‘Nothing to Shew for his Tomb but a Wave’:
Storms, shipwreck and the human cost of global trade
in seventeenth-century broadside ballads

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The sea was a source of danger but also the facilitator of global trade in the early modern period. In England, broadside ballads proclaimed the benefits of global trade and praised the actions of sailors. However, within maritime ballads, there are significant occurrences of storms, shipwrecks and tragedy. This article investigates the function of storm ballads, analysing how they allowed for imaginative experiences of disaster and enabled people to examine their own complex relationship with maritime trade, presenting a battle between civilized culture and the savage power of the sea. These ballads emphasize the human cost of England’s global activities.

Key words: broadside ballads, seventeenth century, shipwreck, storms, sailors, trade, maritime community

In the early modern period, global trade (facilitated by improvements in navigation, ship design and the development of joint stock companies) steadily increased, as did the sheer volume of ships and people on the ocean.¹ This article examines the representation of storms, shipwreck and tragedy in English broadside ballads. In ballads more generally, the economic benefits brought by global trade are proclaimed, and heroic sailors are depicted facing down England’s enemies, mirroring cultural presentations of sailors in other musical forms.² It might initially seem incongruous that products which idolize sailors and their economic roles contain frequent depictions of disaster and family tragedy. However, they allowed members of the maritime community to negotiate their feelings towards this dangerous profession. Furthermore, they offered non-maritime audiences an opportunity to imaginatively experience the dangers of maritime life. These ballads reveal the complicated relationship that the early modern communities (maritime and non-maritime) had with the sea. They demonstrate an awareness of how the work of individuals contributed to national prosperity and emphasize the human cost at which this was purchased.

¹ See Brook, *Vermeer’s Hat*; Parker, *Global Interactions*; Darwin, *After Tamerlane*; Gerritsen and Riello, *The Global Lives of Things*; Schnurmann, ‘Wherever Profit Leads Us’; and Games, *The Web of Empire*; Tracy, *The Rise of Merchant Empires*; van Rossum, van Voss, van Lottum and Lucassen, ‘National and International Labour Markets’; and van Zanden and van Tielhof, ‘Roots of Growth and Productivity Change’.

² See Eubanks Winkler, ‘Come Away, Fellow Sailors’.

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Early modern ballads inhabited a highly intertextual world, and they commented upon the world around them, reinforcing certain morals while ensuring their commercial potential through entertainment. The purpose of ballads was ‘to expound upon the moral, political, or comic potential of any story’. This was also the aim of other literature, particularly pamphlets, but ballads achieved this with greater ease because of their liminal existence, encompassing text, woodcut images, public performance and musical nature. Music was ubiquitous in the early modern period and the broadside ballad occupied a variety of spaces. Many houses and taverns plastered broadside ballads to their walls, both as cheap decoration but also to be sung by visitors. In a semi-literate world, embedding messages in verse allowed them to pass easily through oral communication networks and strike firmly into listeners’ memory. Moreover, the popular tunes to which ballads were set created layers of associative meaning on top of their power as an aide-mémoire.

Several historians extol the value of ballads as sources for understanding everyday life. Patricia Fumerton uses ballads to study the lives of the itinerant working poor, and Stella Achilleos argues that ballads reveal how lower social orders were represented in texts aimed at their consumption. Ballads came in blackletter (Gothic type) or whiteletter (roman type) variations. Unlike whiteletter ballads designed for the ‘political cognoscenti’, blackletter ballads were ‘manipulated by highly market-sensitive publishers’ to appeal to quotidian England. It is, therefore, tempting to view blackletter ballads as windows into the unmediated early modern mentalité. As Fumerton states, they were ‘written from the perspective of the many for the many’. However, it cannot merely be assumed that whiteletter ballads represent political interests and blackletter ballads were written by and for the urban population. The government, civic authorities and joint-stock companies all produced promotional blackletter ballads. The best way to navigate such authorship issues is to focus on the commercial demands behind ballad production. Ballads were economically successful products tailored to accommodate the largest possible audience. Despite being targeted at the lower end of the market, blackletter ballads were more expensive to produce and purchase than whiteletter ballads, and their market was also socially wider, and distributed further. Therefore, publishers were attuned to shifts in popular tastes, and would disseminate a range of opinions to produce ballads that would sell. As long as we acknowledge the complex contexts of ballad production, we can broadly state that views espoused within ballads (particularly blackletter)

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3 Cust, ‘News and Politics’, 66; Raymond, Pamphlets and Pamphleteering, 17.
4 McShane, ‘Ballads and Broadsides’, 361.
5 See Carr, ‘An Harmlesse Dittie’; Nebeker, ‘The Heyday of the Broadside Ballad’; Marsh, Music and Society.
6 Fox, Oral and Literate Culture, 304.
7 See Fumerton, Unsettled; Achilleos, ‘Drinking and Good Fellowship’.
8 See Franklin, ‘The Art of Illustration’.
9 McShane, ‘Typography Matters’, 44.
10 Fumerton, Unsettled, 146.
11 McShane, ‘Ballads and Broadsides’, 342.
12 Hehmeyer, ‘The Social Function of the Broadside Ballad’, 12.
13 McShane Jones, ‘Rime and reason’, 48.
14 McShane, ‘Political Cobbler’, 209.
resonated with many people in early modern London, but also crucially informed these people’s opinions.

