual observer who travelled the countryside or walked the streets of the towns. Hierarchical distinctions of status were reflected in styles of dress, in the conventions of comportment which governed face-to-face contacts between superiors and inferiors, in the order in which seats were taken in church, in the arrangement of places at table and in the ordering of public processions. Order, degree, rank and hierarchy seemed self-evident, even natural. (17)

In a society marked by such material and customary reinforcements of class structure, it is easy to assume that the various delineations between classes are easily definable and recognizable. While this is true in broad strokes (i.e. the aristocracy, the ‘middling’ groups, and the commonalty), a survey of contemporary sources on the subject exposes the inherent disjunction present in attempts to create definitive paradigms for the determination of class association.¹

¹ Particularly considering the obscurity of the topic it is of key importance at the outset to offer a qualification of terms. The term “aristocracy” has been commonly understood to refer only to members of the titular peerage. This usage, however, diverges from those of several notable historians, as well as from contemporary theoretical considerations. Lawrence Stone’s use of aristocracy incorporates not only the titular peerage, but also the class of knights and baronets known as the “upper gentry.” Likewise, citing the writings of the 17th century writer William Harrison, Keith Wrightson notes of those classes of upper gentry, “though internally differentiated into the titular nobility, knights, esquires, and ‘last of all they that are simple called gentlemen,’ this group was defined in general as ‘those whome their race and blood or at least their vertues doe make noble and knoune’ (English Society 19). The most definitive and concise explanation is given by historian M.L. Bush, whose comprehensive study entitled *The English Aristocracy* (1984) asserts: Historians have difficulty in conceiving the English aristocracy as a compound of peerage and gentry, so much so that the term ‘aristocracy’, like that of ‘nobility’, is applied exclusively to the peers. Yet this convention sets more problems than it solves. Besides implying that the gentry and baronetcy are of a different order to the peerage, it also deprives them of social definition. Both are deposited in a social limbo from which escape is only possible through promotion to the peerage or demotion to the commonalty. Moreover, by denying the existence in England of a lesser nobility, the convention creates, at
Further, although historians have become increasingly reliant on early modern documents in order to glean an accurate picture of the social structure, most are quick to point out the difficulty in achieving a comprehensive account. Keith Wrightson cautions:

In trying to describe society as it was, or rather as it seemed to them to be (for systematic social investigation was to await a later age) contemporary writers...put forward a scheme of ranks or degrees, of hierarchically arranged social categories which were intended to simplify the complexity of reality and clearly distinguish the principal social groups. The nature of the actual ranking frequently varied, usually in accordance with the principal concerns of the writer. (19)

Wrightson’s argument here exposes the utilitarian and utopian nature of social systems, which he argues are necessarily subjective, despite their attempts at objectivity.

In *The Description of England*, which ultimately becomes the first part of Raphael Holinshed’s *Chronicles* (1587), William Harrison writes, “we in England divide our people commonly into four sorts, as gentlemen, citizens or burgesses, yeoman, and artificers or laborers” (*Harrison’s Description of England* pt. 1, pg. 105). Such a simplistic schema was not to last, however, as writers sought to provide ever-increasing detail regarding the structure they observed around them, particularly for the many groups of people who were conflated within the middle strata. Around 1600, in response to perceived distinctions that had emerged, Sir Thomas Wilson’s classification of “nobles, citizens, yeoman, artisans, and rural labourers,” attempts to be more comprehensive by making artisans a discrete category from the laborers with which they were mixed in Harrison’s schema (*The State of England* 17). Such slight variations

a stroke, an implausible distinction between the English aristocracy and the other European nobilities. Over the centuries commentators were not so scrupulous. Peers and gentry were frequently conceived as parts of the same order (2). The implication of such distinctions is significant, as it calls into question our modern conception of the peerage as a completely closed caste. Following Bush, my usage of the terms “aristocracy” or “nobility” in the present study, will refer generally to the group comprised of the peerage and upper gentry, unless otherwise indicated.
between class definitions were common and became increasingly complex as mercantile labor created additional gradations based primarily on occupation. By 1695, for example, Gregory King’s *Ranks, Degrees, Titles, and Qualifications*, had significantly expanded its analysis of the “middling groups.” Wrightson summarizes:

King followed the gradations of gentility from the peerage down to the level of plain gentlemen much as Harrison and Wilson had done (with the addition of baronets, an order created only in 1611). Thereafter, however, he dropped both the usual division between townspeople and countrymen and such status terms as citizen or yeoman, providing instead a simple ladder of occupations. First after the gentry came a mercantile and professional cluster of ‘Persons in offices’, merchants, lawyers and clergymen. Next came freeholders, farmers, ‘Persons in sciences and liberal arts’, shopkeepers and tradesmen, artisans and officers in the forces, and finally, common seamen, ‘labouring people and outservants’, cottagers and paupers, common soldiers and vagrants. (*English Society* 21)

Although King’s assessment is not directly contemporary to the period in question in the present study, it is nevertheless significant. His explicit reference to the mercantile professions and the increased amount of attention to the various gradations among “middling” groups is indicative of their increased prevalence and position in society by the turn of the eighteenth century; a process that is begun in the Elizabethan period as a result of the Elizabeth’s desire for expansion by proto-capitalist means.

Such classifications, however, were inherently problematic, as the ever-increasing complexity of society continually necessitated additional gradations. Further, increasing social mobility continually challenged traditionally held distinctions, often resulting in the conflation of inherently similar and closely positioned classes. As Wrightson notes, attempts to define and stabilize social classifications tended to produce:

an overlap, even a confusion between different criteria of social rank. The broad structure of society emerges clearly enough, yet the social order was also far too complex to be anatomized in terms of any single criterion. It had burst through the constraints of traditional classifications into
functional ‘orders’ and only with difficulty could its component parts be adequately defined. (6)

Indeed, the only consistent feature of such attempts is the ambiguity that emerges. This knowledge, however, is useful, as it establishes the categories as constructed, and more importantly, capable of being transcended and mimicked, a fact that was certainly not lost on those members of society with designs on upward movement. Further, Wrightson’s notion that the structure of society had “burst through” traditional constraints exposes the very fracturing that allows the groups in the middle to continue to increase in size and strength. While the social structure struggled to stabilize under the pressure of the changing economic system, members of these “middling groups,” and particularly those involved in mercantile exchange, ascended and descended the ranks of the gentry, achieving ever-increasing levels of wealth, power, and by extension class legitimacy.

As suggested by this paper’s title, Lawrence Stone’s seminal study of social structure during the period has provided a framework for the present analysis, yet fundamental differences in our projects lead us to vastly differing conclusions. Responding to popular trends of criticism between the first and second world wars, Stone postulates that, “the political and social crisis of the seventeenth century has been largely misconceived in recent years, since it has been interpreted as a product of a changing social structure,” (Crisis of the Aristocracy 4). Thus, his devaluation of class considerations appears to run counter to my own assertion that social mobility was, indeed, an important concern. It is important to note, however, that Stone’s survey of social structure is primarily a political one, which attempts to locate the economic and social impetuses that culminated in the English civil war in 1642. As such, he adopts a positivist methodology that relies heavily on statistics and various data, yet ignores less tangible factors, such as perception, fear,
and group anxiety. Despite the differences in our projects, Stone’s work is quite helpful in contextualizing early modern social structure. It becomes particularly pertinent when placed in the context of a study such as this one, which considers it in relation to contemporary writings in which class structure, social mobility and identity are presented as central topics of discussion.

In *The Crisis of the Aristocracy: 1558-1641* Stone asserts, “hierarchy and organic unity were the two predominant postulates upon which [early modern] contemporaries constructed their theories about the nature of society and the functions of government” (15). Yet as we have suggested, despite the prevalence of such seemingly fixed conceptions of hierarchical structure, the years that comprised the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods saw a marked increase in the possibility for social mobility due to an expanding mercantile economy. This is particularly true after the successful circumnavigation of Francis Drake in 1577-1580. Of the impact of Drake’s mission on the average English citizen Theodore Rabb notes, “as the most spectacular and successful of the ventures of the mid-1570’s, Drake’s voyage played a vital role in this awakening of the English people to the possibilities for personal and national profit in faraway lands” (*Enterprise and Empire* 21). In light of such new opportunity, English citizens of all gradations began to consider the prospect of wealth accumulation as a means to increased social legitimacy. If one could make his fortune at sea and return to a knighthood, as Drake had, then social mobility of the highest order was at least a remote possibility. The likelihood, however, is that far fewer people wished for such drastic elevation, but rather hoped to accumulate enough wealth to raise their status to the level immediately above their own. On this point Stone agrees. Addressing the misconception regarding the
challenge the mercantile class poses to the peerage, Lawrence Stone asserts, “the challenge to their authority came not from capitalists or bourgeoisie, but from solid landowners only one notch further down the social and economic ladder, the squires and greater gentry” (Crisis of the Aristocracy 8). Although Stone again mitigates the power of the middling groups, it can be inferred that his schema applies throughout the social system. Particularly as one moves down out of the peerage and into the ranks of gentry, the possibility of upward and downward movement between adjacent levels increases.

What is certain is that during this period mercantile activity of all types facilitated opportunities for social mobility that had never before been possible. Although the extent of such movement is a topic of continuing debate among scholars, the fact of its existence, particularly among the “middlings” is without question.

Mark Netzloff notes, “emergent forms of capital enabled increasing possibilities of social mobility and advancement for the ‘middling sort,’ including urban merchants and capitalist landowners, whose social positions testify to a fluidity of status in the early modern period” (14). Thus, Netzloff highlights the increased power and mobility, of the mercantile classes. Although Lawrence Stone’s analysis excludes a discussion of mobility among mercantile, his conclusion regarding an increase in mobility in general is nevertheless significant: “what has been proved beyond question...is that this was a period of unprecedented economic mobility among the middling landowning groups, with families moving up or down in remarkable numbers” (8). Keith Wrightson’s treatment of Yorkshire in the period from 1558-1642 provides a panaroma of such shifts:

Of the 963 known gentry families of Yorkshire, nine were elevated into the peerage, sixty-four removed from the county, 181 are known to have died out in the male line and a further thirty simply disappeared from the records. They were replaced in county society partly by cadet branches,
partly by newcomers from other counties, partly by successful lawyers and merchants who crowned their careers with the purchase of estates, but above all by men of yeoman origin patiently building up their lands until they were recognized as gentlemen. (26)

This is significant as a case study for several reasons. The schema not only shows the possibility for elevation into the gentry by the mercantile classes as we have discussed, but also illustrates the mechanism by which lower groups, such as yeoman also achieved status as landowners. Further, that nine families were elevated into the peerage in Yorkshire alone in less than a century, illustrates the possibility of elevation into the uppermost levels of the aristocracy.

Such opportunity for movement into and out of all levels of gentry destabilizes class definitions, which leads to a pressuring of nobility’s very essence. Long associated with considerations of birth and blood accompanied by immense estates, the increased possibility of fantastic wealth accumulation through mercantile activity essentially challenged the exclusive claim of the aristocracy to nobility. As birth or blood is not a visually apparent, displays of wealth became the most visible sign of aristocratic class association. Thus, if mercantile activity could provide enough wealth to mimic such demonstrations, what then was the locus of true gentility? This problem was exacerbated by the tendency of those newly wealthy members of society to appropriate the dress, customs and norms of the upper classes. Again, if one could appear as nobility in all the traditional distinguishing factors, was not the problem of birth essentially eradicated?

Discussions such as these frequently became fodder for early modern pamphleteers wishing to expose changes in the nature and structure of English society. In his *Positions Wherein Those Primitive Circumstances Be Examined, Which Are Necessarie For The Training up of children, either in skill in their booke, or health in their bodie* (1581)
scholar and schoolmaster, Richard Mulcaster incorporates a commentary on the phenomenon of class appropriation as an essential component in the education of children:

Therefore when wealth is made the way to gentilitie: or if it be exceeding great, the gap to nobilitie, it is like to some universitie men, which for favour or feasting lend their schole degrees to doltes to intercept those livinges by borowed titles which them selves should have for learning, and might have without let, if they hindered not them selves. But both gentlemen and scholers be well enough served, for overshooting them selves so farre: nobilitie being empaired in note, though encreased in number by such intruders, and learning empoverished in purses, though replenished in putfurthes by such interceptours. (sig. CC3v)

Though Mulcaster’s occupation places him outside the gentility, he adeptly articulates the danger to its members: namely, that those newly wealthy members of society are merely interlopers, and that the association of the nobility with such classes for financial reasons enables the infiltration. In keeping with his academic background, Mulcaster’s excoriation also likens the challenge to legitimate nobility to that perpetrated by scholars who purchase false degrees, yet lack the benefit of the associated education. Interestingly, despite their knowledge and increasing level of respectability, men of learning were still considered only “middling sorts” in the period. This reinforces the idea that perceived threats to the established system were not confined to those wanting to infiltrate the upper gentry, but were also posed by members of the lower classes wishing to make similar upward shifts. Mulcaster expressly reminds his readers to be wary of those “overshooting them selves so farre,” and warns that the necessary consequence of upward mobility is the “empairement” of the “nobilitie.” It is important to recall, however, that the overarching purpose of Mulcaster’s text is a defense of education, thus, the discussion of gentility is employed merely as a metaphor to qualify a certain academic elitism. What is
most significant, then, is that Mulcaster’s metaphoric representation of the problem of social mobility based on wealth accumulation reveals that such an issue was sufficiently established within society to allow for correct interpretation of the literary device.