The maritime community formed a significant component of the ballad market and maritime themes are of notably high incidence within the surviving ballad corpus. Laura Miller argues that the popularity of maritime ballads is explained by considering sailors as ideal ballad consumers, members of the lower classes with (occasionally and temporarily) a little extra money to spend, little room to carry books, an interest in music and with a lot of time on their hands.15 Eric Nebeker also notes that sailors perusing bookstalls for ballads would have been a common image in early modern London.16 Angela McShane states that, although the voices of sailors in ballads ‘may often have been ventriloquized’, ballads did not simply reiterate ‘stereotypes for a civilian audience’. Furthermore, soldiers and sailors found in ballads a ‘sympathetic form’ through which to publicize their concerns.17 Ballads allowed people to experience other lives and inhabit different personas through role-speculation (the act of temporarily and uncommittedly trying out identities).18 Through ballads, consumers could imaginatively see the world, do battle and acquire riches.19 Therefore, they appealed to a broad audience beyond the maritime community. As the sea became ‘culturally and economically of increasing centrality’ in the early modern period, English society grew steadily more enamoured with maritime themes.20 David Proctor highlights seamen’s popularity following the Spanish Armada, which emphasized to common people that ‘their trade and even national survival’ depended on ships and seamen.21

Sailors certainly enjoyed and sang ballads, many of which were written for and about them.22 Occupational identity was highly important in the early modern period and ballads contributed to ‘external processes of identity formation’.23 The positive representations of different occupational trades offered a ‘heroic image’ with which to identify.24 While there was a substantial market for these ballads, which were presented as being written by someone from the relevant profession, the question remains as to whether occupational ballads were created by members of those groups.25 However, in terms of the representations of storms in ballads, author authenticity is of less importance. While ballads were written by both seamen and landsmen, ‘sailors would sing both when at leisure’.26 Amanda Eubanks Winkler notes the role of ballads in naval recruitment but, more importantly, she highlights

15 Miller, ‘Sea: Transporting England’, 250.
16 See Nebeker, ‘Broadsie Ballad and Textual Publics’.
17 McShane, ‘Recruiting Citizens’, 116.
18 Fumerton, Unsettled, 45–6; Fumerton, ‘Not Home’, 504, 512. See Fumerton, ‘Making Vagrancy (In)Visible’.
19 Miller, ‘Sea: Transporting England’, 247.
20 Brayton, Shakespeare’s Ocean, 2; Blakemore and Davey, ‘Introduction’, 14; Bailey, ‘Thy Sceptre to a Trident Change’; and Kuykendall ‘Jolly Jack Tar’.
21 Proctor, Music of the Sea, 32.
22 Proctor, Music of the Sea, 50; McShane, ‘Recruiting Citizens’, 112.
23 Hailwood, ‘Broadsie Ballads and Occupational Identity’, 188.
24 Ibid., 193.
25 Ibid., 193.
26 Proctor, Music of the Sea, 95.
their power in ‘shaping the public’s perception of sailors’. This agrees with Mark Hailwood’s analysis of occupational ballads, which contributed to ‘the wide range of characteristics’ associated with different occupations. Therefore, with storm ballads, what is important is the depiction of the human cost of trade that was disseminated to the general population, whether maritime or non-maritime – ‘representational authenticity was secondary to entertainment’. All ballad consumers were presented with a consistent theme, that the global presence of English sailors came at significant personal cost.