The related anxieties of class mimicry frequently inspired chroniclers of the period to attempt to locate distinctive features of gentility, and such discussions were often manifested across a wide range of subjects. Richard Jones’ Book of Honour and Armes (1590) begins with the author’s proposal that because “gentilite is a degree honorable, it were not fit that anie persons of meaner condition, should thereunto be admitted” (sig. E4v). Although Jones’ stance on the impossibility of social mobility seems clear, he soon vacillates between varying viewpoints present in the period. In defining the gentility, he instructs the reader:

Whosoever is born noble (under which word is comprised all sorts of nobilitie and gentilitie) is equal to any other Gentleman of private condition. Note here, that in saying a Gentleman born, we mean he must be descended from three degrees of gentry, both on the mothers and fathers side. (sig. F3v)

Here, Jones essentially equalizes the claims to nobility of every level of gentility without regard for gradation. Further, his requirement of three generations of prior nobility through both the maternal and paternal lines appears to privilege gentle birth over virtue as the hallmark of gentility. However, he later concedes:

We say that men may bee reputed noble three waies. First, by nature or descent of Auncestors, which is the vulgar opinion. Secondlie, for vertue onelie, which the Philosophers affirme. Thirldlie, by mixture of auncient gentle race with Vertue, which is indeede the true and most commendable kind of Nobilitie: for seeing man is a creature reasonable, he ought to bee called man, in respect of his owne vertue, and not the vertue of others. (sig. H2v)

In addition to considerations of birth, Jones’ hybridization requires an accompanying display of virtue in order to gain, “the true and most commendable kind of noblitie.”
Thus, by this three-tiered schema it is possible to be noble without virtue, and vice versa but in its most pristine form, nobility requires both attributes. Such qualifications were increasingly problematic to certain hereditary members of the gentility who were often derided for their association with certain vices, such as gaming and drink. Thus, by this model, a wealthy, virtuous “middling sort” could achieve a superior brand of nobility to either a “philosopher’s noble, or a “vulgar” and vice-ridden one.

Only one year later, Charles Gibbons’ 1591 pamphlet regarding the choice of a spouse makes a case for virtue as sole determining factor:

> as touching the bare birth, a king hath no better beginning than a beggar, or in respect of the ordinary ende, the Prince hath no priveledge above the poore; for as both procede from a woman, so both shall feede all the wormes; yet that followeth not although all be made of one mettall, none should bee more excellent in majestie, or albeith none be noble by nature, any should not be renowned by calling. (sig. B3v)

The author’s seemingly innocuous argument with respect to marriage veils both an explicit challenge to the social structure and an implicit one to divine right. Further, the moral of the author’s argument is that birth and death are the necessary equalizers of all men and thus, only virtuous action creates nobility. Gibbon also asserts: “indeede the best gentilitie consist[s] in pietie” (sig. B2v). Accordingly, a virtuous man (or woman) is gentle, regardless of station at birth. Gibbon’s view is admittedly somewhat radical in its express denial of birth as a component of gentility. More commonly, pamphleteers often tried to promote a more hybrid view, as Jones does, that both maintained the integrity of nobility by birth, but also allowed for other determining factors that could incorporate the desires and perceived features of the upwardly mobile groups. Nevertheless, the mere pressuring of traditional notions of gentility to include virtue as a determining factor
betrays the increasing power and influence of the emerging Capitalist/Protestant ethic in considerations of social status.

Although such increased prominence of these “middle classes” was a source of discussion and some anxiety, the very success and proliferation of their mercantile activities was inextricably tied to the aristocracy itself. In his seminal study of the merchant classes and their role in the English civil war, Robert Brenner describes the interdependency between them and the highest echelons of society:

Throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the merchants of London secured their profits as much through collective political initiative and organization as through individual economic enterprise. In almost every case, they founded their trades on government privileges that provided the basis for monopoly companies and the close regulation of commerce. Trade by a government-chartered, regulated company was the long-established norm in England. And it had a good and sufficient rationale in the complementary needs of the larger overseas merchants, and the monarchy. (Merchants and Revolution 54)

Brenner notes the symbiotic relationship between the merchant class and the monarchy, and comments further on its particular importance to the Crown:

[T]he monarchical government had every reason to look favorably on the merchants’ request for company privileges […]. A prosperous merchant community could offer an unrivaled source of financial support. (54)

Brenner’s qualification of the immense wealth at the disposal of merchants as “unrivaled” is significant. Essentially, despite the high concentration of wealth at the level of the peerage, the sheer size of the merchant class combined with the liquid nature of its assets established it as a superior source of funding for the State. Further, as mercantile activity at sea grew exponentially after Drake’s return, increasing numbers of aristocrats associated either their money or their persons with such endeavors. Of this phenomenon, Theodore Rabb writes:
Spurred by the propaganda for a tremendous national enterprise whenever they came to London, and encouraged by the example set by leading courtiers and noblemen, a large section of the landed classes was persuaded to invest – for the first time in European history – in overseas trade. (Enterprise and Empire 26)

With the Queen spearheading such a movement, the trickle down effect was inevitable. Further, the importation of the joint-stock company from Italy in the mid-sixteenth century allowed for the landed classes to invest in overseas mercantile activity without the associated burden of the labor involved. Such a disinterested approach on the part of the nobility meant that merchants were almost solely responsible for the management of the enterprise. Thus, the web of interdependency between the English nobility and the middling mercantile groups grew exponentially, as did the power and autonomy of the latter group.

Following Max Weber, Lawrence Stone explains the clash of socio-economic values that occurs as a result of the introduction of nascent capitalism to an aristocratic system:

The capitalist/Protestant ethic is one of self-improvement, independence, thrift, hard work, chastity and sobriety, competition, equality of opportunity, and the association of poverty with moral weakness; the aristocratic ethic is one of voluntary service to the State, generous hospitality, clear class distinctions, social stability, tolerant indifference to the sins of the flesh, inequality of opportunity based on the accident of inheritance, arrogant self-confidence, a paternalist and patronizing attitude towards economic dependants and inferiors, and an acceptance of the grinding poverty of the lower classes as part of the natural order of things. (6)

With such opposing ethical positions, financial interdependence between the two groups is necessarily impossible without significant concessions to foundational principles. In particular, the monarchy’s support of and reliance on a capitalist mode of wealth accumulation is at best a contradiction in terms, and at worst a self-immolation by association from the aristocracy’s highest level. Such cooperation with the mercantile
classes is a tacit acknowledgement of their power and superiority in such matters. This necessarily destabilizes the authority of the monarchy/aristocracy, while imbuing the members of the “middling” groups with increased levels of social legitimacy.

“Pirateering” and Performance

With regard to considerations of the early modern seafaring classes, a similar pattern of interdependency and class conflation emerges. In her discussion of the seafaring classes Barbara Fuchs identifies three distinct groups as the triptych of hierarchy at sea: the privateer, the pirate, and the renegado. Of the fluid and complex relationship between them she posits:

The movement from the paradox of privateering—in which supposed private quarrels were harnessed to the service of the state—to the murky lawlessness of piracy to, finally, the absolute break of the renegadoes, may thus be read as a trajectory of increasing independence of the subject vis-a-vis the English state. That is, if for the privateer even a personal quarrel has to be authorized by the state, the renegado abandons the state so completely as to be branded a traitor. Moreover, this unstable continuum of privateer, pirate, and renegado disrupts the legitimacy of a view of the English nation based in commerce. (51)

As Fuchs’ reading seeks to delineate the politics of the state apparatus regarding piracy, her construction of the continuum relies upon the presence of the renegado as a distinct group in order to establish a hierarchy related to state independence. This, however, is inherently problematic. The separation of renegadoes and pirates into distinct categories belies the fact that the only true distinction between the two groups is a religious, rather than a political one. Her trajectory then belies a clear conception of the ways in which “pirates” are politically, rather than religiously distinct from renegadoes. In fact, pirates such as Purser and Clinton, both historically and in Heywood’s dramatic representations, cleanly sever their ties to England and its laws yet do not transition to Islam.
Fuch’s view of the continuum is nevertheless valid, perhaps with one amendment; an appropriate collapsing of the distinction between the two purely piratical groups in favor of the merchant mariner as the “middling” group between the figures of the privateer and the pirate. This both explains Heywood’s frequent representations of the merchant figure and his complex relationship with the other groups, and amends Fuch’s model, establishing the hierarchy at sea as one of perceived social legitimacy, rather than political independence.

Following this slightly amended model, the seafaring occupations of the late-Elizabethan and early-Jacobean periods were broadly defined as pirates, merchantmen, and privateers. The term “merchantmen” is often conflated with “merchant” both within the period and in modern criticism. It is important to note that it refers only to those sailors employed on merchant vessels, as the merchants themselves rarely accompanied their goods to sea. In general terms piracy is any nonstate-sanctioned theft of goods or vessels occurring at sea. Legally, this is distinguished from privateering quite literally by a mere piece of paper, or a point-of-view. In order to sail legitimately as a privateer, one was required to have at least one of two kinds of official commission from the monarchy. A letter of marque provided the privateer with permission to capture and seize any foreign vessel belonging to a nation involved in a conflict with England, while a commission of reprisal allowed the recuperation of previous losses through the capture of any ships and goods belonging to the offending nation.2 One State’s privateer is another State’s pirate, however, and this was certainly true of Sir Francis Drake, whose numerous depredations against the Spanish certainly established his reputation as a pirate from their perspective. Indeed, the failure of his efforts to hijack the Spanish treasure convoy at

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2 For an extensive discussion of maritime class delineations, see Mark Netzloff (pp.51-73).
Portobello in 1595-1596 and his subsequent death are celebrated in Lope de Vega’s epic poem, *La Dragontea* (1598). In light of this, it would perhaps be more accurate to refer to the activities of both groups as “pirateering,” because, despite the appearance of legal distinctions within their countries of origin, as a practical matter, once outside the control of a single State apparatus more often than not, they were, in fact, one and the same thing. Compounding the problems of such semantic considerations was the practical difficulty of group differentiation. This is due to several key factors, most of which directly resulted from a change in the official attitude toward them between the rules of Elizabeth I, and James I.

During the Queen’s reign, endeavors at sea flourished. Having inherited a practically bankrupted England in 1558 and living under constant threat from Spain’s King Philip II, Elizabeth fostered a group of seafaring adventurers that procured for her and for England riches and security, and ultimately constructed the foundations of an empire. This seemingly symbiotic relationship was not without its flaws, however, as time at sea equated to an existence both literally and figuratively outside the bounds of organized English society and legality. Thus in addition to the risks posed by pirates, state-sanctioned privateers often resorted to openly piratical activity, disrupting legitimate trading lines, and endangering international diplomacy.

For her part, Queen Elizabeth attempted to rein in piratical activity at various times throughout her rule. Although she issued a series of royal proclamations on the subject, they were, for the most part, more concerned with securing the proper revenge against Spain or with ensuring that the Queen and the State received their customs than with
controlling the activities of her pirateers. Her 1602 *A proclamation to represse all piracies and depredations upon the sea* warns:

That if any person whatsoever, shall upon the Seas, take any Ship that doeth belong to any of her Majesties friends, and Allies, or to any of their Subjects, And after knowledge had, that the saide Ship doeth belong to her friends, doeth not forbeare to stay the same, unlesse it shalbe laden with goods of her Majesties enemies, or with marchandizes of such nature or qualitie, as may serve to furnish the king of Spaine his Armies, or Navies and going into the kingdomes of Spaine and Portugall, Or shall take out of it any goods belonging to her said friends, except goods of the aforesaid nature or qualitie, bound for Spaine or Portugall; He or they so offending shall suffer death with confiscation of lands and goods, according to the Law in that case provided. (1)

Despite such strong language, orders such as these were, perhaps purposefully, weak. For instance, in all except the most extreme traitorous actions (i.e. aiding and abetting Spain, or preying directly on English ships or goods), which called for death, the punishment for most of Elizabeth’s articles ranged between a variable fine, and “her Majesties heavy displeasure.” Further, Elizabeth’s excoriation here applies only to those ships and men engaged in the openly piratical practice of taking vessels without regard for their nationality, yet it still condones the piratical actions of any vessel acting against her enemies under the auspices of privateering. Ironically, the caveat that friendly ships could be taken if they were carrying any “goods of her Majesties enemies” leaves a tremendous amount of discretion to men whose descent into piratical activity in the first place is the necessity for the proclamation. After all, as a practical matter it would be nearly impossible, particularly if a ship was flying a friendly flag but carrying goods to an enemy, to know the exact nature of such goods, or the identity of their owners merely in passing. Such misplaced trust seems rather naïve, or perhaps purposefully ambiguous as a tenet of a proclamation designed to control the license taken by seamen once outside the
State’s control. Such risks notwithstanding, so long as these men continued to supply Elizabeth with the necessary resources, she offered a tacit acceptance of their more ignoble pursuits. As Barbara Fuchs notes, “in the 1570s and 80s, piracy became England’s belated answer to Spain’s imperial expansion” (45). Reliance on such risky ventures, however, was a dangerous game of cat-and-mouse and blurred lines between legitimate, state-sanctioned privateer and self-serving pirate became increasingly obscure. Attacks on merchant ships and other unsanctioned targets by privateers continued to undermine the role of the legitimate seafaring occupations, as did the actions of their purely piratical counterparts.

Thus when James ascends the throne in 1603 with an opposing political agenda, he immediately sets out to rectify the problem of piracy. Unlike his predecessor who had prized economic and political superiority over peace and diplomacy, James desires to secure his contested position, establish peace with Spain, and to define himself as the Rex Pacificus. In light of such a goal the seafaring classes and their unruly behavior present a tangible danger to the King’s political agenda. In order to combat this threat, one of the monarch’s first endeavors is to issue several proclamations denouncing the act of piracy, as a crime against the Crown. The first of these, issued in 1603 immediately after his succession orders:

[T]hat no man of Warre be furnished or set out to Sea by any of his Majesties Subjects, under paine of Death and confiscation of Lands and Goods, not onely to the Captaines and the Mariners, but also to the Owners and Victuallers, if the Company of the saide Ship shall commit any piracie, Depredation, or murther at the Sea, upon any of his Majesties friends. (1)

3The use of the gender specific term is purposeful here and throughout the paper. Though there were a few notable female pirates, such as Anne Bonny and Mary Read, women were prohibited onboard pirate ships at sea. Those who did find their way onto vessels were compelled to dress as men in order to hide their identities, as Bess does in Thomas Heywood’s Fair Maid of the West, Part II (1631). The irony here, of course, is the fact that the boat in question is her own.
Expanding upon Elizabeth’s previous warning, James’ proclamation effectively attempts to put an end to state-sanctioned privateering, as well as out-and-out piracy because by 1603 James was already in the process of establishing peace with Spain. Thus, “his Majesties friends” now counted Philip III. Also implicit in James’ warning is a veiled reference to those members of the peerage who participate in such activity, as the King purposefully includes the “confiscation of lands,” rather than merely “goods” as a punishment for failure to comply. Thus, any member of the aristocracy caught participating in any form of piracy, whether directly or indirectly, would lose not only his own life, but also any legacy he might leave to his posterity.