In addition to their labour contribution to joint-stock company enterprises, sailors supported the lifestyle of the non-maritime society through personal trading with the local community. Sailors only received their wages if voyages were successfully completed, therefore, many engaged in personal trading ‘as a supplement to wages’. They purchased commodities abroad and then sold them upon return to England. Beverly Lemire demonstrates that this enabled sailors to ‘shape plebeian consumer patterns on shore’. While the cumulative scale of sailors’ trading was less than either the captain’s private trade or the official cargo, the ‘cultural force’ of their actions (trading with various dealers, peddlers and shopkeepers) was disproportionately high. The general population was so aware of this influence that a common response to a charge of theft was that the items in question had been acquired ‘from a sailor’. Therefore, where maritime and non-maritime communities intermingled, people were cognizant of sailors’ impact in supplying a range of commodities, from exotica to everyday goods. However, the price sailors and their families paid was also well-understood. Laurie Ellinghausen notes the common contemporary objections that ‘maritime enterprise put large numbers of men to death and left wives and children destitute’. She argues that sailor ballads question whether maritime empire was ‘worth the potential damage’ to families and communities, considering whether the fabric of everyday life would unravel the more sailors went to sea and the longer they remained there. Here, I will follow Ellinghausen’s argument, adding to it with a more specific focus on shipwreck and storm ballads, which reveal the perceived tensions between civilized culture and wild nature. Whether ballads were written by the maritime community or not, they proclaim that England’s growing global commercial power was built upon the loss and tragedy of maritime families. A sailor’s life was highly precarious, often living in a debt cycle from voyage to voyage and using ‘wages and advances to pay off previous commitments’. Disruptions to this system could have significant ramifications for maritime families, who were familiar

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27 Eubanks Winkler, ‘Come Away, Fellow Sailors’ 86.
28 Eubanks Winkler, ‘Come Away, Fellow Sailors’ 87.
29 Eubanks Winkler, ‘Come Away, Fellow Sailors’ 87.
30 Alsop, ‘Tudor Merchant Seafarers’, 97; Fury, ‘The Elizabethan Maritime Community’, 119.
31 See Hair and Alsop, English Seamen and Traders; and Blakemore, ‘Pieces of Eight’.
32 Lemire, ‘Men of the World’, 290.
33 Ibid., 294, 310, 313. See also Lemire, ‘Peddling Fashion’.
34 Ibid., 317.
35 Ellinghausen, ‘A Wife or Friend’, 433.
36 Ibid., 434.
37 Fury, ‘The Elizabethan Maritime Community’, 120.
with parochial charity as a short- and long-term survival strategy.\(^\text{38}\)

Through highlighting the benefits brought to the nation, ballads promoted engagement with the wider world. However, when examining ballads featuring storms, shipwrecks and loss, we see the human cost necessary to facilitate this. Storms could cause family destitution if a husband died at sea and they could disrupt the essential mercantile activities central to the lifestyle of the non-maritime community. The role of maritime trade in supporting and underpinning the lives of many people (otherwise seemingly without a connection to the maritime community) means there was a significant market for news of the sea.\(^\text{39}\) As demonstrated by Lemire, trade with the outside world contributed to the lifestyle of people across the socio-economic spectrum. In this article, I examine how the language of ballads describing storms reflects the helplessness of sailors confronted by the force of nature and speaks to the uncertainty of maritime life. I also analyse how the themes and tunes of different ballads carried and created an association between seafaring and tragedy in the early modern mind. Storm ballads were popular not only since they allowed for imaginative experience of intense situations, but also because so much of English life was supported by trade with the outside world. These ballads reminded the audience of how fragile this connection could be. I will then highlight the underlying opposition between civilized society and the savagery of the natural world which underpins many storm ballads. Steve Mentz, in discussing the poetics of early modern shipwrecks, uses the Greek term *metis*, a combination of intelligence and skill used to combat hostile environments.\(^\text{40}\) This idea of rationality and pragmatism to save lives when encountering nature’s might is emphasized in ballads, framing England as a haven of civility in a savage world.

**Seafaring and tragedy**

Storms have been, and still are, a great threat to anyone at sea. While there are few occupations ‘more romanticized than seafaring during the Age of Sail’, its harsh realities meant tragedy and loss for many, and even today, commercial fishing ‘consistently ranks as the world’s deadliest occupation’.\(^\text{41}\) The exact number of ships wrecked during the early modern period is unknown. However, as an illustration, 130 English ships were lost per year between 1624 and 1628.\(^\text{42}\) Storms were such ‘a key feature of maritime life’ that they figure prominently in the commemoration of the maritime community after death.\(^\text{43}\) The ballad *The She-mariners Misfortune* tells the story of a sailor and his cross-dressing sweetheart. However, their voyage is interrupted by a storm, ‘For blustering wind, too oft we find / do work poor Seamans overthrow.’\(^\text{44}\) The word ‘overthrow’ (with the double meaning of a figurative downfall and physical collapse) highlights the state of physical helplessness, as does

\(^{\text{38}}\) Ibid., 126.

\(^{\text{39}}\) See Miller, ‘Sea: Transporting England’, 247.

\(^{\text{40}}\) Mentz, *Shipwreck Modernity*, 77.

\(^{\text{41}}\) Stewart, *The Sea Their Graves*, 4.

\(^{\text{42}}\) Fury, ‘The Work of G. V. Scammell’, 36.