The result, however, was not nearly as definitive as the king would have hoped, and swelling numbers of formerly legitimate mariners ran afoul of the law, forced to seek employment wherever they could, often completing the transition to openly piratical activity.⁴ James’ 1605 A Proclamation for revocation of Mariners from forreine Services addresses precisely this phenomenon:

Whereas within this short time since the Peace concluded betweene Us and the King of Spaine and the Archdukes our good Brothers, it hath appeared unto Us that many Mariners and Seafaring men of this Realme, having gotten a custome and habite in the time of the Warre to make profite by Spoile, doe leave their ordinary and honest vocation and Trading in Merchantly Voyages, whereby they might both reap convenient maintenance, and be serviceable to their Countrey, And doe betake themselves to the Service of divers foreine States, under the Title of men of Warre, to have thereby occasion to continue their unlawfull and ungodly course of living by Spoile, using the service of those Princes but for colour and pretext, but in effect making themselves commonly no better than pirats to robbe both our owne subjects their Countreymen, and the Subjects of other Princes our neighbours, going in their honest Trade of Merchandize.

(1)

⁴ For compelling discussions on this phenomenon see Barbara Fuchs (pp.4-6), and Mark Netzloff (pp.53-55).
Perhaps what is most significant in James’ warning, is the assertion that “mariners and seafaring men” of all types have chosen to “leave their ordinary and honest vocation and Trading in Merchantly Voyages” in order to work ostensibly as hired privateers for foreign nations. Although the exact term used in the proclamation is not privateer, but “men of warre,” both terms indicate the practice of privateering. Privateers were, by definition, state representatives hired to undermine the mercantile and colonial activity of enemy nations during declarations of open war. Under Elizabeth, these men, sailing on privately owned ships were roughly analogous to militiamen, as they maintained their status as private citizens but worked in cooperation with the official naval establishment. This is alluded to by James’ assertion that the men are guilty of continuing actions that were “custome and habite in the time of Warre” after an official declaration of peace. Indeed, the practice of continuing to refer to themselves as “men of warre” after James’ prohibition of privateering is both an attempt to establish theirs as a distinct and legitimate quasi-military occupation, and an express challenge to James’ criminalization of their activities. Thus, in offering their services to foreign nations the men are essentially naval soldiers for hire, which was not only traitorous, but established them as pirates vis-à-vis the English state.

Such traitorous courses of action were often associated with the vice of materiality. In the first part of his sermon entitled Englandes Sickenes (1615), Thomas Adams warns of the danger of wealth accumulation:

What are those labours and appendances, but bands and ties. To keepe close to us madde and starting Riches? We pleade, it is for the mortality of men, but wee meane the mortality of riches. If then these earthly things will boast of any thing, let them boast (as Paul did) their fraileties. They are eyther Journeying, not got without labour, or ventur’d on the Sea, (yea, together with goods) bodies and soules too, to make such ill Merchants full
adventurers. In peril of robbers, publike and notorious theeves: In peril of false brethren, secret & tame theeves, Lawyers, Usurers, flatterers. Fire in the City Free-booters in the Wildernesse, Pyrates on the Sea; for wearinesse, painefullnesse, watching’s, &c. who doubts the miserable partnership twixt them and riches. (L1r-L2v)

Here Adams supplants an attention to mortality with a privileging of materiality and clearly proposes that many of the ills of English society are caused by or related to mercantile ventures, particularly by gentleman adventurers. Further, the qualification of merchants as “ill” combined with his concerted effort to conflate them with such unsavory characters as “theeves, usurers, flatterers, and other false brethren” presents a clear objection to the growing prevalence and power of mercantile activity, and the associated fascination with wealth accumulation.

Nearly twenty-five years before Thomas Adams composes his sermon, Elizabethan chronicler Richard Verstegan’s A Declaration of the True Causes of the Great Troubles, Presupposed to be Intended against the realme of England (1592) addresses yet another danger shared by the conflated merchant and pirate classes:

Let vs also consider the great decay of Trafike, that of late yeares the countrie is brought vnto, whereby not only many principall marchantes, which were wont to transport great riches and comodities to the realme, are become banckruptes, and sundry of them enforced to turne their trade of marchandize into meere piracie, but also diuers whole townes are decayed, & the people compelled to beg, that before were honestly sustained by the trade of clothing. (sig. D6r)

Here again, Verstegan aligns the actions of some merchants with their piratical counterparts. Yet, what is most striking is Verstegan’s incorporation of a discourse on the transience of mercantile wealth. He warns that merchants, who once transported “great riches and commodities”, have become “banckruptes,” and as a result are forced to transition to “mere piracie.” While the term “banckruptes” can be read as a moral
judgment, Verstegan’s description of their subsequent “enforced” turn of their trade to piracy suggests an economic necessity that would logically result only from a loss of their former wealth. This, he argues is a dangerous method of maintaining an economy particularly as compared to the much safer cloth trade that had been England’s main export before the rise of other merchant guilds. Thus, for Verstegan, mercantile wealth can provide “great riches,” but the ensuing fall is equally great, and the destabilizing effect on English society is perhaps the greatest danger of all.

The collapse of distinctions between the groups was exacerbated further by the uncanny capability of the seafaring groups to appropriate the legitimate features of other “classes.” Barbara Fuchs notes:

[T]he English passed as merchants until they spotted a likely target, which suggests that the differences between English merchants and English pirates were not as clear as it might have appeared at first. The latter understood that often all that was required to operate freely was the performance of legitimacy. (49)

Here, Fuchs alludes to the common practice of pirate ships to carry a stock of foreign flags. Once they discovered a possible target, they would hoist a friendly banner in order to lure the vessel into a false sense of security. Indeed, Queen Elizabeth, herself, acknowledged the performative practices of pirates when in her 1569 Proclamation against the maintenaunce of Pirates she specifically denounces the act of flying “fayned colours” in order to gain safe entry into English ports and waterways (1).

Such performances also manifested themselves in other quite dramatic ways. For example, in “Pirates and Turning Turk in Renaissance Drama” Lois Potter cites an episode in the autobiography The Life and Works of Henry Mainwaring (1618), wherein the “reformed pirate” admits that pirates often worked in cahoots with respectable
merchant and other mariners, staging kidnappings in order to facilitate the procurement of quick profit, and a subsequent return to respectable mercantile society. Thus a complex web of interdependency and mutual facilitation emerges. Despite the problems caused by piracy to merchants, it could often offer a way to earn additional money and the unscrupulous pirates not only allowed such practices aboard their ships, they were also happy to play along with the ruse.

Considering the inherently performative nature of early modern piracy, it is not surprising that the seafaring men of late-Elizabethan and early-Jacobean England frequently become the topic of dramatic works of the period, particularly within the genre of plays known as adventure dramas. Particularly following the return of Francis Drake from his successful circumnavigation in 1580, mercantile activity at sea increases exponentially and romantic notions of exotic lands and immense wealth begin to permeate the culture. Of the significance of the voyage, historian Theodore Rabb writes:

At the most general level the success of the venture symbolized England’s emergence as a potential power on the high seas, as a dangerous rival to Spain, and as a possible competitor for the wealth of the East. But Englishman could draw a more immediate lesson from Drake’s successful return. Not only could they rejoice at the startling blow he had struck the Spanish Empire, but they could marvel at the fabulous riches that accompanied the hero homeward. The display of courage might have been expected, but the booty was unprecedented. (20)

Such immense possibilities for wealth accumulation and the associated sense of national pride inspire playwrights such as Robert Daborne, Thomas Heywood, and even Shakespeare, to name but a few, who quickly begin peppering their works with

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5 For several other fascinating examples of the extent to which pirates and private citizens would go in order to disguise their illicit dealings see C.M Senior (pp. 54-57).
representations of the various seafaring groups, the complex relationship between them, and the perils of mercantile activity at sea.  

Barbara Fuchs has argued dramatic depictions of these men are, “an ideal site on which to study the cultural anxieties attendant upon the representation of a merchant nation and the development of an English empire based on commerce” (Fuchs 49). This is largely due to their integral roles in England’s economic and political successes during the Elizabethan period, as compared to the violent change in policy toward them after the ascension of James. Paraphrasing Richard Helgerson’s work on the (trans)formation of English national identity in the early modern period, Barbara Fuchs posits, “the age of discovery saw a mercantile ideology assert itself against an aristocratic one in England and the figure of the wealthy pirate, enriched and often even ennobled by his pillaging, somewhat complicates this transition” (46). Here, as on land, the appearance of immense wealth and success as centered on the figure of the pirate/merchant has a necessarily destabilizing effect, particularly as a result of his questionable status vis-à-vis the state.

Accordingly, Fuchs’ article “Faithless Empires: pirates, renegadoes, and the English Nation,” successfully argues for a reading of adventure dramas as political allegories. Fuchs posits that the incorporation of pirates, privateers, and apostate pirates, such as Daborne’s James Ward, into early-Jacobean drama introduces a not-so-veiled critique of James’ weak and ineffectual foreign and economic policies. The dramatists’ representations of pirates at sea, she suggests, create a “shadow” of the legitimate

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6 In addition to Heywood’s works, which are the subject of the present study, I am referring here respectively to Daborne’s A Christian Turn’d Turk (1612), which depicts the historical Captain John Ward and his transition to apostasy on the Barbary Coast; and to works of William Shakespeare, such as The Merchant of Venice (1600), the plot of which is propelled by the impending danger of mercantile ventures at sea, and Pericles (1609) which incorporates an extensive plot at sea, wherein Pericles’ most prized possession, his daughter is kidnapped by pirates.
government that is sometimes more successful than, and thus dangerous to the rule of the monarch. Following Fuchs, Mark Netzloff’s analysis of the anonymous pamphlet *The Lives Apprehensions, Arraignments, and Executions, of the 19. Late Pyrats* (1609) locates a similar anxiety represented within the non-dramatic text. He cites the case of Captain Harris, who adventures to sea out of a desire to experience the world and its cultures. When he is captured in Tunis, it is a pirate, Captain Bishop, who rescues him. Netzloff notes, “his redemption is accomplished by Bishop, rather than the English state. His subsequent decision to serve under Bishop therefore offers him a surrogate community in light of his home nation’s failure to provide either economic survival at home or protection from captivity abroad” (*England’s Internal Colonies* 62-63). Thus as Fuchs suggests, the pirate state emerges as more successful and reliable than the English one. Though it is true that such allegorical associations can be read politically as a barometer for gauging English notions of self, this hermeneutic model can be extended further to encompass not only imperial anxieties, but also class tensions.

**One if by Sea…**

As is suggested by the title, Heywood and Rowley’s *Fortune by Land and Sea* is comprised of a dual plot structure that juxtaposes the events occurring on land with those at sea.\(^7\) In her seminal biography of Thomas Heywood, Otelia Cromwell refers to the maritime portion of the play as merely “the story of the fortunate youth, who, sailing the seas as an outcast, achieves fortune and honor through miraculous adventures with luck always on his side” (21). Cromwell’s near-omission of any detailed analysis of this important dramatic feature, however, is challenged by Herman Doh in his introduction to the text. In examining the dual plot structure, Doh asserts:

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\(^7\) Hereafter referred to by Act, Scene, line number, and the letter *F*. 
The sub-plot is somewhat more important than Miss Cromwell suggests. Young Forest and his fortune by sea, to which the account of the pirates is tied, is better characterized as the frame-plot. And Young Forest’s good fortune is not to be attributed entirely to luck. However miraculous his adventures, his good fortune is clearly just reward for virtue. (12)

In addition to introducing the centrality of virtue within the play, Doh’s assessment establishes the maritime narrative, not as a subplot, but as a frame by which the entire play operates. Conceding Professor Doh’s inversion of the frame, the presence and function of the maritime classes, as represented within this narrative is of paramount importance. By presenting issues such as class fluidity and appropriation, the dangers of materiality, and the rising virtues of the mercantile class within the geographically separate, protected space at sea, Heywood is able to safely destabilize the notion of hierarchy, and expose the anxieties related to an economy based primarily on mercantile wealth without posing a direct challenge to the system.

Heywood’s view of the changing early modern society is constructed through a complex process by which he simultaneously destabilizes the aristocracy’s claim to superiority, while promoting the importance of the middling groups. Heywood rejects a definition of nobility determined by birth or blood and proposes new criteria based on the ideals of the emergent capitalist/Protestant ethic. In order to expose the inherent flaws and hypocrisy in the existing system, Heywood forces his characters to test traditional definitions of their statuses. He then exposes the ease with which they can appropriate and mimic features of other groups in order to establish the arbitrary and constructed nature of class distinctions. To compound matters, the dramatist stresses the complex web of interdependency between groups to implicitly suggest that the complacency of the aristocracy as the primary force behind their own increasing obsolescence.
The sea-based plot of *Fortune by Land and Sea* is primarily constructed around the character of Young Forest. When the unfortunate youth inadvertently kills the gentleman Rainsford in a duel to avenge his brother’s murder, he is forced to flee England in order to keep his liberty, despite the fair nature of the fight and the accidental nature of Rainsford’s death. Forest laments that he has killed a man, particularly one whose station is elevated above his own:

> but I forget my safety,  
> The Gentleman is dead, my desperate life,  
> Will be oversway’d by his Allies and friends,  
> And I now have no safety but by flight.  
> *(F, 2.2.776-779)*

Formerly a law-abiding man, Young Forest is forced into flight by the hypocrisy of an English law that unfairly doles out punishment to the lower classes while ignoring the transgressions of the upper gentry. After all, his crime is committed in a fair fight, in which he accidentally kills an unpunished murderer, yet he is forced to flee upon remembering that his class status will negate the possibility of fair punitive treatment. Forest’s observation that he will be “oversway’d” by Rainsford’s noble friends and allies suggests that their calls for punishment will be heard far more loudly than his defense. For this reason, when the fugitive Forest happens across Anne Harding, she too is compelled by his unfortunate situation. Thus, Forest’s adventures at sea begin as a sailor on Anne’s brother’s merchant vessel bound for France.