\(^{\text{43}}\) Stewart, *The Sea Their Graves*, 40.

\(^{\text{44}}\) Anon., *The She-Mariners Misfortune* (1664–1703?), Pepys Ballads 4.187, English Broadside Ballad Archive (hereafter EBBA) 21849.
Many other ballads play on the imagery of the ship being physically thrown. The Jovial Marriner, a blackletter ballad from the late seventeenth century, describes how, ‘our Ships are tost on hye, / and with the waves are roulld; / When tempests fierce our sails doth tear / and rends the Masts a sunder.’46 Martin Parker’s blackletter ballad, Saylors for my Money, uses similar imagery to emphasize the terror that this could inspire, ‘Our ship is tost with waves / And every minite we expect, / The sea must be our graves.’47 According to Parker, the only recourse for sailors is to ‘turne unto the Lord of hosts’.48 In Neptune’s Raging Fury (a later adaptation of Parker’s ballad set to the same tune), the religious dimension is reduced, but the ballad still emphasizes that when a ship is out of control men must recourse to prayer (figure 1).49 Ballads encapsulate the terror and feeling of helplessness when in the grip of the elements.

45 Ibid.
46 Anon., The Jovial Marriner (1670–82), Crawford.EB.544, EBBA 32976. EBBA incorrectly lists this ballad as being written by John Playford. My thanks to Angela McShane for pointing this out.
47 Parker, Saylors for my money. (1630?), Pepys Ballads 1.420–421, EBBA 20197.
48 Ibid.
49 Anon., Neptune’s Raging Fury (1693–95?), Roxburghe 2.543, EBBA 31143, Rollins’s Analytical Index Number (hereafter, RI) 1860. This ballad was entered into the Stationers’ Company Register in 1678. Rollins, ‘An Analytical Index’, 162.
and emphasize faith in the saving hand of God. Their entertainment value comes from the awe-inspiring, yet terrifying, events they describe. However, through repetition of themes and melodies, ballads also created an associated link between seafaring and tragedy.

While ballads about ‘constant’ sailors highlight the tenuous links between sailors and their families on shore, the theme of involuntary separation as ships are lost is also significant. These ballads attest to an association between seafaring and human loss. This link was cemented in the imaginations of the contemporary ballad audience as the price of England’s global activities. This is epitomized by the title of the whiteletter ballad Love in Despair: Or, The Virgin’s Lamentation for her Love, Who Was unfortunately Drowned near the English-shore, on his Return from the West-Indies. This ballad’s tune of ‘The Ruined Virgin’ served to underline the theme of mortality as it was another name for the well-known melody ‘Welladay’, a popular tune commonly used for execution ballads. While themes, characters and woodcut illustrations all moved between ballads, it was recurring melodies which were the most effective ‘cross-pollinators’ of meaning. The redeployment of well-known tunes, a process known as contrafactum, was central to early modern ballads; and the better-known the tune, the denser its web of associations. Through this repeated use of tunes, associations were built up in the minds of the audience. For anyone hearing this ballad, the melodic meaning was clear. A tune associated with executions emphasized the point that to be employed in seafaring was potentially a death sentence.

The link between seafaring and tragedy is also emphasized by the three blackletter ballads, The Constant Seaman and his Faithful Love, The Two Faithful Lovers and The Fair and Loyal Maid of Bristow. In the first, a sailor’s partner implores him not to venture out to sea, and she knows the potential price of profitable trading saying, ‘Thy company I more do prize / than all the Indian Store’ and ‘What care I for the golden Mines, / thou treasure art to me’. This ballad was set to the tune ‘Philander’, also known as ‘Oh Cruel Bloody Fate’. The name ‘Philander’ was taken from the ballad A Strange Apparition which was sung to ‘Oh Cruel Bloody Fate’. In this ballad, Phillis kills herself, mistakenly believing that Philander has died. He then ends his own life to join her. This tune’s associations would immediately inform the audience that, no matter how constant they are, their relationship is doomed. A similar message is given by The Two Faithful Lovers, which is set to the tune ‘Franklin is fled away’. This tune often accompanies ballads concerning ill-fated romance. Its title comes from A Mournful Caral in which Franklin is slain and his