Forrest’s initial exchange with the merchant is revealing. As Forest thanks the man for the compassion and courtesy shown to a “poor” and “dejected” stranger, the merchant responds:

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8 Young Forest kills Rainsford when he trips and falls, accidentally stabbing the gentleman with his sword.
You wrong your worth,
You have desert sufficient, that she writes
In your behalf, and I commend her for’t,
Me thinks I see such honest parts in you,
That upon weaker urgence then these lines,
I would build much affection, on these gifts
That I see nature hath endowed you with;
Indeed I flatter not, none flatter those
They do not mean to gain by, ‘tis the guise
Of siccophants, such great men to adore
By whom they mean to rise, disdain the poor

(F, 3.3.1310-1320)

The merchant’s decision to assist Forest, despite his less than promising position is
ostensibly due to his sister’s intervention. Yet, here the magnanimous man suggests that
even without such prompting, Forest’s inherent virtue is so palpable that had he met him
unassisted, he would have been compelled to help him anyway. Unlike the aristocratic
State, which has been rendered incapable of fairly administering justice by an unfounded
attention to social status, the merchant, a member of the middling group, succeeds in
judging Forest fairly based on his display of virtue. Further, the merchant’s excoriation of
sycophancy betrays an inherent and related flaw in the aristocratic system. Men with
wealth and power are often esteemed, not for their own virtue, but for their ability to raise
the fortunes of others. Admiration of this sort is not admiration at all, but is merely self-
interested falsity. True to his word, Anne’s brother requests nothing more for his gesture
than Young Forest’s love and a note once a year to let him know of his state. Forrest
happily agrees to such fair terms, promising: “But if these black adventures I survive, /
Even till this mortal body lie ingrav’d, / You shall be Lord of that which you have sav’d”
(F, 3.3.1358-1360). Thus, in assisting Forest without the promise of any tangible reward,
the merchant simultaneously reestablishes Forest’s tainted virtue and the superior
integrity of the middling groups. Further, though Forest’s qualification of his forthcoming
adventure as “black” appears to suggest the dismal prospect of his escape and the danger involved, it is more likely however, given the events that follow, that Forrest alludes to the black color of the pirate flag and the piracy that he will undertake in order to forge a success not possible under the social strictures of the official system.

Such superiority of the lesser classes is also manifested in the financial transaction that occurs between Forest and the merchant. Forrest, whose formerly aristocratic family has fallen into decline, is nearly penniless before his flight to sea. Immediately upon joining the merchant crew, Anne’s brother disguises Forest in the habit of a merchant mariner and bestows upon him ten pounds in gold. As a result, Forest’s financial fortunes are immediately rendered less bleak. Further, his appropriation of the features of the mercantile class stabilizes his formerly degenerated class status. It is important to note that aside from the money that has changed hands between the men, all that has taken place quite literally is a change in costume. This both stresses the ease of class fluidity and exposes the highly performative nature of class and occupational legitimacy.

Forrest’s earlier allusion to piracy quickly proves valid when at the conclusion of Act Three we are alerted to the piratical activities of the historical pirates, Purser and Clinton, through the humorous interaction between the Clown and the Pursuivant. Suffering from laryngitis, the Pursuivant is unable to deliver his proclamation denouncing piracy. When he happens upon the Clown, the former attempts to enlist the assistance of the latter in the completion of his task:

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9 The spelling of the word “Pursuivant” was not yet standardized. Spelling in the original text fluctuates between “pursevant” in the speech prefixes, and “pursivant” in the *dramatis personae*. In the interest of consistency, I have chosen to follow the spelling in the *dramatis*, as it most closely resembles the word’s modern appearance.
Sirrah I have a Proclamation to publish, and because
my self am somewhat hoarse, and thou hast a large wide mouth, and a
laudible voice I charge thee for the better understanding of the
multitude to speak after me word by word.

(F, 3.4.1536-1539)

As a representative of the Queen, the pursivant’s inability to denounce piracy acts as an
overt political allegory for what was viewed as the Queen’s inability (or lack of desire) to
definitively reign in those piratical subjects wreaking havoc upon the seas. Perhaps more
importantly, however, the pursivant mentions the Clown’s large wide mouth and its
ability to better address the multitude. Thus, the position of the Clown is elevated. While
the Queen’s representative is ineffective, the lowest servile classes of society, is
established as having a powerful and thus more effective voice. Such an assertion clearly
indicates a decrease in aristocratic superiority and an elevation in that of the lesser
classes. In its correct form the proclamation is intended as:

Whereas two famous Rovers on the Sea. Purser and Clinton. Long since
proclaimed Pirates. Notwithstanding her Majesties commission. Stil keep
out. And have of late spoyled a Ship of Exeter. And thrown the chief
Merchant over board. I therefore in her Majesties name. Proclaim to him
or them. That can bring in these Pirates Ships or Heads. A thousand pound
sterling. If a banisht man his country. If a condemned man liberty. Besides
her Majesties especial favour. And so God save the Queen (F, 3.4.1542-
1570 in alternating lines with the following excerpt)

True to form, however, and despite the agency given him, the clown severely mangles the
proclamation, reversing and negating many of its most important tenets, thus
transforming it into farce:

Whereas two famous Rogues upon the Sea. That lost their purses at the
Clink. Long since proclaimed spirats. Notwithstanding her Majesties
condition. And will not come in. And have of late spoyled all the sheep in
the Exchequer. And thrown the Merchant cheeses over-board. I therefore
in the name of her Majesty. Proclaim to them or him. That can bring in
these Pyecrusts or Sheeps-heads. A thousand Stares and Starlings. If a
man he shall be banisht his country. If a man at liberty condemned.
Besides her Majesties spectacles and favour. And have you done now Sir (F, 3.4. 154201570 in alternating lines with the former excerpt)

The Clown’s mention of the exchequer, or the royal treasurer to whom customs were paid by seafaring merchants, establishes the complacency of the State apparatus. His compounding of the words “spy” and “pirates” also suggests that the pirates are in cahoots with the very authority that denounces their activity. Further, the commutation of the reward from “a thousand pound sterling” to merely “stares and starlings” renders the possibility of compliance with the order nearly moot, as does the promise that aiding the monarchy will revoke a man’s freedom and his citizenship. Finally, the allusions to her majesty’s “condition” and “spectacles” are poignant jabs at her advancing age, yet another sign of her impotency. In this way, the Clown both undermines the authority of the monarchy and calls into question the validity of regarding the pirates as such.

Indeed, the distinction between pirates, merchants and privateers becomes increasingly blurred when we are finally introduced to the notorious Purser and Clinton. At the outset of Act Four Scene One, the men have seized a merchant ship after a long and tedious fight. As the beaten merchants are dragged aboard the pirates’ ship, an argument ensues in which the characters attempt to define the distinctions between their classes. The pirate Clinton quips, “we did not look for such a valiant spirit / In any Merchants breast; nor did we think / A ship of such small burden, so weakly man’d, / Would have endured so hot and proud a fight” (F, 4.1.1591-1594). This statement is an offhanded compliment to the valor and grit displayed by the merchant sailors; qualities that Clinton clearly believes are inherent only to the more piratical classes of seafarers. Yet the fortitude of this particular merchant, as opposed to those the pirates have
previously encountered is indicative of the increasing strength and effectiveness of the mercantile class. The merchant responds by qualifying pirates as “men of base condition,” which is an express reference to an inherent lack of birth or breeding. Here, the merchant appropriates the traditional view of aristocratic superiority in order to establish his own superior position vis-à-vis the pirates (F, 4.1.1596). Despite such attempts to distance one group from the other, the exchange merely betrays the complex and interdependent relationship between them. Clinton explains:

If thou and thine be quite undone by us,
We made by thee, impute it to thy fortune,
And not to any injury in us;
For he that’s born to be a beggar know
How e’r he toyls and trafficks must dye so.
(F, 4.1.1608-1613)

Here, Clinton seeks to invert the traditional hierarchy of legitimacy by subordinating merchant classes to the pirate one. The implication in lines 1612-1613 is that in stealing goods from merchants, pirates are merely acting as agents of fortune. The establishment of pirates as equalizing agents whose activities both serve and erode the existing structure mirrors the discourse surrounding the erosion of the hierarchy at the hands of its own aristocracy. Just as pirates and merchants are inextricably tied in their pursuit of material wealth, so are the aristocratic and mercantile classes in their shared pursuit of profit. Ironically, Clinton’s assertion appears to reinforce a return to the traditional structure, yet the final line may also be read as a warning. Clinton does not suggest that status at birth must be status at death, but rather warns that however one “toyls and trafficks” will determine their fate. In this way, the importance of birth is diminished by the role of industry. And, any members of the aristocracy that willingly lower their status and
associate themselves with the mercantile class for gain are destined to be undone by that same pursuit.

To compound the problem of aristocratic complacency, Heywood continually challenges a hierarchy that privileges the accident of inherited wealth or birthright, over demonstrated virtue. Contrary to the gradated hierarchy on land, sailors on Purser and Clinton’s ship are treated equally, without regard for station. As the spoils of the merchant ship are divided, Purser proclaims “The spoyl of this rich ship we will divide / In equal shares” (F, 4.1.1581-1582). Such a fair distribution of wealth, devoid of hierarchical considerations stands in direct opposition to the established system on land. Purser defends such a structure, arguing “though Out-laws, we keep laws amongst our selves, / Else we could have no certain government” (F, 4.1.1585-1586). As Purser indicates, despite the fact that the pirates are seen as criminals, operating outside of sanctioned laws and governmental regulations, they nevertheless maintain a government of their own in the interest of order at sea. Further, this system, which is far more equal and has seemingly abolished the problematic adherence to hierarchy, is arguably better, more equitable, and thus more legitimate than existing structure.

Such appropriation and improvement of the English social landscape also explains Clinton and Purser’s view of their trade as a legitimate one. When one of the captive merchants recognizes the notorious pirate Clinton Atkinson as having been formerly employed on one of his ships, he laments: “Clinton I know thee, and have us’d thy skil, / Ere now in a good vessel of my own, / Before thou tookest this desperate course of life” (F, 4.1.1621-1623). The case of Clinton clearly illustrates that a legitimate and talented

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10 According to Herman Doh’s introductory material to the text of Fortune by Land and Sea, Clinton Atkinson’s biography and exploits were well-known within the period. The stories had been circulated for
tradesman, (in this case, a navigator), is capable of plying his trade in service of more underhanded pursuits. Clinton challenges the merchant, “We know we are Pirates, and profess to rob, / And wouldst not have us freely use our trade” (F, 4.1.1608-1609).

Responding to the merchant’s reference to Clinton’s skill, the pirate’s establishes piracy as a trade similar, if not identical to that of the seafaring merchants, or their privateer counterparts. Thus, in attempting to exact the merchant’s sympathies with regard to his actions, Clinton invokes a certain occupational camaraderie. Further, for Clinton and Purser, their crossover into piracy is a natural, and thus legitimate extension of the merit based system inherent in a capitalist structure. The men have long since passed their apprenticeships, and thus believe they have a right to become masters. If merchant mariners and privateers are able to “use their trade” at sea, their piratical counterparts, using more or less the same skills, and considering the fluidity between groups, also have a right to do so in pursuit of their own fortunes. Finally, considering the monarchy’s support of pirateering under Elizabeth, Clinton’s association of piracy with legitimate trade is a fair one, which further exposes the hypocrisy of denouncing them as criminals.

Indeed, Heywood’s 1639 pamphlet A True Relation of the Lives and Deaths of the two most Famous English Pyrats, Purser and Clinton (1639), also recounts the lives of Purser and Clinton. In it, Purser and Clinton determine:¹¹

in regard of their experience and skill in navigation, what basenesse it was in them to bee no better than servants, who had both the Judgement and ability to command, and to bee onely Employed to benefit and inrich others, whilst they in the Interim wanted themselves: They further

¹¹ Though its authorship was initially contested, recent scholarship has definitively accepted Heywood as the author of the pamphlet. It was Arthur Melville Clark who first suggested the link in his 1931 biography of the dramatist. In his critical edition of Fortune by Land and Sea, Herman Doh’s examination of the source material for the play includes an extensive side-by-side comparison of the dialogue between the pursuivant and the clown, which appears nearly verbatim in both texts.
reasoned that service was no heritage, and that in regard they had eyther of them beene more than a prentiship to learne their art, it was now high time to be freemen of the Sea. (sig. B1r)

Here, the pirates argue that knowledge and skill are capable of determining class status. Thus, their expertise and success in seafaring must establish them as masters, rather than common sailors. Here, the pirates’ argument attempts to establish piracy as a legitimate trade that follows a similar apprenticeship structure to that which existed in guild society.

In view of this, it is not surprising that from Clinton and Purser’s perspectives, they are merely victims of the arbitrary nature of English law: “Since our country have proclaim’d us pyrats, / And cut us off from any claim in England, / We’ll be no longer now call’ed English men” (F, 4.1.1618-1620). Reminscent of the Clown’s translated proclamation, Purser expresses the disappointment and abandonment felt by those members of the seafaring classes whose services were used to further State interests under Elizabeth, but were later criminalized by James. This disillusionment bred in hypocrisy is the impetus for the pirates’ denunciation of their nationality, and becomes their justification for the indiscriminate looting of English ships.

In order to successfully ply such a trade, Purser and Clinton appropriate legitimate State symbols to appear as law-abiding English merchants. As the pirates approach Forest’s ship, the Boatswain spies their sail and tells Forest, “She bears the Cross of England and St. George” (F, 4.2.1759). True to his role as privateer, Young Forrest refuses to attack because of its appearance as an English ship. Such a display is merely a ruse by the pirates who have used the symbol of England to lure Forest’s crew into a false sense of security. After the deception is revealed, a hearty battle ensues and Young Forest’s “pirateer” crew emerges as victorious. The pirates are captured and their former
prosperity is reversed. When Purser and Clinton enter as captives, Purser muses on the turn of fate that has subjugated them again: “We now are captives that made others thrall / Thus ebb may flow, and highest tydes may fall” (F, 4.5.1845-1846). The explicit reference to fortune reinforces Clinton’s previous argument that those who earn by plunder are destroyed plunder. Thus the ultimate victory of the “legitimate” Englishmen appears to reinforce the proper social order. Yet the fact remains that Forest’s crew is engaged in the same activities. As such, any distinction between the men is necessarily diminished. Further, and perhaps most significantly, the swift change in fortune implies yet another warning to those members of the aristocracy who associate with such activities: Mercantile wealth is transient wealth. Fortunes may rise, but the ventures are necessarily risky, and any who might engage in such endeavors do so at their own peril.

Accordingly, having grown to the heights of power and prestige at sea, Clinton and Purser face execution upon being captured. While walking to the gallows, Purser asks Clinton how he is faring in the face of death. When Clinton tells him he is doing well, Purser responds:

But was’t not better when we raign’d as Lords,  
Nay Kings at Sea, the Ocean was our realm,  
And the light billows in the which we sayl’d  
Our hundreds, nay our shires, and provinces,  
That brought us annual profit, those were daies.  
(F, 5.1.2157-2161)

In this, his final speech, Purser betrays the inherent flaw for which the men are ultimately punished. His conflation of piracy with monarchy attempts to appropriate the privilege and power of the aristocracy at its very highest level. At sea, forging their own destiny outside the social strictures of Elizabethan England, these men successfully mimicked traditional and legitimate structure to create their fortunes, to serve their nation, and to
appropriate the power afforded to their social superiors. Such a mirroring of English society outside of its boundaries, however, cannot be tolerated within the confines of the hierarchy, and so the two pirates, once captured, must be divested of their wealth, freedom, and power.

Although the deaths of Purser and Clinton can be interpreted as a restoration of the proper order, the execution scene subverts such a reading. As a practical matter, the deaths of two men who are officially considered common criminals could easily be included in the drama as a mere point of narrative fact. Yet, Heywood devotes an entire scene almost exclusively to the pirates, allowing them over a hundred lines for their final speeches, in which they reiterate the hypocrisy of their treatment. As they approach the gallows, Purser recalls their great successes and characterizes them as men whose exploits supplant those of the official state:

    How many Captains that have aw’d the seas
    Shall fal on this infortunate peece of land?
    Some that commanded Ilands, some to whom
    The Indian Mines pay’d Tribute, Turk vayl’d:
    But when we that have quak’d, nay troubled flouds,
    And made Armadoes fly before our stream,
    Shall founder thus, be split and lost,
    Then be it no impeachment to their fame,
    Since Purser and bold Clinton bide the same.

(F, 5.1.2203-2211)

Purser’s lamentation here credits the pirates with the very achievements that had long preoccupied Elizabeth. Colonization of islands, trade with India, the subjugation of the Turks, and the defeat of the Spanish armada all are accomplished by the strength and skill of the pirates, rather than the power and efficiency of the legitimate State. Despite such brave and noble actions in the interest of England, the men appear to be treated as little more than rogues. Recognizing this, Purser’s expresses his particular discontent at having
fallen so far that they are “the scorn of a base common hangman” (*F*, 5.1.2224-2225).

Yet, in their final moments Heywood incorporates a seemingly innocuous gesture that further betrays the State’s hypocrisy. Just before their deaths Purser addresses the sheriff:

“Mr. Sheriff, you see we wear good clothes, / They are payd for, and our own, then give us leave / Our own amongst our friends to distribute: / There’s Sir, for you” (*F*, 5.1.2245-2248). He later adds: “Wear them for our sakes, and remember us” (5.2.2252-2253).

Here, Heywood appropriates contemporary martyrdom accounts wherein Protestant martyrs dispose of their earthly goods at the site of execution often requesting bystanders to wear or to keep the items in remembrance of their ultimate sacrifice for the cause. Such a recoding of terms at the precise moment of death both mitigates the effect of the punishment upon the audience and redeems the men’s legacies. In this way, Heywood pressures the arbitrary nature of traditional class distinctions and destabilizes a hierarchy supported by hypocrisy.

*Two if by Land* …

While Young Forest propels the plot at sea, it is the events surrounding his older brother that facilitate the land narrative. At the outset of the play Mr. Rainsford, a “quarrelsome” gentleman, inadvertently murders the son of Old Forest, a former gentleman who has lost his wealth, perhaps through a failed mercantile venture.\(^{12}\)

Immediately prior to the nobleman’s transgression Old Forest admonishes his son for carousing with members of an intemperate class of aristocracy:

\(^{12}\) In maintaining the integrity of the original edition, Herman Doh does not standardize the spelling of the Forest surname, which also appears at times as “Forrest.” The doubling of the “r,” however, appears only in the abbreviated speech prefixes, while the *dramatis personae* is consistent with modern spelling of the word. I have standardized the spelling to “Forest” throughout this study, despite its ease of confusion with the gentleman “Foster.”
Oh sonne, that thou wilt follow rioting,
Surfeit by drinking and unseasoned hours;
These Gentlemen perhaps may do’t they’re rich,
Well landed, and their Fathers purchase dayly,
Where I heaven knows the world still frowning on me,
Am forc’d to sell and Margage to keep you.

(F, 1.1.47-52)

Old Forest implies that wealth and status merely allows the men in Rainsford’s group to participate in nefarious behavior. The implication here is that aristocratic wealth, unassisted by accompanying virtue, merely promotes moral corruption. His challenge to the men’s “nobility” continues as he attempts to define that which he deems to be legitimate:

Let me tell you, had you gentlemen
Called him to any fairer exercise,
As practice of known weapons, or to back
Some gallant gennet; had it been to dance,
Leap in the fields, to wrestle, or to try
Masteries in any noble quality,
I could have spared him to you half his age:
But call him out to drinking, of all skill
I hold that much us’d practice, the most ill.

(F, 1.1.29-37)

According to Old Forest, acceptable features of the aristocracy include playing at war, defense of the nation, or perfecting the more sensible and lofty arts. However, in choosing to indulge their more profligate desires, these men have failed to apprehend nobility. Although the men are born gentleman, their behavior as displayed is not commensurate with their position. In this way, the authority with which the old man diminishes the men’s nobility establishes the moral superiority of the “middling group” to which Old Forest has been relegated.

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13 Members of the nobility were often encouraged to participate in activities more appropriate to their station. The 1486 The Gentlemans Academie, written by Juliana Berners, for example, instructs the gentility in the fine arts of, “Hawking, Hunting, and Armorie,” which are “so necessarie and behovefull to the accomplishment of the Gentlemen of this flourishing ile” (A3r).
Prior to Act III, Scene II, the audience/reader knows only that Old Harding, a noble gentleman, probably of the “country elite,” or “middle class” of gentility, has disinherited his eldest son, Philip, for his decision to marry the daughter of Old Forest.\(^{14}\) Like her father, Susan Forest is a product of diminished wealth and thus, is dowerless.\(^{15}\) Upon discovering that the girl has wed his son, Old Harding protests against the marriage and encourages Philip to cast off his new wife in favor of a more socially appropriate choice. In an attempt to persuade his father that he has made a sensible match, the men enter into a debate regarding the benefits of virtue over wealth:

PHIL: Do men use
By other hearts and eyes their wives to chuse?
OLD HARDING: She’s poor.
PHIL: Yet virtuous.
OLD HARDING: Virtue, a sweet dower.
PHIL: Yet that when Mammon fails retains her power.
OLD HARDING: Possest of virtue then thou need nought else.
PHIL: Riches may waste by fire, by sea, by stealth,
But water, fire, nor theft can virtue waste,
When all else fails us that alone shall last.
OLD HARDING: Go to Cheapside with virtue in your purse,
And cheapen Plate, or to the Shambles hye,
And see what meat with virtue you can buy.
Will virtue make the pot seeth, or the Jack
Turn a spit laden? tell me, will your Landlord
at quarter day take virtue for his rent?
Will your Wives virtue yield you ten i’th hundred?
A good stock would do all this.
\((F.1.3.363-380)\)

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\(^{14}\) The term “country elite” is taken from Lawrence Stone’s explication of the various classes of gentility. My qualification of it as the “middle class” merely indicates that, according to Stone, the “titular peerage” is ranked above it in the hierarchical schema, while the class of “plain gentleman” falls below.

\(^{15}\) It is difficult to definitively determine the exact social status of Old Forest. The manner in which he speaks about his situation to his son, combined with Harding’s disdain regarding his son’s marriage to Susan suggests that he has fallen completely out of the gentry. However, the role reversal motif that exists between the two men would indicate that Forest has simply moved out of the “middle gentry” and into the lower. At this level, it is possible that he would not have any dowry to offer for his daughter, but that his son could retain enough respectability to carouse with men situated in the classes directly above him.
In keeping with the argument constructed in Gibbon’s tract on marriage, Philip’s position clearly indicates not only that virtue is capable of defining gentility, but also that in the choice of a wife it is far more tangible and valuable than wealth. Although his father believes it insufficient to promote the young man’s fortunes and to maintain his class status, he too, has married the dowerless Anne in favor of her virtue.\footnote{The sentiments echoed in Old Harding’s final lines in this exchange share striking affinities with Lord William Cecil Burghley’s 1611 \textit{The Counsell of a Father to His Sonne in ten severall Precepts}. In it, Burghley encourages his son to “use great providence and circumspection in the choice of thy wife,” and warns him, “let her not be poore, howe generous soever: for a man can buy nothing in the market with gentility” (1). Burghley’s letter also expressly warns against “parasites and sycophants, who will feed and faune on thee in the sommer of thy prosperity, but in any adverse storme, they will shelter thee no more, then an Arbour in Winter” (1). The kind of men herein described are just the sort of men represented in the drama by Goodwin and Foster, whose behavior toward Philip in Act Three, Scene Four establishes them as sycophants and fickle “friends.” Such similarities call into question whether Lord Burghley himself was familiar with Heywood’s play and, perhaps had it in mind when formulating the instructions to his son.} Despite his opposing position regarding his son’s marriage, Old Harding warns his younger sons that if they refuse to accept and respect Anne as a mother, he will disown them, as well: “And boyes I tell you, though you be my sonnes, / You much forget your duty to a Mother / Whom I hold worthy to be called my Wife; / No more of this I charg you” (\textit{F}, 1.3.309-312). Like his eldest son, at least as it pertains to his wife, Harding privileges virtue over status, challenging the traditional importance of such considerations.

Notwithstanding this fact, where Philip is concerned, Harding makes good on his promise to disown him, thereby betraying his own hypocrisy, circumventing the laws of primogeniture, and thus further upsetting the traditional order. In a final act of egregious rebellion, Harding installs Philip and Susan as servants in the household. In a scene strikingly similar to the instantaneous change in status afforded to Young Forest by the merchant, Harding immediately demands that Philip and Susan be habited in the appropriate attire to reflect their change in status:
Come then, off  
With these gay cloaths, no habits fit for hyndes;  
Help boys to suite them as their fortunes are;  
Go search in the clowns wardrobe.  
(F, 2.1.633-636)

Here, Harding reinforces the concept of sumptuary laws that sought to make class status visually apparent. Such a practice thwarts the kind of class appropriation denounced by Richard Mulcaster, yet pressures the very concept of class status, by stressing its theatricality. Harding mistakenly believes that a mere whim and change of costume can remove Philip’s gentility, which merely challenges the fact of its existence. After all, if class status is established by his birth, merely swapping out his garments should be insufficient to divest him of it. Further, Anne begs Old Harding: Oh bear a soft and more relenting soul, / And look upon the vertues of your sonne, / This Gentlewomans birth” (F, 2.1.591-593). Here, Anne both suggests that Philip has an inherent virtue that should supersede his transgression, and reminds Old Harding that despite Susan’s diminished wealth, she remains gentle by birth. Yet, the hypocritical Harding insists upon maintaining a traditional concept of gentility.

This debate regarding the locus of nobility intrigues the clown and as the parties part ways, he muses about which to side with: “Now which of these parties shall I cleave to and follow: / well now I remember my self, Ile show my self a true Citizen and / stick to the stronger side” (F, 1.3.427-430). In the scene that follows, we learn that the Clown has offered to assist Philip in his servitude, vowing to take on a double amount of chores, and to relieve Philip from the most labor-intensive work. Heywood’s attribution of the capitalized term “Citizen” is of note in this context and produces an interesting double meaning. Thomas Heywood was well-known for his “citizen comedies,” which primarily
dealt with the interests of the middling classes as their subject. The Clown’s reference to himself as a “true citizen” who will “stick to the stronger side” lends itself to two possible analyses. At first glance, his implication seems denunciatory in its implication that the “true citizen” or at least the average English one is fickle in nature and thus will always follow the side that appears to be stronger. On the other hand, the Clown’s association of the “stronger side” with the man whose estate is lacking, yet whose virtues abound, is indicative of the increasing prevalence of the Capitalist/Protestant ethic into the social hierarchy.

Such modes of wealth accumulation, though attractive, are necessarily unstable and transient, as is the associated mobility among class structures. Thus the dramatist includes extensive debates these subjects, as characters struggle to stabilize their own positions, and define the locus of nobility. Issues such as these are illustrated in the play by the adversarial relationship that emerges between the Harding and Forest patriarchs, particularly in the conversation that occurs in Act Three when Forest approaches Old Harding:

OLD HARDING: I what are thou fellow.
OLD FOREST: You knew me in my pride and flourishing state, Have you forgot me now, as I remember We two were bred together, Schoole fellows, Boorded together in one Masters house, Both of one forme and like degree in School. OLD HARDING: Oh thy name’s Forest. OLD FOREST: Then in those days your Father Mr. Harding Was a good honest Farmer, Tennant too Unto my Father. All the wealth he purchast, Far be upbraiding from me, came from us As your first raiser; and you called me then Your landlord and young Master: then was then, But now the course of fortunes wheele is turned; You climbed, we fell, and that inconstant fate That hurled us down, hath lift you where we sate.
OLD HARDING: Well, we are Lord of all those Mannors now,  
You then possest. Have we not bought them deerly?  
Are they not ours?  
(F, 3.2.1179-1197)

Here, we learn that prior to the change in fortune the Harding family was once the tenant of the Forests. Notwithstanding this deceivingly clear gradation between them, Forest’s assertion that as boys they were “both of one forme and like degree” establishes that the men are equals in birth and breeding. Forest, however, has fallen from his aristocratic position due to a loss of wealth, perhaps unsuccessfully ventured, while Harding has managed to increase his fortune and gain access to a higher level of gentility. The tension exhibited between the men is created by Harding’s anxiety regarding the stability and permanence of his elevated position. Accordingly, the revelations present within Harding’s debate with Forest suggest that the former’s disdain for the marriage may result from a desire to decrease proximity to his more humble origins in order to mitigate the danger of social backslide.