50 For the ‘constant’ sailor motif, see Fumerton, Unsettled, chapter eight.
51 Anon., Love in Despair (1672–96?), Pepys Ballads 5.313, EBBA 22150.
52 See Tipton, ‘The Transformation of the Earl of Essex’; Hyde, Singing the News; McIlvenna, ‘The Rich Merchant Man’; and Simpson, The British Broadside Ballad, 747–8.
53 Marsh, ‘Fortune My Foe’, 327.
54 McIlvenna, ‘When News was Sung’, 320; Marsh, ‘Fortune My Foe’, 327. See also McIlvenna, ‘The Power of Music’.
55 Anon., The Constant Seaman and his Faithful Love (1662–92?), Pepys Ballads 4.189, EBBA 21851.
56 Anon., A Strange Apparition (1681–84), Pepys Ballads 3.378, EBBA 21394. See Simpson, The British Broadside Ballad, 4–6.
lover, Cordelius, commits suicide.\textsuperscript{57} In \textit{The Two Faithful Lovers}, a woman asks not to be left behind, saying that ‘tho seas do threaten death’, she will dress as a sailor and join her partner on board.\textsuperscript{58} They sail to Venice but the ship is sunk and, while he manages to swim to shore, she drowns. He then curses the ‘cruel seas’ and ‘rocks unkind’, begging any couples hearing the ballad to ‘lament my fall’. References to ‘rocks’ are common in ballads and writings about seafaring. This is because running aground was the more likely cause of a wreck rather than sinking far out at sea. This also accounts for the common ‘rocks’ motif on maritime memorials.\textsuperscript{59} The ballad then ends, ‘In Venice he did dye, / And there his corpse doth lye, / And left his friends to cry.’\textsuperscript{60} Finally, the link between commerce and domestic loss is clearly dawn by \textit{The Fair and Loyal Maid of Bristow}. A sailor leaves to provide for himself and his partner, going to Virginia ‘his fortune to advance.’ However, this action ‘did procure their overthrow’, for ‘ere he to Virginia came, / he lost his dearest life, / And n’er returnd to her again’.\textsuperscript{61} For all the benefits of a global presence, it was at the expense of sailors and their families who could be ruined by the loss of a ship in storms at sea.

\textbf{Civilized sailors}

As well as emphasizing personal cost and individual tragedy, storm ballads also epitomize the tensions between civilized human nature and the savage outside world. Through this, they reveal wider societal attitudes towards seafaring and the natural world. Shipwreck narratives record ‘moments of crisis’ which test social conventions and throw assumptions about concepts such as divine providence and national character into ‘unusually sharp definition’.\textsuperscript{62} In ballads these ordeals demonstrate that the sea was violent and unpredictable and that sailors had to hold on to rationality and civilized behaviour to survive. The subtitle of the 1670s blackletter ballad \textit{The Benjamins Lamentation} states that it is a ‘Narrative of one of his Majesties Ships, called the Benjamin, that was drove into Harbour at Plimouth, and received no small harm by this Tempest’ (figure 2).\textsuperscript{63} Most maritime wrecks and disasters happen near to shore as, at sea, ships were designed to ride the waves, withstanding strong winds. As long as it had ‘adequate sea room’, a ship could weather even a strong storm.\textsuperscript{64} Problems occur when there is not sufficient sea room and if the vessel loses the

\textsuperscript{57} Anon., \textit{A Mournful Caral} (1680–82), Pepys Ballads 2.76, EBBA 20700, RI 1823. Originally entered into the Stationers’ Company Register in 1656. Rollins, ‘An Analytical Index’, 159. See Simpson, \textit{The British Broadside Ballad}, 232–3.

\textsuperscript{58} Anon., \textit{The Two Faithful Lovers} (1693–5?), Euing Ballads 361, EBBA 31972, RI 583. Originally entered into the Stationers’ Company Register in 1656. Rollins, ‘An Analytical Index’, 56.

\textsuperscript{59} Stewart, \textit{The Sea Their Graves}, 36.

\textsuperscript{60} Anon., \textit{The Two Faithful Lovers}.

\textsuperscript{61} Anon., \textit{The Fair and Loyal Maid of Bristow} (1672–96?), Roxburghe 4.46, EBBA 31278, RI 825. Originally entered into the Stationers’ Company Register in 1625. Rollins, ‘An Analytical Index’, 76.

\textsuperscript{62} Lincoln, ‘Shipwreck Narratives’, 155.

\textsuperscript{63} Anon., \textit{The Benjamin’s Lamentation} (1681–4), Roxburghe 4.33, EBBA 30997. The British Library English Short Title Catalogue (hereafter ESTC) estimates the publication date to be 1674–79. See ESTC R232485.

\textsuperscript{64} Stewart, \textit{The Sea Their Graves}, 38.
I have not yet found any evidence about the presence of a royal ship called the Benjamin in Plymouth. If this event really occurred then it was sufficiently well known to have a melody named after it (the ballad’s tune is ‘The Poor Benjamin’). Even without concrete historical facts to which we can connect this ballad, it offers much that can be assessed on its own terms. The ballad describes the departure of the Benjamin for Venice, but a series of ‘harms’ befall the ship, and it steadily loses sails, masts and even crew. Ballads such as this can be read as offering practical guidance to their audience through a preview of a shipwreck. However, storm and shipwreck ballads reveal more about contemporary imaginations of maritime travel and national character when they are analysed in terms of sailors’ order and rationality being tested by the savage power of the sea.

The image of the ship struggling in a storm is a highly evocative one. In his study of maritime gravestones and monuments, David J. Stewart highlights the prominence of the ship’s ability to manoeuvre. I have not yet found any evidence about the presence of a royal ship called the Benjamin in Plymouth. If this event really occurred then it was sufficiently well known to have a melody named after it (the ballad’s tune is ‘The Poor Benjamin’). Even without concrete historical facts to which we can connect this ballad, it offers much that can be assessed on its own terms. The ballad describes the departure of the Benjamin for Venice, but a series of ‘harms’ befall the ship, and it steadily loses sails, masts and even crew. Ballads such as this can be read as offering practical guidance to their audience through a preview of a shipwreck. However, storm and shipwreck ballads reveal more about contemporary imaginations of maritime travel and national character when they are analysed in terms of sailors’ order and rationality being tested by the savage power of the sea.

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65 Ibid, 38–39.
66 There is record of an East India Company ship called the Benjamin active from the 1680s to 1700. See Benjamin: Journal British Library (hereafter BL) IOR/L/MAR/A/XCVII fos 3–75, fos 18–124; and Anon., Proposals For Setling the East-India Trade, 13.
67 Anon., The Benjamin’s Lamentation
of such images, arguing that ‘ships represent culture in a constant battle against the forces of nature’. The ballad *The Praise of Saylors Here Set Forth* is sung from the perspective of a landsman, ‘I lay musing in my bed, / full warm and well at ease, / I thought upon the lodging hard / poor Saylors had at Seas’. Landsmen in bed juxtaposed by sailors struggling at sea is a frequent ballad motif. As well as proclaiming the superior bravery of sailors and their role in supporting land-based society, this also creates the image of England as a haven in the middle of a chaotic world. This is epitomized by a news ballad relating the stranding of several sailors in the arctic circle. On 1 May 1630, the Muscovy Company whaling ship *Salutation* departed for Spitsbergen. A narrative was published on its return by Edward Pellham. When bad weather forced the ship to retreat to open seas, eight men (including Pellham) were forced to spend the winter in ‘those desolate and untemperate Clymates’ until ships returned in the next hunting season (a feat never achieved before). Pellham’s narrative was entered into the Stationers’ Company Register on 30 September 1631 and was soon followed by a blackletter ballad entered into the Register on 2 January 1632.

This ballad, *A Wonder Beyond Mans Expectation*, establishes Spitsbergen as a ‘barren land’ where nothing for ‘sustenance, / most part o’th yeare doth grow’. It emphasizes the savagery of nature with which the sailors had to contend, including ‘White Beares and Foxes monstrous, / and other savage beasts.’ The ballad is a gripping narrative of survival with a comforting message of God’s care. It states that these men survived only because God ‘Did shew his wondrous power’. The religious message is clear: even when the men felt they had been abandoned, they did not lose their faith. The ballad describes how ‘the Sabbath day they observed, / and spent it piously’, even claiming that they could not observe it as zealously ‘as they desired’. This encouragement to maintain religious faith in the face of suffering is in keeping with the wider tradition of religious pamphlets and street literature. The ballad ends by reinforcing God’s role in determining human affairs. However, this ballad offered more to its audience than a statement of religious faith.

As well as a manifestation of godly power, the rescue of the castaways on Spitsbergen underlined the endurance, hardihood and community among English whalemen. This theme is prominent in the ballad and may have resonated just as strongly as the religious motif of God’s deliverance. The ballad argues that, while God is responsible for their salvation, the sailors proved worthy of this by never abandoning civilized behaviour and succumbing to the savage nature of their surroundings. They did not give up hope as ‘one man best experience’d / in policy and cunning’ managed to motivate his fellows. The men dug a cave ‘to shrowd