Such a desire to increase and maintain social distance is also enacted through Harding’s attempts at mimetic appropriation of the norms and codes of the upper classes of gentility. As he and Old Forest continue their conversation, Harding becomes increasingly annoyed at its length. When Harding orders Forest to leave his presence, the latter again reminds him of their equal birth, and argues that he has not lost his gentility merely through the loss of his wealth:

OLD FOREST: Tis no disparagement unto your birth, / That you converse with me, if I mistake not, / Sure, sure I am as wel born”

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17 As in the case of his foil, a complete picture of Old Harding’s financial situation is inaccessible from the text. We know that he is now landed based on his discussion of tenancy with Forest. It can be inferred, however, that his wealth must be primarily gained through mercantile activity, both because of his proven upward mobility and because of Goodwin’s mention of “moveables” with regard to the content of his will.
OLD HARDING: And yet sure, sure, / ‘Tis ten to one I shall be better buried.
OLD FOREST: I am as honest.
OLD HARDING: Nay there you are a ground. / I am honester by twenty thousand pound.
OLD FOREST: Are all such honest then that riches have.
OLD HARDING: Yes rich and good, and poor man and a knave.

(F, 3.2.1255-1264)

Here, each man classifies “honesty” as a feature of nobility, but they fail to achieve a mutual understanding of the word’s meaning. For Forest, currently the lesser man, honesty is indicative of one who is truthful and trustworthy, while Harding understands the word in its more economic sense, to mean that he is “good for” the money. What is most enlightening, perhaps, is the thought on which Harding concludes. His perception of class is constructed in accordance with Lawrence Stone’s description of the aristocratic ethic and thus is a binary one that equates wealth with good and poverty with roguishness, without the possibility of exception to the rule based on an individual’s particular virtues. Such an opinion held by a newly made member of the upper gentility is a clear appropriation of views traditionally associated with the aristocracy and is particularly hypocritical considering Harding’s origins.

Perhaps more striking are the ways such mimesis becomes enacted dramatically, as by Harding’s insistence on seating his guests at dinner according to their social position:

“Y’ar welcome Gentlemen, come take your places / As your degrees are: wife the chair is yours; / My loving boyes sit, let th’servants wait” (F, 4.6.1929-1931). Here again, though Harding is ostensibly preserving the traditional notion of hierarchy, the privileging of his dowerless wife over his sons and of his youngest sons over his eldest constitutes a mere semblance of structure where none, in fact, exists. Harding is not, after all, a true member of the titular peerage, or even of the highest levels of gentry. His extreme attempts to
create class association through mimicry are inherently erroneous, and his ultimate demise as a result of a lost mercantile venture serves as a warning to the very social class he mimics. Despite his attempts to achieve distance from the lower classes, his mercantile activities have nevertheless interwoven his fortunes with theirs. As a result, his worst fears are realized as this comingling of fortunes eventually drags him back to his former position. As Harding has “toyl’d and trafficked” in order to gain his social status through mercantile activity, so has he been undone by those same efforts. Further, his case has necessarily eroded the structure of the very hierarchy he has tried to promote, both by allowing him in originally and by exposing the instability of traditional class systems. This occurrence within the drama functions as a veiled critique of members of the titular peerage, including the Queen herself, who ventured their fortunes at sea during the period. Like Harding, these aristocrats wished to reap the benefits of the newly emerging economy, while naively failing to understand the overt risk such endeavors posed to the entire structure and perpetuation of the aristocracy. His death then is proof that one cannot successfully partake of the emerging system without tacitly promoting the accompanying changes to social structure.

The juxtaposition of Harding’s son Philip with his younger brothers extends the discussion regarding the essential features of nobility. Like their father, Old Harding’s younger sons, Will and John attempt to mimic aristocratic ideals out of a desire for upward mobility. In contrast to their humble and patient brother, Philip, the younger boys are greedy and anxious to capitalize on his misfortune in order to circumvent his birthright and inherit their father’s estate. While Philip values happiness and goodness over material wealth, his younger siblings muse about “living like emperors,” causing
Philip to quip, “Well jest on Gentlemen, when all is try’d, / I hope my patience will exceed your pride” (F, 4.6.1944-1945). Relegated to the role of family servant, Philip’s shift in fortune now situates him within the lowest of class structures, reversing the traditional order and subjugating him to his younger brothers. Will and John’s purposeful mistreatment of Philip and his wife is yet another example of a desire to distance oneself from downward mobility through performance. Will stresses the reversal of fortune, barking orders to Philip while reminding him, “it seems we have got the start of you for being / but a servant you are taken a button-hole lower” (F, 2.3.797-798). John reacts in kind with his treatment of Susan vowing, “if I do not find work for her, Ile doe nothing but take to / bacco in every room, because twice a day Ile make her make clean the house” (F, 2.3.821-822). By cruelly creating additional work for their siblings, and exaggerating their role as superiors, John and Will exhibit the kind of nobility that Jones refers to as the “vulgar sort.” Conversely, Philip is established as the epitome of the “most commendable” or “true” kind of nobility achieved by a combination of gentle birth tempered with the Protestant ideals of humble patience and magnanimity. That all three boys are related and are the product of equal rearing places a significant amount of pressure on a system that blindly values the accident of fate that is one’s birth or blood. Further, the fact that Philip’s wish for patience to withstand the voracity of his brothers’ greed is eventually granted through the restoration of wealth, supports the increasing view that such an occurrence is both possible, and perhaps, preferable.

When the land and sea plots finally converge in Act Four, Scene Six, news of Harding’s lost venture finally reaches land. The shock of such a significant loss of wealth proves fatal for the old man: “That news hath pierc’d my soul, and enter’d me / Quite...
through the heart, I am on the sudden sick, / Sick I fear of mortal malady” (F, 4.6.1969-1971). Such a severe reaction is perplexing. Although Harding has likely lost a substantial amount of wealth, the fact remains that the old man’s death signals the restoration of Philip as heir to his estate. This, of course presupposes that there remains something to inherit. It is significant that the gentleman, Foster is the one to comment on the extremity of Harding’s reaction: “‘Tis strange the bare report of such a loss / Should strike a man so deeply to the heart” (F, 4.6.1998-1999). Although Foster, as a representative of the aristocracy fails to correctly interpret the message, Harding’s death by mercantile venture allegorically symbolizes the death of the traditional aristocratic structure. As the mercantile class gains power, the Capitalist/Protestant ethic supplants the traditional aristocratic one. To this end, the “strike to the heart” metaphor, which reiterates Harding’s own lamentation refers to the blow that the mercantile economy and the resulting shifts in social structure deal to the traditional English aristocratic system. The irony, of course, is that the “hand that strikes the blow” is their own.

In the case of Philip Harding, even a failed mercantile venture at sea has sufficient power to restore the proper social order, where the official traditional structure has failed. Philip is ultimately rewarded for his patience, generosity, and loyalty, all essential features of the emerging Capitalist/Protestant ethic. Indeed, even though Philip has technically achieved upward mobility, he has succeeded in doing so not by appropriating or performing the legitimate structure as Harding, his younger sons, and the pirates Clinton and Purser do, but rather through industry and humility.

Such inherent virtues are further displayed by the fair and magnanimous treatment of his thankless brothers, as he promises to provide their patrimony and to welcome them at
his table, despite their former cruelty to him. His goodwill, however is accompanied by a warning:

Spend but in compass, rioting eschew,
Waste not, but seek to encrease your patrimony,
Beware of dice and women, company
With men of best desert and qualitie;
Ay but these words in your hearts inrold,
You’ll find them better then these bags of gold

(F, 4.6.2064-2069)

Although Will and John have technically been punished by the loss of their inheritance prospects, in fact their positions never truly changed. Without a signed will, the boys never actually supplanted Philip. Thus, the “punishment” for their lacking virtue is insufficient. Philip’s warning here is reminiscent of Old Forest’s admonition to his elder son at the outset of the play. Will and John remain lacking in virtue, and thus Philip’s excoriation of gaming and women seeks to prohibit a decline into profligacy. Such a warning, issued by the virtuous Philip again places the ethics of his brothers in direct contrast with his own. And, true to form the boys immediately prove their lack of mettle. Upon receiving the money Will says:

Thanks for your coyn and counsel: Come Jack this shall be lavish among the suburbs: here’s drink mony, dice mony, and drab mony, here’s mony by the back, and mony by the belly; here’s that shall make us merry in Claret, Muskadine, and Sherrey

(F, 4.6.2070-2073)

Thus, the boys fail to heed Philip’s advice, and the audience is left to infer that their true punishment is yet to come. Without landed estates, and with no apparent means to earn additional wealth, their adherence to vice will eventually affect their demise. As the boys exit to pursue their riotous behavior, Philip is left with the sycophantic gentlemen

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Goodwin and Foster. After administering a hearty admonishment for their previous behavior, he presents them with a legacy of their own:

Take heed lest here for your unthankfulness,
That I once rais’d, doe not remove your estates
(God be with you) henceforth howe’r you speed,
Trust not in riches, and despise not need.
(F, 4.6.2085-2088)

Just as Harding’s death facilitates Heywood’s warning regarding the complacency of the aristocracy, Goodwin and Foster, as the only remaining gentlemen from the outset of play are the recipients of his final admonition. As Philip speaks, the veiled message that has been implied throughout the plays becomes clearly and concisely expressed: Gentlemen, however you may go from here, muddling one’s fortunes with moveable wealth will ruin your estates and your claim to superiority. Further, his request of them to “despise not need” suggests that if they wish to thwart the impending obsolescence of their privileged hierarchical positions, they must necessarily adapt their ethic to incorporate the ideals of the emergent Capitalist/Protestant social identity.

One if by Land…

As in Fortune by Land and Sea, both The Fair Maid of the West Parts I and II are also comprised of concurrent land and sea-based plots.18 Beginning in a Plymouth tavern, ostentatious attempts at class mimicry frame the narrative surrounding the tavern wench, Bess and her beloved gentleman, Spencer. As the plot develops across both installments, Heywood’s focus in The Fair Maid Parts I and II becomes increasingly transfixed on issues such as the locus of true gentility, the increasing ambiguity and hypocrisy of  

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18 Hereafter referred to by Act, Scene, line number, and the letters FMI or FMII. Although the installments were written roughly thirty years apart, I have chosen to examine the plays as one plot trajectory, rather than two distinct works. Many of the themes identified in Part I consistently reappear or are resolved in Part II.
traditionally held hierarchical categories, and the rapid and sometimes farcical reversal of fortune that could accompany proto-capitalist success, particularly at sea.

As Act One of *Fair Maid of the West Part I* opens the audience/reader is immediately made aware of the tremendous accumulation and performative display of mercantile wealth. Upon arrival in Plymouth at the outset of the play, one of the captains accompanying the gentleman, Mr. Carrol, remarks: “How Plymouth swells with gallants! How the streets / Glister with gold! You cannot meet a man / But trick’d in scarf and feather, that it seems / As if the pride of England’s gallantry / Were harbor’d here” (*FMI*, 1.1.11-15). Contemporary usage of the word “gallant” was understood to indicate “a man of fashion and pleasure; a fine gentleman” or merely “a gentleman, in a semi-ironical tone.” (*OED Online Ed.*)19 Here, the captain employs both meanings in context in order to qualify the importance of his observation. The captain’s assertion that the streets “glister with gold” is a reference to the recent influx of mercantile-related capital, particularly in port towns like Plymouth. Such excessive material wealth allowed a far greater number of ‘middling sorts’ to purchase the appearance of nobility without the pedigree to sustain it. Thus, the captain’s first mention of the word is meant to contain the ironical tone of a man who notices so many finely “trick’d” and “self-made” gentleman that it would seem to him that the very finest of true gentleman had come to be harbored in Plymouth.

Accordingly, in the second instance, his reference is to the legitimate “man of privilege.” Such a seemingly innocuous reaction to his environment eloquently introduces the theme of class appropriation and hierarchical mimesis. In addition to the practical problem of distinguishing a “real” aristocrat from an imposter, these gallants are in violation of sumptuary laws, which required citizens to dress according to their appropriate class

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status. One might imagine that a sudden influx of these “false” gentlemen would not only cause confusion in the determination of true class association but would also cause a marked destabilization in the concept of true nobility. Again, if birth or blood is not visibly apparent, and every man is dressed as a gentleman, how does one distinguish the true noble from so many imposters? Accordingly, Heywood’s framing of the play with such problems of social mimesis within the official structure presents a tangible challenge to traditional hierarchical structure that continues to manifest itself throughout both *Fair Maid* dramas.

In response to such a challenge, *The Fair Maid of the West Parts I and II* are rife attempts place pressure on traditional notions of gentility in order to redefine its features. To this end, Bess’ spotless character is presented as the model of virtue, industry, and patriotism by which virtually all of the other characters are judged. Spencer’s love for Bess, a tavern maid and tanner’s daughter, places him in an precarious position, as her low birth establishes her as unsuitable for marriage to a man of Spencer’s breeding. Goodlack chides the gentleman’s admiration: “Come, I must tell you, you forget yourself. / One of your birth and breeding thus to dote / Upon a tanner’s daughter! Why, her father / Sold hides in Somersetshire and being trade-fall’n / Sent her to service” (*FMI*, 1.2.15-19). Despite Goodlack’s assertion of Bess’ unworthiness, Spencer defends the object of his affection, arguing that he has tested the girl’s virtue, continually proving her faithful and chaste. Spencer bucks traditional custom by inviting Bess to join their table, yet she refuses: “My fellows love me not and will complain / Of such as saucy boldness” (*FMI*, 1.2.68-69). Although Spencer’s social superiority allows him the freedom to treat Bess with magnanimity, the girl recognizes that her position prohibits her from accepting his
request without consequence. Spencer is, after all, influenced in his promotion of her status by his love, but Bess reasonably understands that other gentlemen present in the tavern will certainly take affront to any perceived challenge to their superiority. Bess laments her iniquity: “for I could wish / I had been born to equal you in fortune / Or you so low to have been rank’d with me; / I could have then presumed boldly to say / I love none but my Spencer” (*FMI*, 1.2.80-84). Compelled by her sentiment and faithfulness, Spencer gives Bess a hundred pounds and bids her to keep it in the event of his misfortune at sea. Thus the girl’s intangible virtue is imbued with material value.