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68 Stewart, *The Sea Their Graves*, 57.
69 Anon., *The Praise of Saylors Here Set Forth* (1658–64?), Euing Ballads 267, EBBA 31876.
70 Pellham, *Gods Power and Providence*, 9. ESTC S114323.
71 See ESTC S114323 and RI 3015.
72 Anon., *A Wonder Beyond Mans Expectation* (1655?), Pepys Ballads 1.74–75, EBBA 20271, RI 3015. EBBA dates this ballad as about 1635, but it was entered into the Stationers’ Company Register in 1632. Rollins, ‘An Analytical Index’, 258.
73 Anon., *A Wonder Beyond Mans Expectation*.
74 Appleby, ‘Conflict, Cooperation and Competition’, 29.
75 Anon., *A Wonder Beyond Mans Expectation*. 
them from the cold, / Wherein they lived sound men’. It is significant that they were ‘sound’ men, never losing their mental or physical fortitude. The ballad describes how the men survived, mirroring normal life in England by substituting what was available, ‘Their Venson they dry baked, / which served them for bread, / For Drinke their thirst they slaked / with Snow water, in stead / Of English Beere and French Wine’ and ‘the flesh of Beares they boyled, / in stead of powdered Beefe.’ The killing of the native bears epitomizes civility conquering savageness. It is the men’s rationalism and pragmatism (the aspects which define them as intelligent, civilized beings) which are most celebrated, ‘when their food was neare spent’, they began to ration themselves and ‘feed but once a day, / thus spare they did their meate’. The constant struggle also took a toll on their clothes. The solution to this problem was to be found through ingenuity, ‘misery that makes men / industrious, was so kinde, / To furnish them with a tricke.’ They untwisted the ropes they had with them and, with needles fashioned from whalebone, ‘They sow’d their clothes, & handsomely / their bodies covered.’

Human ingenuity in the face of natural adversity (Mentz’s *metis*) and an emphasis on maintaining discipline are what kept the men alive. Their eventual rescue frames a moment of tension between survivors and rescuers. When the English ships returned and saw the castaways ‘clad with the skinnes of Beares, / The Captaine hardly knew them, / his heart was full of feares’. Visually, there was no evidence that the survivors had maintained civilized behaviour and rationality. Their animal-skin garments may well have evoked mental comparisons with Native Americans, whom Europeans saw to be primitive and uncivilized. It was assumed that surviving in such a savage landscape, untouched by humanity, would have had a polluting and degrading effect upon the men’s own rational, civilized spirits. However, the captain found them ‘so unexpectedly, / To be all perfect sound men’. The description of them as sound men is repeated here and the captain’s surprise is emphasized. This ballad marks the line between civilized England and a savage outside world, which the sailors kept at bay by their ability to maintain civilized, ordered behaviour. This was then all supported by the more obvious theme of faith in the providential hand of God.

The rationality displayed by Spitsbergen sailors is a trait that is idolized in other shipwreck and storm ballads. *The praise of Saylors here set forth* emphasizes that, when things are at their worst, difficult decisions must be made for the good of the ship, ‘many times constraind they are / for to cut down their Mast.’ Cutting down a mast was a drastic but often necessary action. If a mast had been broken in a storm, yet had not fully detached from the ship, it was important to cut it away to prevent it damaging the ship’s hull. The ballad describes how, in storms, sailors often have to seize ‘Their victuals and their Ordinance, / and ought else that they have, / They throw it over board with speed’. When a ship was in mortal peril, sometimes all cannon and cargo, despite their value, had to be flung overboard to lighten the ship. By being pragmatic and rational, sailors increased their chances of survival. The

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76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 Anon., *The Praise of Saylors Here Set Forth*.
80 Harland, *Seamanship in the Age of Sail*, 300.
81 Anon., *The Praise of Saylors Here Set Forth*. 
theme of sailors working together to preserve order in the face of chaos is prominent in this ballad. The actions of each crew member are described, and each has a role in preserving the ship, ‘Our Masters Mate takes Helm in hand’, while ‘Our Master to his Compass goes, / [. . .] / He sends a Youth unto them amaine, / for to unsling the Yard’ and finally the boatswain, ‘a man of courage bold’, is under the deck shouting encouragement to the rest of the crew. The ballad makes the life-saving power of this division of labour abundantly clear. The next role described is that of the pilot. He holds a ‘Line and Lead to sound, / To see how far and near they are / from any dangerous ground’.82 A pilot’s role was potentially the most important and, without them, a ship could be lost. This is conveyed simply and starkly in the 1680s blackletter ballad Love VVithout Blemish. The disaster that strikes the ship is seemingly small, but it emphasizes the centrality of the pilot to the safety of a ship, ‘mark what cruel Fate befell / As he was outward bound / The Pilot he not being well / The Seamen all were drownd.’83 Pilots were the expert navigators on board ships. Their job was to chart courses through difficult or congested waters. In this ballad, without the pilot (the symbol of order) the sailors are without hope of survival in the chaotic outside world.

In The Praise of Saylors Here Set Forth, once the pilot has sounded the depth of the water, the singer states that ‘It is a testimonial good, / we are not far from land’.84 However, this is then immediately followed by a line emphasizing the danger they are still in, ‘There sits a Mermaid on the Rock, / with Comb and Glass in hand.’85 Mermaids were common portents of maritime disaster at sea and held a traditional association with bad luck stemming from classical sirens and being carried forward into medieval bestiaries and the early modern world.86 Mermaids were thought of as dangerous sirens, who would lure sailors to their deaths, and generally portended misfortune.87 This is a crucial point in the context of this ballad since this ship is not wrecked by the storm, and the mermaid is never mentioned again. She is only there to serve as a sign of potential death and disaster. The fact that the main portion of the ballad describes the various actions undertaken by the crew to save the ship is highly significant. The ballad argues that a well-manned ship with a disciplined crew (all fulfilling their roles and maintaining order) has the best chance of survival in a storm. The emphasis on unity and cohesion also ties into other contemporary political messages about maintaining the ship of state.88 The mermaid, signifying the wild, savage nature of the outside world, is close-by and the ship appears to be in greater difficulties after her appearance, as the sea is described with animalistic imagery of a hungry predator. However, this ravenous beast is opposed by the authority of the ship’s captain, ‘Our Captain he is on the Poop, / a man of might and power, / And looks when raging Seas do gape / our bodies to devour.’89 Elias Canetti

82 Ibid.
83 Anon., Love VVithout Blemish (1681–4), Pepys Ballads 3.331, EBBA 21346.
84 Anon., The Praise of Saylors Here Set Forth.
85 Ibid.
86 Wood, Fantastic Creatures in Mythology and Folklore, 50–4.
87 Scribner, ‘Mermaid Iconography’, 6.
88 See Thompson, The Ship of State; Mentz, Shipwreck Modernity; and Taff, ‘Gendered Circulation’.
89 Anon., The Praise of Saylors Here Set Forth.
argues that, for English people, the sea captain was a powerful image of stability, who gives commands which the sea ‘has to obey’. The power of the captain can be seen in the frequency of this figure as an important character in contemporary dramas. This is particularly evident in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, a play about ‘human control over the biophysical environment’. Daniel Brayton argues that the contemporary European fantasy of mastery over nature can be seen in Shakespeare’s creation of a character (Prospero) who is able to exert this control as well as others (Lear, Hotspur and Macbeth) who desire this power. In both *The Tempest* and *The Praise of Saylors Here Set Forth* the boatswain is a figure that attempts to exert human control over wild nature. Disaster is repeatedly engaged in the ballad as the mariners pull together and follow commands; the quartermaster ‘calls them to the Pomp amaine, / to keep their leakt ship free’. *The Praise of Saylors Here Set Forth* presents a contrast between the wild chaos of the sea and the structure and order of the sailors trying to save the ship. Ballads depict England at the heart of a global network of trade and conflict. They present sailors as constantly in battle with the chaotic nature of the outside world and emphasize that order must be maintained to preserve ship and crew.

**Conclusions**

Ballads provide an insight into the ways in which the global seventeenth-century world was conceptualized among the broad spectrum of quotidian England to which they were marketed. Within ballads, sailors and maritime themes are notably prominent. Through analysing ballads, we notice that the sea held several conflicting characteristics for people in the early modern period. The ability to traverse the globe was the enabling condition for the globalizing process and many ballads extol the many virtues for citizens and the nation as a whole of being involved in global trade. The apparent juxtaposition is that, in products seemingly geared towards consumption by sailors and which are in support of their endeavours, there is such a frequency of depictions of loss, shipwreck and human tragedy. For non-maritime audiences, ballads offered opportunities to employ role-speculation, and imaginative speculation of facing the boundless power of the ocean, reminding them how tenuous the lifeline of global trade could be. Maritime audiences were also presented with ballads that highlighted the sufferings experienced by them and their families. The prominence of storms at sea as a theme in balladry is significant. Underpinning the lives of so many people, fluctuations in maritime trade could have drastic consequences. Ballads about storms, and the inability of people to combat them, attest to the uncertainties of maritime life. Ballads contrast the savage power of the nature against sailors, whose best hopes for survival are faith in the saving hand of God and a dependence on order and rationality. When that order and structure of shipboard life is removed, the crew are doomed. This is possibly most starkly shown in *Love VVithout Blemish*, as the illness of the pilot results in the loss of the ship. The theme of constancy, which is the most common theme in maritime ballads, highlights the impermanence of links between sailors and their families ashore.

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90 Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 171.
91 Jowitt ‘Performing “Water” Ralegh’, 131.
92 Brayton, *Shakespeare’s Ocean*, 52.
93 Brayton, *Shakespeare’s Ocean*, 54, 166; Mentz, *At the Bottom of Shakespeare’s Ocean*, 11–12.
However, the recurrence of involuntary separation through shipwrecks or storms also significantly emphasizes the fragile nature of the connection between sailors and their families, as well as between the maritime and non-maritime communities. These ballads attest to an association between seafaring and tragedy in the popular imagination and, for all the economic benefits of global trade, ballads demonstrate its human cost.

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