Such virtuous behavior unfortunately does not extend to the ‘true’ gentleman drinking in the tavern. Mr. Carrol and his two captain friends begin rioting on the upper floor. Heavily laden with drink, Carrol’s gentility fails to exonerate him from the vices commonly associated with profligate nobility. The men demand Bess’ service but when she does not immediately acquiesce, the brawl escalates. Spencer intervenes on Bess’ behalf, telling Carrol: “This is my room; / And if you bear you, as you seem in show, / Like gentlemen, sit and be sociable” (*FMI*, 1.2.121-123). Here, Spencer expresses a similar observation to the captain’s earlier one that merely because a man is able to dress as a gentleman, does not necessarily indicate that he will behave as such. Upon finally joining Spencer’s party, Carrol’s bawdy and denunciatory conversation reverts to Bess. He argues to Spencer, “Though you may be companion with a drudge, / It is not fit she should have place by us” (*FMI*, 1.2.128). Forgetting that he Spencer’s guest, Carrol continues his attempt to relegate Bess to her appropriate position. Spencer counters, “She is worthy / The place as the best here, and she shall keep’t” (*FMI*, 1.2.129-130). Spencer’s avowal indicates that although Bess is low born and employed as a tavern
wench, her exhibited virtue qualifies her as equal or superior in stature to many of those who have had fortunate births, and certainly to Carrol, himself. Thus, according to Spencer, Bess’ virtue not only compensates for her lack of gentility but also imbues her with it. Perhaps anticipating Young Forest in FLS, when Carrol persists in his debasement of Bess, Spencer accidentally kills him and is forced to flee his homeland in order to escape an ineffective system of justice that would punish Spencer for his fair and honorable defense of honor and virtue in favor of the vice-ridden belligerency of a “gentlemanly” drunk.

The hypocrisy of Spencer’s sad fortune is compounded, as Bess continues to prove her spotless virtue. Prior to his departure, Spencer arranges through Goodlack to clandestinely meet his love. Concerned for Spencer’s wellbeing, Bess offers not only to return his money, but also to give her own savings to ensure his safe passage. Spencer refuses and subsequently gives her the keys to his trunk, which includes the majority of his “money, apparel, and what else thou find’st” (FMI, 1.3.39). Bess now possesses all the distinguishing features of the upper classes, with the exception of birth; yet any eventual removal from the geographic borders of England would disallow any knowledge of her previous position. This, in combination with her virtue has arguably made her superior to intemperate members of the aristocracy, as Spencer previously suggests. Ironically, Spencer’s shift of wealth to Bess raises her status to that of a woman that would be an appropriate match for a gentleman. Had Spencer been allowed to marry her without consideration for social norms, the union would also have had the same elevating effect on her station, while erasing the issue of breeding.
Notwithstanding this rapid rise in fortune, the gift of Spencer’s portrait becomes her most prized possession. Despite Bess’ improved condition, she remains wholly unaffected by material considerations. This is evidenced by her reaction when, after it appears that Spencer has died, Goodlack attempts to divest her of the picture. The girl’s misery is palpable: “Rob me not of the chiefest wealth I have. / Search all my trunks; take the best jewels there. / Deprive me not that treasure; I’ll redeem it / With my plate and all the little coin I have, / So I may keep that still” (*FMI*, 3.4.10-14). Bess’s willingness to part with the totality of her wealth and to return to her former position both displays her loyalty to Spencer and reinforces her lack of regard for materiality. Compelled by this demonstration of virtue to Spencer, Goodlack is obliged to reveal the true purpose of his visit, which is to inform Bess that she has inherited the remainder of Spencer’s estate. Again, her response illustrates her privileging of: “This surplusage of love hath made my loss, / That was but great before, now infinite” (*FMI*, 3.4.86-87). Far from pleasing Bess, this newly acquired wealth merely exacerbates the pain of her loss, which suggests that in a climate of mercantile activity, for some there remain more important priorities than wealth accumulation or upward mobility. Bess’ reaction notwithstanding, the transference of Spencer’s moveable wealth succeeds in instantly raising her social status. This shift is compounded by the additional transference of real property in the form of the tavern at Foy, which also establishes her as landed member of gentility. Of this phenomenon, Barbara Fuchs argues, “Bess’ rise in the world stems from Spencer’s charitable bequests to her; *no matter how virtuous*, she would never have gotten rich without him” (61 emphasis mine). While this is essentially true, it is precisely because of Bess’ virtue that Spencer elevates her status. Thus, virtue and social mobility are not
mutually exclusive as Fuchs would suggest, but rather Heywood establishes the necessity of virtue as a prerequisite for acceptable movement between classes.

Indeed, the relationship between Bess’ virtue and her wealth is far more complex than Fuchs allows. Several scholars have suggested that the girl’s chaste and virtuous nature has a transformative affect on nearly all of the male characters in the play, a fact the alderman acknowledges as Goodlack attempts to impugn her: “But those that with most envy have endeavor’d / T’entrap her have return’d won by her virtues” (FMI, 3.2.42-43). However, her accumulation of wealth, though initiated by Spencer, is also a direct result of her work ethic and her successful business sense. Upon first encountering Bess, Roughman and Forset observe the success of her tavern. Forset tells Roughman that in a mere week, “she hath almost undone all the other / taverns. The gallants make no rendezvous now but at the Windmill” (FMI, 2.1.3-5). In a very short time, Bess’ leadership has established the Windmill as the most successful tavern in town, causing Forset to comment further that, “If these doings hold, she will grow rich in short time” (FMI, 2.1.15). In this way, Heywood establishes a multifaceted picture of Bess’ ascendancy. Her virtue leads to wealth, which leads to property, which leads to immense success. In this way, Bess exhibits the industrious nature of the work ethic established as a primary component in Lawrence Stone’s capitalist/Protestant ideal. Bess social mobility is achieved not by a desire for upward mobility at any cost, but precisely Yet, although Bess is aligned with the newly emerging system, her demonstrated lack of materiality establishes her as immune to this particular danger often associated with mercantile wealth accumulation. Her depiction then, silences contemporary voices like that of

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20 Most notably, Jean Howard’s interest in the workings of gender in the texts argues that Bess is “a device for uniting men of different classes into a homosocial community of brothers, into a nation” (cited in Fuchs 57).
Thomas Adams who attempts in *Englandes Sickenes* to establish materiality as a vice of the ‘middlings.’

Within *The Fair Maid* plays Heywood simultaneously promotes the ethics of the emergent class system while challenging traditional notions of gentility by painting its “legitimate” members in a less than flattering light. To this end, the dumb show that occurs prior to Act One, Scene Four extends the discussion regarding the performance and gentility at the outset of the play. As petitioners file through to receive money from the General, two drawers emerge to discuss a specific failure of class appropriation among the gallants at Plymouth. The second drawer observes, “’Tis ordinary amongst gallants nowadays, who had rather swear forty oaths than only this one oath: ‘God let me never be trusted’” (*FMI*, 1.4.5-7). Here, as in the conversation between Old Forest and Harding in *Fortune by Land and Sea*, the concept of honesty has a double significance of both trustworthiness and economic solvency. While the second drawer understands the word in the first sense, the other man identifies the word with the repayment of tavern tabs: “But if the captains would follow the noble mind of the general, before night there would not be one score owing in Plymouth” (*FMI*, 1.3.8-10). The use of the word noble in conjunction with the General, who has just settled all the petitioners’ open scores, suggests that nobility requires the presence of both virtues; honesty in word and in deed. Thus, it is a dually constructed concept requiring affluence and virtue. His juxtaposition with those gallants who lack one or both qualities indicates that although one may dress as a gentleman, as in the previous case of Carrol, he will likely fail to behave as one.

To this end, the character appropriately named Roughman is the embodiment of gentility without accompanying virtue. Finding Bess in her elevated state, Roughman
discloses his intention to marry her. Forset warns that she has several other suitors, some of which are said to be the sons of knights. Such aristocratic suitors reveal the extent to which Bess’ wealth has elevated her position. Despite the odds against him, the “swaggering gentleman” muses: “Tis like enough some younger brothers, and so I intend to make them” (FMI, 2.1.13-14). Roughman’s reference here is to the younger sons of noblemen, who due to the laws of primogeniture were technically gentlemen by birth, but did not stand to inherit. Their interest, then, in marrying a wealthy and landed tavern owner, like Bess, would necessarily be a financial one, as, in fact, is Roughman’s. When Forset comments on the tavern’s potential for further prosperity, Roughman returns, “There shall be great doings that shall make this Windmill my / grand seat, my mansion, my palace, and my Constantinople” (FMI, 2.1.16-17). True to his name, Roughman’s gruff demeanor, cowardice, (the same cowardice later exposed by Bess in the habit of a man) and misplaced attention toward material considerations seem unlikely to woo Bess, or to reinforce traditional notions of gentility. Indeed, in this regard it is significant that so much attention is placed on Roughman’s attention toward materiality. As a gentleman, Roughman’s desire for moveable wealth places him in danger of conflation with the lesser classes. Like Carrol before him, Roughman is a clear example of one who is a gentleman by birth, yet his gentility is undermined by a failure to possess certain appropriate traits. Like Roughman, all of the men in the play, with the exception of Spencer and some of the less-developed characters, exhibit fatal flaws with regard to materiality and upward mobility that ultimately lead to subordination or punishment.

The men’s desires for upward mobility are often examined through representations of the dangers of mimicry and class appropriation. Not long after his arrival in Fez, Bess’
prematurely freed apprentice, Clem enters the scene dressed as a “fantastic Moor.
Perhaps not surprisingly this drastic change in appearance places him in a perilous
position, wherein a misunderstanding of the term “geld” leads him to expect a reward of
gold, rather than castration. Jean Howard has suggested that it is Clem’s aped
appropriation of cultural “otherness” that ultimately causes his castration. Yet, Barbara
Fuchs argues:

When Clem suffers castration it is not primarily for being like the natives
but for trying to stand in for his betters. The warning seems to be more
clearly directed at an apprentice trying to appear as a gentleman than at an
Englishman playing Turk. Clem is identified as the interloper by his class.

Certainly, Clem’s class status is betrayed by his puerile confusion of terms; a mistake that
Bess certainly does not make considering her immediate and severe reaction to the
suggestion that her Spencer might be made a eunuch. Further proof is provided by
Clem’s own musings regarding the upset in the established order that has allowed his
swift rise to pretended gentility: “‘It is not now as when Andrea liv’d.—or rather
Andrew, / our elder journeyman. What, drawers become courtiers’” (FMI, 5.1.110-111).
Here, Clem’s paraphrase of Thomas Kyd’s Spanish Tragedy questions the ease with
which formerly held hierarchical structures, long thought to be immovable have been cast
off through cross-cultural, maritime trade. As the French merchant pays him to employ
Bess in the recovery of his forfeited goods, Clem’s boldness extends to critiquing the
nobles at court for their dishonesty: “You may see / what it is to be a sudden courtier: I
no sooner put my nose / into the court, but my hand itches for a bribe already” (FMI,
5.1.139-141). As a result of his aristocratic mimicry, Clem has become bold enough to
accuse the aristocracy at court of taking bribes for political favors. Unfortunately, though
quite expectedly, Clem’s rise to glory is a short one. His desire for material gain has caused him to misinterpret the locus of nobility. Thus, His castration is both a literal and figurative removal of the jewels he dissembled in order to achieve upward mobility.

Like Clem, Roughman and Goodlack are similarly taken in by excessive desire for material wealth. Though both are technically members of the gentility, Roughman by birth and Goodlack by mercantile activity, both hold similar desires for an accumulation of wealth that ultimately endangers their status as a result of their association with the other. Almost immediately after their arrival in Fez, both men are wooed by King Mullisheg’s generosity. Roughman tells Goodlack: “Captain, / This king is mightily in love. Well, let her / Do as she list, I’ll make use of this bounty” (FMI, 5.1.68-70). Here, Roughman expresses his desire to take advantage of the rich treatment offered by the Moorish king. This creates an implicit dependence upon the Other, and this dangerous proximity is ultimately punished.

When the Moorish Queen Tota seeks revenge on her husband, she enlists the help of Roughman who is easily bribed because of his desire for class transcendence:

TOTA: I have observed you
To be of some command amongst the English;
Nor make I question but that you may be
Of fair revenues.
ROUGHMAN: A poor gentleman.
TOTA: We’ll make thee rich. Spend that. [Gives him money]
ROUGHMAN: Your grace’s bounty
Exceeds what merit can make good in me.
I am your highness’ servant.
(FMII, 1.1.119-125)

Tota is keenly aware of Roughman’s less than honorable motivations, and these inherent flaws of ambition facilitate seduction to the Moorish queen’s scheme. Roughman’s aside after Tota orders him to “use her” is revealing:
Use us! Now upon my life, she’s caught.
What, courted by a queen, a royal princess?
Where were your eyes, Bess, that you could not see
These hidden parts and mysteries which this queen
Hath in my shape observed? ‘Tis but a fortune
That I was born to, and I thank heaven for’t.

(FMI, 1.1.134-139)

Ironically, the mistake in Roughman’s understanding of the situation both reinforces and
subverts Heywood’s representation of combined virtue and birth as hallmarks of gentility.
Roughman is aware that his birth makes him unworthy of a royal’s courting.
Nevertheless, he believes that Tota recognizes some inherent virtue within him that
somehow compensates for what he lacked by birth. Unfortunately for Roughman,
however, such virtues are imagined and are thus not capable of achieving reward.

Like Roughman, Goodlack is also driven by a desire for material wealth that
ultimately forces him to conflate his fortunes with the unstable Other. Mullisheg
manipulates Goodlack in an attempt to deflower Bess: “Captain, I read a fortune in thy
brow / More than a slight presage of augury, / Which tells me thou, and only thou, art
mark’d / to make me earthly bless’d” (FMII, 1.1.272-275). Indeed, Robert Turner’s
editorial gloss of this line notes that “[Mullisheg] has noticed a general inclination on
Goodlack’s part to advance himself” (108, n273). Thus, like Roughman, Goodlack’s
aspirations for upward mobility make him vulnerable to the seduction of promised wealth
and power. Mullisheg taunts Goodlack’s failure to seize his own fortune, which
ostensibly refers to his eventual honesty with Bess regarding Spencer’s will: No, thou art
dull or fearful. Fare thee well. / Thou hadst a fate laid up to make thee chronicled / In thy
own country, but thou wilt basely lose it / Even by thine own neglect” (FMII, 1.1.289-
292) Channelling Clem, Goodlack also senses a lurking danger as he wonders aside what it is about him that makes the King believe that he would turn traitor to his nation and friends in exchange for gold or status, “Possible / That he should mark out me? / What does my face Prognosticate that he should find writ there / An index of such treasons” (FMII, 1.1.331-333). However, Goodlack inadvertently answers his own question. Although he is unsettled at the prospect of betraying Bess, and although he does ultimately devise another plan in order to circumvent it, he ruminates between the desire for integrity and the promise of wealth: “But a viceroy / And a king’s minion, titles that will shadow / Ills most base and branded” (FMII, 1.1.335-337). Thus, Goodlack and Roughman’s manipulation by the Moorish monarchs allegorically represent the danger an association with mercantile wealth poses to those members of the aristocracy who may perhaps be made richer as result of their endeavors, yet jeopardize their hierarchical superiority by promoting the interests of the lower classes.

Two if by Sea…

Like gradations of social status on land, class identifications at sea are equally difficult to discern in The Fair Maid of the West I and II. In Act One, Scene Two, the reader/audience learns that Spencer has decided to seek his fortune at sea as a gentleman adventurer. His friend, Goodlack is perplexed by Spencer’s desire for such risk, particularly as he is not in need of monetary wealth: “Pray resolve me, / Why, being a gentleman of fortunes, means, / And well revenu’d, will you adventure thus / A doubtful voyage, when only such as I, / Born to no other fortunes than my sword, /Should seek abroad for pillage” (FMI, 1.2.4-9). In a conversation strikingly suggestive of historical

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21 This is a curious statement on Mullisheg’s part. The text does not explain the basis this bit of knowledge, as he would have no way to know the events preceding the arrival of Bess’ crew in Fez.
occurrences in the period, Goodlack’s challenge to Spencer, and particularly his use of the word “pillage” calls into question the motivations and activities of those “gentlemen adventurers” who risked their lives and their wealth without a true economic need. Unlike Goodlack, Spencer’s fortune is secure and thus the pursuit of additional material wealth through mercantile or piratical endeavors exposes him to that which is considered beneath him. However, Spencer’s responds:

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Pillage, Captain?
No, ‘tis for honor; and the brave society
Of all these shining gallants that attend
The great lord general drew me hither first,
No hope of gain or spoil.
(FMI, 1.2.8-12)
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Here Spencer identifies his motivation as the nobleman’s pursuit of honor, rather than the pirate’s goals of “pillage.” Thus, the true gentleman’s virtue is established within the play, while the status of gentleman adventurer is simultaneously upheld.

Yet, the allusion to piracy in Spencer and Goodlack’s conversation is a foreshadowing of events to come. Directly following the initial exchange between Roughman and Forset regarding Bess the audience is first made aware of the pirates lurking in their midst. As Bess surveys the tavern’s patrons, Clem warns, “There be four sea captains. I believe they be little better than / spirats, they are so flush of their ruddocks” (FMI, 2.1.52-53). Like the Clown in Fortune by Land and Sea, Clem’s use of the word “spirats” is consistent with a dual and hypocritical view of piracy as both employed by (and thus beneficial to), yet unruly, and perhaps detrimental to the State. Bess gives further credence to such a reading, as she qualifies the men as legitimate businessmen: “No matter; we will take no note of them. Here they vent / many brave commodities by which some gain accrues. / Th’are my good customers, and still return
Bess’ decision to treat the men as regular guests of the tavern is rooted in their ability to promote economic prosperity. According to Bess, not only do the men sell their commodities, supporting the local economy but they are also patrons of Bess’s tavern. Thus, she privileges the value of mercantile exchange over the implied baseness of their status, or even their perceived criminality. Of particular significance also is that Clem only believes them to be pirates based on the amount of money they have, and perhaps their ruddy complexions from exposure to the sun, as Robert Turner suggests in his glossing of the text (24, n53). Assuming that these are their only distinguishing factors, the men could just as likely be merchant mariners or more likely, privateers. In this way a dual ambiguity is presented surrounding the men regarding both their very existence as pirates, and again, their reputation as nefarious individuals, considering the contradictory nature of their endeavors. Such a depiction creates an inherent contradiction in terms that necessarily calls into question the ability to distinguish individuals from one class or another.

Bess’ tacit support of the piracy progresses toward what arguably becomes her own piratical transformation as the drama progresses. When word reaches Bess that Spencer has been killed, she orders Goodlack and Roughman, now loyal supporters of her virtue, to purchase and outfit a ship. When they return with the bark, Bess instructs Goodlack and Roughman in the changes she requires to its appearance: “Then first, you said your ship was trim and gay; / I’ll have her pitch’d all o’er: no spot of white, / No color to be seen, no sail but black, / No flag but sable” (FMI, 4.2.77-79). As Spencer appears to have died displaced from English soil, Bess’ stated desire in taking to sea is to return his body so that he might be buried properly and in the hope that she may later be interred with
him. Ostensibly, the appearance of the ship is to indicate mourning for her beloved Spencer’s death but its similarity to a pirate ship is undeniable; painted black, flying no national flag, and subject to no national law or courtesy. Accordingly, as Act Four, Scene Four opens Bess enters habited “like a sea captain.” It is important to note that Heywood never uses the term “pirates”, but refers to the suspected men in the tavern, the Spanish pirates, and now Bess and members of her crew merely as “captains.” Such a purposeful omission on Heywood’s part demonstrates his disdain for the arbitrary treatments of pirates in light of their former achievements.

Anticipating Forrest in _Fortune by Land and Sea_, once outside the bounds of English society, Bess’ status at sea quickly becomes questionable. Having received intelligence that Spaniards have stolen and desecrated Spencer’s corpse, the gentleman, himself, becomes commodified as a looted prize. Accordingly, Bess’ mission begins to resemble a privateer’s one of reprisal, as she vows revenge on any and all Spanish enemies: “Yet ere I die, I hope to be reveng’d / Upon some Spaniards for my Spencer’s wrong” (_FMI_, 4.4.54-55). Bess and her crew are careful to establish their allegiance to England in order to appear as privateers. At the outset of Act Four, Scene Four, Forset has captured two Spanish captains from a fishing boat in order to gain information about Spencer’s body. Aside from her motive for revenge, Bess initially shows little interest in plundering activity. Upon capturing the men, she displays tremendous magnanimity toward her hostages: “‘Las, these poor slaves! Besides their pardon’d lives, / One give them money. –And, Spaniards, where you come, / Pray for Bess Bridges, and speak well o’th’ English” (_FMI_, 4.4.57-59). Bess’ treatment of England’s enemies seems designed to promote goodwill, rather than to grease the pockets of her crew or to dispose of the Spaniard
threat. Her request of them to praise the English is met with approval, and thus Bess has simultaneously achieved her own ends, adhered to English law, and displayed her own personal virtue.

Shortly thereafter, a sailor on Bess’ ship spies the plundering Spaniards approaching and calls for the crew to arm itself: “Arm, gentlemen! A gallant ship of war / Makes with her full sails this way, who it seems / Hath took a bark of England” (*FMI*, 4.4.77-79). Upon discovering that the Spaniards have an English boat in tow, Bess vows to rescue her countrymen. As she encourages her crew before the battle, she reminds the men of their motivations: “Then, for your country’s honor, my revenge, / For your own fame and hope of golden spoil” (*FMI*, 4.4.84-85). Here again, Bess’ goal is identified as revenge, this time, however, her inclusion of “golden spoil” as a goal acknowledges that her crew are more materially driven. After a hardy battle wherein Goodlack is critically injured, Bess continues to display her magnanimity by releasing the Spaniards and allowing for their safe placement ashore: “Had my captain died, / Not one proud Spaniard had escap’d with life. / Your ship is forfeit to us and your goods, / So live. –Give him his long boat; him and his / Set safe ashore. –And pray for English Bess” (*FMI*, 4.4.116-120) Here, Bess’ decision within the drama to spare the lives of the pirates and to force them to forfeit their goods is in keeping with the punishments mandated by Elizabeth’s various proclamations against piracy. The character becomes conflated with the queen, as the express mention of “English Bess” suggests the blurring of historical fact and its dramatic representation. The Spanish captain’s reaction reinforces the similarity, as in his confusion he understands Bess to refer to the monarch: “I know not whom you mean, but be’t your queen, / Famous Elizabeth, I shall report / She and her subjects both are
merciful” (FMI, 4.4.121-123). In this way, Bess represents the ideal Elizabethan privateer. She had conquered the enemies of England, achieved spoil for her country, and promoted the good name of her country throughout the world.

Yet, as we have seen, even the “ideal” privateer is always perilously similar to an ideal pirate, which problematizes the existence of discrete groups. Of the difficult distinction between pirate and privateer here, Barbara Fuchs notes of Bess, “Her greatest success as a symbol of England lies in bringing these disparate motivations together” (59). Further to Fuch’s assertion, Bess also incorporates the motivating power of personal virtue, not necessarily dependent upon birth or blood, creating a triptych of the desirable features of Englishness. Thus Bess, like her namesake, gains fame through successful venture and a simultaneous re/construction of national identity through virtue. The fact remains, however, that notwithstanding her magnanimity or patriotic adherence to royal proclamation, with hopes for material gain and no official letter of marque, Bess and her crew have officially transitioned to piracy. Heywood’s previous effort to establish her as the ideal privateer, implies that at least in Heywood’s view, the perfect privateer is a pirate.22

Although their strength and effectiveness at times seems imperturbable, those characters engaging in piratical activity are, in fact, the most vulnerable to sudden shifts in fortune. Thus, as the drama progresses, even Bess, the ever-chaste heroine gains and loses wealth far too many times to count, in a manner often reminiscent of farce. After her initial accumulation of wealth, her journeys on land and sea, expose her to various

22 Queen Elizabeth’s A proclamation to represse all piracies and depredations upon the sea (1602) specifically prohibited the looting of any vessel not belonging to an enemy of England. At the end of Act Four, prior to Bess’ arrival at Mullisheg’s court, the chorus says of Bess and her crew: “Much prize they have ta’en. / The French and Dutch she spares, only makes spoil / Of the rich Spaniard and the barbarous Turk” (FMI, 4.5.6-8). Thus, Bess appears to act in accordance with the law.
monarchs, bandits, shipwrecks, and merchants who continually bestow and remove it in a manner that nearly renders her incapable of knowing her particular status at any given time. Her exasperation is best articulated when after surviving the shipwreck in Florence she laments, “This day the mistress of many thousands, / And a beggar now, not worth the clothes I wear” (FMII, 4.1.15-16). Although still habited as a woman of means, Bess is essentially a beggar. The appearance of her dress here serves only to remind the audience that the appearance of gentility is sometimes merely a façade. When the Duke questions her origins and how she came to arrive in Florence, Bess responds, “all the wealth / I had from Barbary is perish’d in the sea. / I that this morn commanded half a million / Have nothing now but this good merchant’s bounty” (FMII, 4.1.140-144). Bess, the once successful entrepreneur and privateer/pirate has been relegated to a mere charity case, forced to accept the goodwill of the same merchant that her former position allowed her to assist. In this way, Bess’ case facilitates the delivery of Heywood’s veiled warnings; namely, that mercantile wealth is quick to gain and equally quick to lose, that social elevations are always necessarily temporary, and that interdependency between the classes unites their fortunes, thereby diminishing any distinction between them.

Indeed, it is significant that while at sea even members of the aristocracy are subject to such dangers. Early in Part I, Spencer himself laments what he perceives to be the cruelty of fate:

To imagine that in the same instant that one forfeits all his estate, another enters upon a rich possession. As one goes to the church to be married, another is hurried to the gallows to be hang’d, the last having no feeling of the first man’s joy nor the first of the last man’s misery. At the same time that one lies tortured upon the rack, another lies tumbling with his mistress over head and ears in down and feathers. This when I truly consider, I cannot but wonder why any fortune
Spencer’s observations presage his own unstable fortune. After bestowing his wealth on Bess and being forced to flee England, Spencer’s ship bound for Fayal is captured by pirates. When they order Spencer to identify himself, he challenges the pirate captain: “Thy equal as I am a prisoner, / But once today a better man than thou, / A gentleman in my country” (*FMI*, 4.1.19-21). Here, Spencer’s statement indicates awareness that his capture has changed his social standing. Previously considered a gentleman, his lacking freedom places him on equal footing with the pirates. This, too, is significant, as it would seem that his status as prisoner would necessitate Spencer’s acknowledgement of his captors’ superiority, yet according to him his imprisonment has merely equalized their positions. The Spanish captain’s play on the word “gentle,” subtly pressures the concept of gentility: “Wert thou not so, we have strappados, bolts, / And engines to the mainmast fastened, / Can make you gentle” (*FMI*, 4.1.22-24). Despite Spencer’s refusal to accept the superiority of the pirates, his instantaneous loss of birthright at the hands of seafaring plunderers indicates the destabilizing power of mercantile activity. Further, in light of Goodlack’s query at the outset of the play regarding Spencer’s motivations, Heywood’s message here seems clear. Having enjoined his fortunes unnecessarily to mercantile pursuits, Spencer himself is responsible for the circumstances by which he finds himself reduced to equality with a pirate. Likewise, the aristocracy at large is encouraged to heed a similar warning.

Although Heywood restores Spencer and Bess’s fortunes at the conclusion of the play, here as in *Fortune by Land and Sea*, it is not in order to construct a conservative drama that functions as a mouthpiece for the existing structure. On the contrary, it is
precisely because the official structure has failed in some way that characters are forced to seek their fortunes at sea in order to restore social, and by extension, economic order. Thus, by constructing parallel plots on land and sea within his adventure dramas the dramatist is able to expose the simultaneous elevation of the ‘middling’ or mercantile groups and the increasing obsolescence of aristocratic superiority. As we have shown social mobility on land, up to and including movement into and out of the upper-most echelons of the aristocracy, suggests a corresponding (though roughly constructed) model within the “shadowed” hierarchy at sea. And, as established by the arguments in the present analysis, Heywood’s frequent representations within the drama of the mimicry, hypocrisy, and ambiguity associated with such distinctions destabilizes the very concept of discrete hierarchical structures and exposes the changing social landscape of early modern England. Categories are shifted, definitions recoded, and the essential features of a capitalist/Protestant ethic begin to supplant the traditional aristocratic model. Such a force, propelled into motion during the Elizabethan period by the rise of the mercantile class is the same one that later strengthens culminating in the English Civil War in 1642. Thus, Heywood’s dramatic depictions of piracy, privateering, and mercantile activity suggest that members of the proto-capitalist class and the aristocratic adventurers who backed them, including the Queen herself, were, in fact, the legitimate pirates.

23 The term “shadow” is borrowed from Barbara Fuch’s analysis, which is presented herein.
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